



Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Parental Engagement in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study investigated innovative strategies for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 237 parents of students. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select 237 parents as participants. Data was collected using the "Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Parental Engagement Questionnaire (ISEPEQ)" and the test for the reliability of the instrument was through the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Method producing a reliability index of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used for hypothesis testing. Innovative strategies such as collaborative projects, digital communication platforms, parent advisory committees, home-school partnerships, and cultural inclusivity were identified as effective means for enhancing parental involvement. Additionally, the findings showed common barriers to parental engagement, including time constraints, communication challenges, cultural differences, lack of awareness, and parental education level. Conclusively, these strategies offer pathways to strengthen the partnership between schools and families, empowering parents to play an active role in their child's educational journey by addressing these barriers and implementing these innovative strategies, schools can significantly improve parental involvement, which in turn fosters a supportive educational environment for students. The study made the following recommendations for educational administrators, policymakers, teachers, and parents to prioritize parental engagement, address barriers, and implement effective strategies to support student success and well-being in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Keywords: Innovative, Strategies, Parental, Engagement, Public, Senior Secondary Schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Parental engagement refers to the active participation and involvement of parents in their children's education, encompassing a wide range of activities and interactions that support learning and development both at home and within the school environment. This engagement includes attending school meetings, volunteering, communicating with teachers, supporting homework and study routines, and participating in decision-making processes related to school policies and practices. Parental engagement is crucial because it directly influences students' academic achievement, social behavior, and overall well-being. When parents are engaged, they help create a supportive and conducive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom, providing children with the encouragement and resources necessary to succeed academically and personally.

The significance of parental engagement is well-documented in educational research. Studies have consistently shown that students with involved parents are more likely to achieve higher grades, exhibit better behavior, and have higher levels of motivation and self-esteem (Jeynes, 2016). Parental engagement also fosters stronger relationships between families and schools, leading to a more collaborative approach to addressing students' needs. This collaboration helps to align the goals of parents and educators, ensuring that students receive consistent messages and support from both home and school environments. Additionally, parental involvement can enhance the overall school climate, making it more inclusive, responsive, and supportive of students' diverse needs (Chow et al., 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2020).

Innovative strategies are essential for enhancing parental engagement, especially in today's rapidly changing educational landscape. Traditional methods of engaging parents, such as parent-teacher conferences and school newsletters, are often limited in their reach and effectiveness. These approaches may not accommodate the diverse schedules, preferences, and needs of modern families, particularly in communities where parents may face barriers such as language differences, work commitments, or a lack of familiarity with the education system. To address these challenges, schools must adopt innovative strategies that leverage technology, provide flexibility, and offer targeted support to ensure that all parents can participate meaningfully in their children's education. Technology-driven communication platforms, for example, are a powerful tool for enhancing parental engagement. Mobile apps, social media, and learning management systems (LMS) provide schools with new ways to connect with parents, offering real-time updates on student progress, school events, and important announcements. These digital tools make it easier for parents to stay informed and involved, regardless of their physical location or time constraints (Olmstead, 2019). Providing parents with easy access to information and the ability to communicate directly with teachers and administrators, technology helps to bridge the gap between home and school, fostering stronger partnerships and more effective support for students (Ololube et al., 2016).

Another innovative approach to enhancing parental engagement is the implementation of community-based programs and partnerships. Schools can collaborate with local organizations and community leaders to create programs that support families and encourage their involvement in education. These programs can include workshops that teach parents how to support their children's learning at home, as well as services such as tutoring, health care, and financial literacy resources. Therefore, addressing the broader needs of families, community-based

programs can help remove barriers to parental engagement and create a more inclusive and supportive school environment (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

Flexible engagement opportunities are also critical for increasing parental involvement. Recognizing that parents have different schedules and responsibilities, schools can offer various ways for parents to participate in their children's education. This might include providing virtual meeting options, hosting events outside of regular school hours, or offering volunteer opportunities that fit parents' interests and availability. By accommodating the diverse needs of families, schools can make it easier for parents to engage in meaningful ways, leading to stronger connections between home and school and better outcomes for students (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016).

The use of personalized and culturally responsive communication is another important innovative strategy for enhancing parental engagement. Schools must recognize and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and communication preferences of their families. Providing bilingual materials, offering translation services, and using culturally sensitive communication methods, may assist schools to ensure that all parents feel valued and understood. This approach helps to build trust and mutual respect between parents and educators, leading to more effective collaboration and increased parental involvement (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

This study investigated the innovative strategies to enhance parental engagement in public senior secondary schools within Rivers State, and exploring these strategies, the research aim to contribute to improved student academic achievement, increased school attendance, and a more positive school climate.

Statement of the Problem

Public senior secondary schools in Rivers State face significant challenges in fostering effective parental engagement, despite traditional methods like Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. These conventional approaches often fail to reach or resonate with all parents, leading to persistently low levels of involvement. This lack of engagement negatively impacts student academic performance, as students may miss out on crucial support and encouragement from home. Furthermore, the disconnect between home and school environments hinders the development of strong partnerships between parents and educators, which is essential for a positive school climate and student well-being. Additionally, without active parental involvement, schools may struggle to effectively address key issues such as curriculum development, resource allocation, and student support services. To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for innovative strategies that can enhance parental engagement, ensuring that all parents are empowered to contribute meaningfully to their children's education and the broader school community.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate innovative strategies for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools within Rivers State. The study's objectives are to:

- Identify innovative strategies that can be implemented for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

- Ascertain the barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

- What innovative strategies can be implemented for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- What are the current barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the innovative strategies that can be implemented for enhancing parental engagement public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the current barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement

Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement, propounded by Joyce L. Epstein in 2011, presents a comprehensive framework that delineates various levels and dimensions of parental engagement in education. The model emphasizes the importance of building partnerships between schools, families, and communities to support student learning and success. According to Epstein's model, parental involvement consists of six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011). Each type represents a different aspect of parental engagement that contributes to students' academic achievement and overall development.

Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Parental Engagement in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State can draw inspiration from Epstein's Model to create tailored approaches that address the specific needs and challenges of the local context. For instance, schools can implement programs that focus on improving parenting skills and providing support to parents in navigating the educational system. Workshops and seminars on effective communication strategies between parents and teachers can be organized to enhance the quality of home-school communication (Epstein, 2011).

Volunteering initiatives can be promoted within schools, encouraging parents to actively participate in various school activities and events. This could include volunteering in classrooms, assisting with extracurricular activities, or contributing to school improvement projects. Thus, involving parents directly in school activities, educators will be able to foster a sense of belonging and ownership within the school community, leading to increased parental engagement (Epstein, 2011).

Learning at home programs can be developed to empower parents with resources and strategies to support their children's learning outside of school. This may involve providing

parents with educational materials, guidance on creating conducive learning environments at home, and strategies for helping children with homework and academic tasks. Equipping parents with the necessary tools and knowledge has the potential of helping schools to facilitate continuous learning and skill development beyond the classroom (Epstein, 2011).

Decision-making opportunities can be expanded to include parent representatives in school governance bodies and decision-making processes. Parents can be invited to participate in school advisory councils, parent-teacher associations, and other committees to contribute their perspectives and insights on important educational issues. Thus, by involving parents in decision-making in schools can promote transparency, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving, ultimately strengthening the partnership between parents and educators (Epstein, 2011).

Collaborating with the community is another key aspect of Epstein's Model that can be leveraged to enhance parental engagement in Rivers State's public senior secondary schools. Schools can forge partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community groups to provide additional resources and support services for students and families. Community-based initiatives such as mentoring programs, after-school clubs, and health and wellness activities can complement school-based efforts and further involve parents in their children's education (Epstein, 2011).

Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement offers a valuable framework for developing innovative strategies to enhance parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The adoption of a comprehensive approach that encompasses various dimensions of parental involvement are able to make schools promote meaningful partnerships with families and communities to support student success and well-being. Through collaborative efforts and tailored initiatives, educators can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that empower parents to actively participate in their children's education.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Innovation

Innovation is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in driving progress across various sectors, including business, education, and technology. At its core, innovation involves the introduction of new ideas, processes, products, or services that result in significant improvements or transformations. It is not merely about inventing something entirely new but can also involve modifying or improving existing systems to better meet the needs of society. The importance of innovation in today's rapidly changing world cannot be overstated, as it serves as a catalyst for economic growth, competitive advantage, and societal advancement. The process of innovation is often complex, requiring a combination of creativity, strategic thinking, and the ability to take calculated risks. Organizations that prioritize innovation tend to be more resilient and better equipped to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer demands. For instance, companies like Apple and Google have consistently demonstrated how innovation can lead to sustained success by continuously introducing groundbreaking products and services that redefine industries (Pisano, 2015). This commitment to innovation has allowed these companies to maintain their positions as global leaders in technology.

Innovation is also increasingly being recognized as a key factor in addressing global challenges such as climate change, healthcare, and education. In the field of environmental

sustainability, for example, innovative technologies like renewable energy solutions and smart grids are being developed to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainable development. Similarly, in healthcare, innovations in medical technology, such as telemedicine and personalized medicine, are revolutionizing the way healthcare is delivered, making it more accessible and efficient (Mazzucato, 2018). These examples illustrate how innovation can be leveraged to create solutions that address some of the most pressing issues facing humanity today. Moreover, the role of innovation in education has gained significant attention in recent years. Educational institutions are increasingly embracing innovative teaching methods, such as blended learning, flipped classrooms, and the use of digital tools, to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. These approaches not only make education more interactive and personalized but also help to prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century workforce. The integration of technology in education, driven by innovation, is transforming traditional learning environments and providing new opportunities for lifelong learning (Anderson, 2016).

However, fostering a culture of innovation requires more than just investing in research and development; it also involves creating an environment that encourages experimentation, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas. Organizations that are successful in fostering innovation often have a leadership team that supports and champions new ideas, as well as a workforce that is empowered to think creatively and take risks. Additionally, collaboration across different disciplines and sectors is crucial for innovation, as it brings together diverse perspectives and expertise that can lead to breakthrough solutions (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). Ololube et al. (2013) noted that despite the many benefits of innovation, there are also challenges associated with it. One of the key challenges is the resistance to change that can arise within organizations or society at large. People are often hesitant to adopt new ideas or technologies, especially if they perceive them as threatening or disruptive. Overcoming this resistance requires effective communication and leadership, as well as a clear demonstration of the value and benefits of the innovation. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological advancement can create challenges in terms of regulation and ethical considerations, as societies struggle to keep up with the implications of new innovations (Von Hippel, 2016).

Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Parental Engagement

Parental engagement in education is widely recognized as a critical factor in students' academic success. However, traditional methods of involving parents, such as parent-teacher conferences and periodic report card distributions, have proven inadequate in addressing the diverse needs of today's families. As such, innovative strategies are needed to bridge the gap between schools and parents, ensuring that all students benefit from the support and involvement of their families. These strategies include the use of technology, community-based programs, personalized communication, and flexible engagement opportunities. Each of these strategies has the potential to significantly enhance parental engagement, leading to improved student outcomes.

Technology-Driven Communication Platforms

One of the most effective innovative strategies for enhancing parental engagement is the use of technology-driven communication platforms. Digital tools such as mobile apps, social media, and learning management systems (LMS) provide schools with a direct line of communication to parents, making it easier for them to stay informed and involved in their children's education.

For example, mobile apps like ClassDojo and Remind allow teachers to send real-time updates about students' progress, homework, and upcoming events, ensuring that parents are always in the loop (Smith, 2017). This level of communication can help parents feel more connected to the school community and more capable of supporting their children's academic efforts.

Moreover, learning management systems enable parents to monitor their children's assignments, grades, and attendance in real-time. This transparency not only helps parents to stay informed but also encourages them to take an active role in addressing any academic challenges their children may face (Olmstead, 2019). The convenience and accessibility of these digital platforms mean that even busy parents can participate more fully in their children's education, thereby enhancing parental engagement and contributing to better educational outcomes.

Community-Based Programs and Partnerships

Another innovative strategy for enhancing parental engagement is the development of community-based programs and partnerships. Schools can collaborate with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders to create programs that support families and encourage their involvement in education. For instance, community centers can host workshops that educate parents on how to support their children's learning at home or offer resources such as tutoring and homework help (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). These programs can be particularly beneficial for low-income families or those who may feel disconnected from the school system due to cultural or language barriers.

Partnerships with community organizations can also help schools to provide parents with access to essential services such as health care, financial literacy, and job training. By addressing some of the broader challenges that families face, these programs can remove barriers to parental engagement and create a more supportive environment for students (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). When parents feel that the school is invested in their well-being and success, they are more likely to engage with the school and take an active role in their children's education.

Personalized and Culturally Responsive Communication

Effective communication is key to parental engagement, but it must be tailored to meet the diverse needs of families. Personalized communication strategies involve reaching out to parents in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them, taking into account their cultural backgrounds, language preferences, and communication styles. For example, schools can provide translation services for non-English-speaking parents or offer bilingual materials that make it easier for them to understand and engage with their children's education (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Additionally, schools can use culturally responsive communication methods that respect and acknowledge the unique cultural identities of their students and families.

Adopting personalized communication strategies, schools can build stronger relationships with parents, fostering a sense of trust and mutual respect. This, in turn, can lead to increased parental involvement, as parents feel more valued and understood by the school community. Furthermore, when communication is tailored to the specific needs of parents, they are more likely to participate in school activities and support their children's learning at home (Henderson & Mapp, 2020). This personalized approach can be particularly effective in engaging parents who might otherwise feel marginalized or disconnected from the school system.

Flexible Engagement Opportunities

Recognizing that parents have different schedules, responsibilities, and levels of availability, schools can enhance parental engagement by offering flexible engagement opportunities. This might include hosting parent-teacher meetings outside of regular school hours, providing virtual meeting options, or organizing events on weekends when more parents can attend. Through the accommodation of the diverse needs of families, schools are able to remove some of the barriers that prevent parents from participating in their children's education (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016).

Flexible engagement also extends to the types of activities and involvement opportunities that schools offer. For example, schools can create volunteer opportunities that allow parents to contribute in ways that align with their skills, interests, and schedules. This could include helping with after-school programs, participating in school committees, or even supporting classroom activities remotely through virtual platforms. When parents are given multiple ways to engage with the school, they are more likely to find an opportunity that fits their circumstances, leading to greater involvement and a stronger school community (Kim & Sheridan, 2015).

Impact of Innovative Strategies on Parental Engagement

The implementation of these innovative strategies has the potential to significantly enhance parental engagement in public senior secondary schools. Technology-driven communication platforms provide parents with easy access to important information, making it more convenient for them to stay involved in their children's education. Community-based programs and partnerships offer additional support to families, helping to remove barriers to engagement and create a more inclusive school environment. Personalized communication ensures that all parents feel valued and understood, fostering stronger relationships between schools and families. Finally, flexible engagement opportunities accommodate the diverse needs of parents, making it easier for them to participate in their children's education.

When these strategies are effectively implemented, the result is a more engaged and supportive parent community, which can lead to improved academic outcomes for students. Research has shown that students whose parents are actively involved in their education tend to perform better academically, have higher attendance rates, and exhibit better behavior (Jeynes, 2016). Therefore, enhancing parental engagement through innovative strategies, schools will be able to create a more positive and supportive educational environment that benefits all students.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement in public senior secondary schools is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing students' academic success, social growth, and overall well-being. Extensive research underscores the positive impact of parental involvement on various facets of student development. For instance, a study conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009) found that students whose parents are actively engaged in their education demonstrate higher academic performance, better behavior, and increased motivation compared to their peers whose parents are less

involved. This highlights the significant correlation between parental engagement and positive student outcomes.

However, despite its evident benefits, achieving meaningful parental engagement can be challenging, especially within the diverse landscape of public schools. Jeynes (2011) discusses the complexities surrounding parental involvement in the context of public education, noting the presence of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and varying levels of parental participation. Factors such as parents' educational attainment, employment status, and cultural beliefs can influence their ability and willingness to engage with their children's schooling. Additionally, the varying levels of resources and support available to parents within the school system can further impact their involvement.

One of the primary challenges in promoting parental engagement in public senior secondary schools is bridging the gap between school and home environments. Despite the desire of both parents and educators to collaborate for the benefit of students, communication barriers and logistical constraints often hinder effective partnership. Limited opportunities for meaningful interaction between parents and teachers, as well as insufficient channels for sharing information and feedback, can impede the establishment of robust home-school connections (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Furthermore, socio-economic disparities among families can exacerbate the challenges of parental engagement, as parents from marginalized backgrounds may face additional barriers to involvement. These disparities can manifest in various forms, including limited access to transportation, language barriers, and competing demands on parents' time and resources. Consequently, efforts to promote parental engagement must be sensitive to the diverse needs and circumstances of families, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility (Fan & Chen, 2012).

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the complexities of parental involvement in public senior secondary schools. Schools must actively work to create welcoming and inclusive environments that foster parental participation and partnership. Strategies such as hosting regular parent-teacher conferences, offering flexible communication channels, and providing resources to support parents' understanding of the education system can help bridge the gap between home and school (Epstein, 2011).

Moreover, efforts to enhance parental engagement should extend beyond traditional school settings and embrace community-based initiatives. Collaborating with local organizations, businesses, and community groups can provide additional avenues for parents to connect with their children's education and access support services. Leveraging community resources and networks, schools will be able to strengthen the support systems available to families and empower parents to play an active role in their children's learning journey (Henderson & Mapp, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey method. The population of the study comprised of 237 parents of students found in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State during the morning hours and closure time. Purposive sampling method was used to select respondents. All parents found at randomly selected days (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday, Friday) were included in the study. A sample of 237 parents were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled: "Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Parental Engagement Questionnaire (ISEPEQ)". The reliability of the study was done through Pearson Product

Moment Correlation Coefficient Method which produced a reliability index of 0.78 ensuring that the items in the questionnaire were understood, simple, and sufficient. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research question 1 and 2 while independent t-test were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What innovative strategies can be implemented for enhancing parental engagement public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation on the innovative strategies that can be implemented for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

S/N	Innovative strategies	Male Parents		Female Parents		Mean Set	Remark
		Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.		
1.	Initiate collaborative projects where parents and teachers work together to address common educational goals or challenges, fostering a sense of partnership and shared responsibility..	3.00	0.98	3.12	0.86	3.06	Agree
2.	Implement digital communication platforms such as mobile apps or online portals that facilitate easy and real-time communication between parents and teachers, enabling them to stay updated on their child's progress, school events, and important announcements.	3.06	0.91	2.98	0.97	3.02	Agree
3.	Form parent advisory committees that meet regularly to discuss school policies, programs, and initiatives, allowing parents to provide input and feedback directly to school administration and shape decision-making processes.	3.09	0.97	3.08	0.93	3.09	Agree
4.	Foster home-school partnerships by encouraging teachers to visit students' homes to better understand their home environment and family dynamics, creating stronger connections between school and home life	3.24	0.79	3.14	0.79	3.19	Agree
5.	Ensure that all communication materials and engagement activities are culturally and linguistically inclusive to accommodate diverse parent populations, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect..	3.17	0.89	3.07	0.97	3.12	Agree
Grand Mean		3.11	0.91	3.08	0.91	3.10	Agree

Table 1 provides insights into innovative strategies that can be implemented to enhance parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, segmented by gender. The grand mean for both male and female parents is 3.10, indicating a generally agreed-upon level of effectiveness for these strategies in enhancing parental engagement.

The data suggest that initiating collaborative projects between parents and teachers, aimed at addressing common educational goals or challenges, is perceived as a promising strategy, with mean scores of 3.00 for male parents and 3.12 for female parents. Implementing digital communication platforms, such as mobile apps or online portals, to facilitate real-time communication between parents and teachers also holds potential, scoring 3.06 for male parents and 2.98 for female parents.

Forming parent advisory committees to discuss school policies and initiatives is another effective strategy, with mean scores of 3.09 for male parents and 3.08 for female parents. Additionally, fostering home-school partnerships by encouraging teacher visits to students' homes to understand their family dynamics garners strong support, scoring 3.24 for male parents and 3.14 for female parents. Ensuring cultural and linguistic inclusivity in communication materials and engagement activities is also recognized as important, with mean scores of 3.17 for male parents and 3.07 for female parents.

In summary, the data highlight several innovative strategies, including collaborative projects, digital communication platforms, parent advisory committees, home-school partnerships, and cultural inclusivity, as effective means to enhance parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Question Two: What are the current barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation on the current barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

S/N		Barriers to enhancing Parental Engagement	Gender				Mean Set	Remark
			Male Parents		Female Parents			
			Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.		
6.	Time Constraints	2.83	1.08	3.01	0.91	2.92	Agreed	
7.	Communication Challenges	3.20	0.90	3.25	0.88	3.23	Agreed	
8.	Cultural Differences.	3.36	0.74	3.08	0.86	3.22	Agreed	
9.	Lack of Awareness.	3.05	1.00	3.16	0.87	3.11	Agreed	
10.	Parental Education Level.	3.15	0.88	3.13	0.83	3.14	Agreed	
		Grand Mean	3.12	0.92	3.13	0.87	3.13	Agreed

The table presents the mean and standard deviation of various barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, categorized by gender. Overall, the grand mean for both male and female parents is 3.13, indicating a generally agreed-upon level of barriers to parental engagement.

When examining specific barriers, it's observed that time constraints have a mean score of 2.92 for male parents and 3.01 for female parents, both falling within the "agreed" range. Communication challenges also present notable barriers, with mean scores of 3.20 for male parents and 3.25 for female parents. Cultural differences, with mean scores of 3.36 for male parents and 3.08 for female parents, and lack of awareness, with mean scores of 3.05 for male parents and 3.16 for female parents, are also perceived as significant barriers, though slightly higher for males. Parental education level, with mean scores of 3.15 for male parents and 3.13 for female parents, is another factor contributing to barriers to engagement.

In summary, the data suggest that there are several common barriers to parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, including time constraints, communication challenges, cultural differences, lack of awareness, and parental education level, with relatively consistent perceptions across genders.

Test for Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the innovative strategies that can be implemented to enhance parental engagement public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the innovative strategies that can be implemented to enhance parental engagement public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean	SD.	Df	t-test	Sig.	Decision
Male	66	3.11	0.91	234	0.227	0.820	NS
Female	170	3.08	0.91				

Key: NS-Not Significant

The table summarizes the t-test conducted to examine the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents concerning innovative strategies for enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The hypothesis being tested (HO6) posits that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents.

For male parents, the sample size (N) is 66, with a mean rating of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 0.91. For female parents, the sample size is 170, with a mean rating of 3.08 and a standard deviation of 0.91. The degrees of freedom (Df) is 234. The t-test yields a t-value of 0.227, and the corresponding p-value (Sig.) is 0.820. This p-value indicates that the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents is not statistically significant. Therefore, the decision is to accept the null hypothesis (NS - Not Significant), suggesting that there is no significant difference between the perceived effectiveness of innovative strategies for enhancing parental engagement for male and female parents in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the current barriers to enhancing parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 4: Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents on the current barriers to parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Df	t-test	Sig.	Decision
Male	66	3.12	0.92	234	-0.078	0.938	NS
Female	170	3.13	0.87				

Key: NS-Not Significant

The table presents a summary of the t-test conducted to assess the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents regarding the current barriers to parental engagement in

public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The hypothesis being tested (HO1) states that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents.

For male parents, the sample size (N) is 66, with a mean rating of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.92. For female parents, the sample size is 170, with a mean rating of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.87. The degrees of freedom (Df) are 234.

The t-test result yields a t-value of -0.078, and the corresponding p-value (Sig.) is 0.938, indicating that the difference between the mean ratings of male and female parents is not statistically significant. Therefore, the decision is to accept the null hypothesis (NS - Not Significant), suggesting that there is no significant difference between the perceived barriers to parental engagement for male and female parents in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Innovative Strategies to Enhance Parental Engagement

Research Question One, focusing on innovative strategies to enhance parental engagement, the study identified several promising approaches. These include initiating collaborative projects between parents and teachers, implementing digital communication platforms, forming parent advisory committees, fostering home-school partnerships, and ensuring cultural inclusivity in communication materials. Similar to the first research question, there were no significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of these strategies between male and female parents.

One promising approach identified in the study is initiating collaborative projects between parents and teachers. Research by Sanders and Sheldon (2009) emphasized the importance of partnership and shared responsibility between schools and families in promoting student success. Collaborative projects provide opportunities for parents and teachers to work together towards common educational goals, fostering a sense of partnership and involvement in their child's education.

Implementing digital communication platforms emerged as another effective strategy in the study, echoing findings from previous research. Studies by Smith (2017) and Olmstead (2019) highlighted the role of technology in facilitating communication between schools and parents. Digital platforms such as mobile apps and online portals offer convenient and real-time communication channels, enabling parents to stay updated on their child's progress, school events, and important announcements. The findings of the current study underscore the potential of digital communication tools to enhance parental engagement in education.

Forming parent advisory committees was also identified as a promising strategy in the study, aligning with research on the subject. Research by Epstein (2011) emphasized the importance of involving parents in decision-making processes at the school level. Parent advisory committees provide a platform for parents to provide input and feedback directly to school administration, shaping policies, programs, and initiatives. This collaborative approach empowers parents to contribute to school improvement efforts, fostering a sense of ownership and investment in their child's education.

Fostering home-school partnerships emerged as another effective strategy in the study, consistent with existing literature. Studies by Epstein (2011) highlighted the importance of building strong connections between schools and families. Home visits by teachers provide opportunities to better understand students' home environments and family dynamics,

establishing trust and rapport between educators and parents. Therefore, bridging the gap between home and school, partnerships contribute to positive student outcomes and overall school success.

Ensuring cultural inclusivity in communication materials and engagement activities was also identified as a key strategy in the study, aligning with research on the subject. Thus, emphasizing on the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity in educational settings. Culturally sensitive approaches to parental engagement promote a sense of belonging and mutual respect among diverse parent populations, fostering meaningful partnerships between schools and families. The findings of the current study underscore the need for inclusive practices to effectively engage all parents in their child's education.

Barriers to parental engagement

Research Question Two, which explored the current barriers to parental engagement, the analysis revealed several common obstacles perceived by both male and female parents. These barriers include time constraints, communication challenges, cultural differences, lack of awareness, and parental education level. However, there were no significant differences in the perception of these barriers between male and female parents. One common barrier identified in the study is time constraints, which is consistent with previous literature. Research by Epstein and Sheldon (2016) highlighted how busy schedules can hinder parental involvement in school activities. Similarly, a study by Fan and Chen (2011) found that parents often struggle to find time to engage with their child's school due to work and family commitments. These findings underscore the universality of time constraints as a significant barrier to parental engagement across different contexts.

Communication challenges emerged as another prominent barrier in the study, echoing findings from previous research. A study by Henderson and Mapp (2013) emphasized the importance of effective communication between schools and parents for fostering parental involvement. However, barriers such as language barriers, limited access to communication channels, and ineffective communication strategies can impede this process. This aligns with the findings of the current study, where communication challenges were identified as a barrier to parental engagement.

Cultural differences also surfaced as a barrier to parental engagement in the study, corroborating existing literature on the subject. Research by Lee and Nam (2020) emphasized the influence of cultural norms and values on parental involvement in education. Cultural differences in beliefs about the role of parents in education, attitudes towards school participation, and communication styles can impact parental engagement efforts. The findings of the current study underscore the need for culturally sensitive approaches to promote parental involvement in diverse communities.

Lack of awareness and parental education level were identified as additional barriers in the study, aligning with prior research. Studies by Jeynes (2016) and Hill et al. (2009) have highlighted how parents' level of education can influence their ability to engage with their child's school. Moreover, lack of awareness about the importance of parental involvement and available opportunities for engagement can hinder parents' participation. These findings emphasize the importance of providing parents with information and resources to support their involvement in their child's education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the barriers to parental engagement and the identification of innovative strategies to enhance parental involvement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings shed light on several key insights that hold implications for educational practice and policy. Firstly, the study uncovered common barriers perceived by both male and female parents, including time constraints, communication challenges, cultural differences, lack of awareness, and parental education level. Despite these obstacles, the study found no significant differences in the perception of these barriers between male and female parents. This suggests a shared understanding among parents of the challenges they face in engaging with their child's education, irrespective of gender.

Secondly, the study identified several promising strategies to overcome these barriers and enhance parental engagement. Initiating collaborative projects between parents and teachers, implementing digital communication platforms, forming parent advisory committees, fostering home-school partnerships, and ensuring cultural inclusivity in communication materials emerged as effective approaches. These strategies offer pathways to strengthen the partnership between schools and families, empowering parents to play an active role in their child's educational journey.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on parental engagement in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, the following recommendations are made for relevant stakeholders to enhance parental involvement in education:

- Educational administrators and policymakers should prioritize the development and implementation of policies that promote parental involvement in schools, recognizing the importance of addressing barriers such as time constraints, communication challenges, and cultural differences.
- Teachers and school staff should actively involve parents in collaborative projects and decision-making processes within the school community, recognizing their valuable contributions to student success.
- Parents should actively engage with their child's school by participating in parent advisory committees and collaborative projects.

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