



Family Communication Patterns and Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Nyeri County, Kenya

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Abstract

Family communication patterns play a critical role in shaping students' academic outcomes by influencing motivation, emotional stability, and learning behaviours. This study examined how family communication patterns affect students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, Kenya. It focused on identifying dominant family communication styles—such as consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire—examining their relationship with learners' academic outcomes. The study was guided by family systems theory and adopted a mixed-methods descriptive correlational design. Data were collected from students, teachers, and parents using questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques, including correlation analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between family communication patterns and academic achievement ($r=.581, p=.000, N=400$). The consensual communication pattern was most dominant and had the strongest correlation, which was associated with higher academic performance. The study was limited to public secondary schools in Nyeri County, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions or private institutions. The study contributes to existing literature by providing context-specific insights into the role of family communication in academic achievement within Nyeri by showing how supportive communication combined with culturally grounded parental authority can influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools. The study established that positive family communication significantly drives students' academic success, highlighting the urgent need for parents, educators, and policymakers to promote open, supportive parent-child interactions by strengthening parent-child communication strategies through school-based programmes, policy interventions, and strengthening family involvement in education to enhance learners' performance and overall educational outcomes.

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Introduction

Academic achievement remains a key indicator of educational success and future socio-economic mobility. In Kenya, disparities in student performance have been attributed not only to school-based factors but also to family-related influences. Among these, communication patterns within the family



significantly shape learners' attitudes, motivation, and engagement in academic activities (Desmianti, 2025).

Family communication patterns refer to the ways in which family members exchange information, express emotions, and resolve conflicts. These patterns determine the emotional climate within the home and influence students' psychological well-being and academic orientation. Studies have shown that supportive, open communication enhances students' confidence and learning outcomes, whereas poor communication contributes to stress and disengagement (Rachmad, 2022).

Despite growing evidence on parental involvement and academic achievement in Africa (Anyamene & Odo, 2025), few studies have specifically examined family communication patterns using established frameworks, such as Family Communication Patterns Theory, particularly within secondary school contexts in Africa. Furthermore, existing studies largely focus on primary and tertiary education, with little attention to secondary education, particularly in Kenya. Additionally, there is a lack of context-specific, methodologically robust studies that explore intra-family communication processes and their predictive influence on academic achievement. This study, therefore, sought to fill these gaps by examining how family communication patterns influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, Kenya.

Despite the growing attention to family influences, few empirical studies in Nyeri County specifically examine how communication patterns affect academic achievement. This study addressed this gap by analysing the relationship between family communication patterns and students' academic performance.

Family Communication and Academic Achievement

Research by Nyamu et al. (2025), Obwaka and Kimani (2024), and Mwesigye and Kaziro (2025) on family communication patterns has broadly focused on parental involvement and parent-teacher communication; however, it does not apply structured frameworks such as conversation orientation, conformity orientation, pluralistic, protective, or laissez-faire patterns. This leaves a gap in the application of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) Theory, as advanced by Paul Schrodtt. This research, therefore, sought to address this gap, given the limited empirical evidence in Africa, by examining specific family communication patterns and their differentiated effects on academic achievement.

Empirical evidence from studies by Mwesigye & Kaziro (2025) – Primary schools (Uganda) and Kumaha et al. (2024) – Tertiary institutions (Ghana) shows an overemphasis on primary and tertiary levels, which overlooks secondary school learners who face critical academic transitions and are highly influenced by family dynamics. This study, therefore, sought to address the insufficient research on family communication patterns among secondary school students, particularly in Kenya.

Empirical evidence suggests a strong link between communication patterns and academic achievement. Studies indicate that open communication enhances motivation and self-efficacy. Literature consistently demonstrates that family communication patterns significantly influence students' academic outcomes. For instance, research on secondary school students by the World Bank and UNESCO reports found that parental involvement and communication patterns within the family significantly predict academic achievement, but there is a policy-practice disconnect due to a lack of practical, communication-based interventions, and schools lack structured programmes to improve family communication. This study sought to address the insufficient research translating findings into practical, school-based interventions targeting family communication patterns.



Similarly, supportive dialogue improves problem-solving skills and engagement; studies on family environment indicate that parent-child interaction and communication quality are central determinants of academic success, as they influence learners' psychological well-being, motivation, and learning behaviours (Sartania, 2022).

Poor communication leads to anxiety, low confidence, and poor academic outcomes; Positive communication, characterised by warmth, support, and openness, has been associated with better academic performance, while hostile or conflictual communication is linked to poor outcomes. Recent research by Badamian et al. (2023) further indicates that family communication patterns significantly affect students' academic engagement, with more open and participatory communication linked to higher levels of involvement in learning activities. This suggests that communication influences not only outcomes but also the processes through which students learn.

Research emphasises that it is not just the presence of communication but its quality that matters. High-quality communication involves active listening, mutual respect, openness, and emotional understanding. Studies show that families where members communicate honestly and listen attentively tend to produce learners with better academic adjustment and performance (Feric, 2024).

However, most studies remain generalised, highlighting the need for this study to conduct localised research in contexts such as Nyeri County, where socio-cultural factors may influence family communication and educational outcomes.

Types of Family Communication Patterns

Family communication patterns are categorised into four main types, one of which is consensual communication, which emphasises high interaction and high conformity, thereby promoting guidance and academic discipline. Pluralistic communication, which emphasises open dialogue and independence, therefore, enhances critical thinking and confidence. Protective communication, which emphasises obedience with limited dialogue, may limit independent thinking. Finally, laissez-faire communication, which emphasises minimal interaction, is associated with low academic motivation.

Consensual communication

Badamian et al. (2023) explored family communication patterns and students' academic engagement in online learning contexts. The study established that students from consensual and pluralistic families reported higher academic engagement than those from protective or laissez-faire families. Therefore, consensual communication enhances interaction, guidance, and academic involvement, all of which are predictors of achievement.

A study by Anyamene (2025) conducted in Nigeria found that family communication patterns significantly predict students' academic achievement in English. Consensual communication, characterised by high levels of both conversation and conformity orientation, plays a significant role in shaping students' academic achievement. Recent studies indicate that such communication fosters structured learning environments, enhances cognitive development, and promotes academic motivation. This study found out that, while consensual communication provides a supportive and guided academic environment, its effectiveness depends on maintaining a balance between parental control and open dialogue.

Pluralistic communication

A study by Shlapy (2022) found that pluralistic communication had a positive but weak relationship with students' social self-efficacy, suggesting that open dialogue enhances learners' confidence, which indirectly supports academic achievement. Similarly, research on academic engagement (2023)



revealed that students from pluralistic families demonstrated significantly higher levels of academic engagement compared to those from protective and laissez-faire families.

Supporting evidence from Fu et al. (2022) indicates that communication environments with high conversation orientation promote self-efficacy, a key predictor of academic success. This study found that open, supportive communication fosters academic engagement, whereas limited communication negatively affects performance.

Protective Communication

Research by Fu et al. (2022) shows that high conformity environments are associated with negative psychological outcomes such as low self-esteem and depression, which undermine academic performance. The UNESCO 2022 academic engagement study further established that students from protective families exhibited lower engagement levels than those from laissez-faire families and significantly lower than those from pluralistic families. Shlapy (2022) found that the protective communication pattern was positively related to social self-efficacy, but the relationship was weaker than that of more open communication styles, indicating limited developmental benefits. This study noted that while this pattern promotes discipline and structured learning, it may hinder the development of critical thinking and reduce students' intrinsic motivation.

Laissez-faire Communication

Shlapy (2022) reported an inverse, insignificant relationship between laissez-faire communication and social self-efficacy, indicating weak developmental support for learners characterised by low levels of both conversational and conformist behaviours. This is associated with minimal parental involvement and weak family interaction. The 2023 academic engagement study by the World Bank found that students from laissez-faire families had the lowest levels of academic engagement, significantly below those in pluralistic and consensual families. Additional evidence from Hanson (2022) shows that low family interaction (as in laissez-faire settings) leads to reduced emotional and cognitive support, both of which are critical for academic success. This study noted that although this communication pattern may foster independence, the absence of guidance and support significantly undermines academic achievement.

Problem Statement

Academic achievement among students in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, Kenya, remains a concern despite ongoing efforts by the government, educators, and other stakeholders to improve educational outcomes. While factors such as school resources, teacher quality, and student characteristics have been widely studied, less attention has been given to the role of family communication patterns in shaping students' academic performance. Family, as the primary socialising agent, plays a critical role in influencing learners' attitudes, behaviours, and motivation toward education.

In many households, variations in communication patterns—ranging from consensual, pluralistic to protective or laissez-faire may significantly affect students' emotional well-being, self-esteem, and academic engagement. However, there is limited empirical evidence specific to Nyeri County that clearly explains how these differing family communication styles influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools. This gap in context-specific research limits educators', policymakers', and families' ability to design effective interventions that holistically address students' academic challenges.



Therefore, this study sought to assess how communication patterns within families influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, Kenya, to provide evidence-based insights to inform educational policies and family-based interventions.

Justification

Effective communication within the family unit fosters emotional support, guidance, and the transmission of values that shape learners' attitudes toward education. Conversely, poor communication patterns—characterised by conflict, neglect, or lack of engagement—may hinder cognitive and emotional development, thereby negatively affecting academic outcomes. Investigating this relationship contributes to expanding knowledge of how micro-level family interactions translate into measurable educational performance.

Empirically, although numerous studies have examined determinants of academic achievement, much of the existing literature in Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa has focused predominantly on structural factors such as school resources, teacher quality, and socio-economic status. Fewer studies have explored intra-family processes, particularly communication patterns, as determinants of learners' academic success. This creates a contextual and methodological gap that this study addresses, particularly in Nyeri County, where socio-cultural dynamics and family structures may uniquely shape students' experiences.

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to inform stakeholders—including parents, educators, school administrators, and policymakers—on the importance of fostering positive communication environments at home. Understanding how communication patterns influence academic achievement can guide the development of parent engagement programmes, counselling interventions, and policies to strengthen family-school partnerships. In the Kenyan context, where education is highly valued as a pathway to socio-economic mobility, such insights are critical for improving student outcomes in public secondary schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in family systems theory, which views the family as an interconnected unit where communication patterns influence individual behaviour and outcomes. Effective communication fosters emotional stability and academic engagement, while dysfunctional communication leads to stress and poor performance; (Baptist, 2022).

The concept of family communication patterns is grounded in the Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) developed by McLeod and Chaffee and later refined by Fitzpatrick and Ritchie. The theory identifies two primary dimensions: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation orientation reflects the degree to which family members engage in open dialogue and exchange ideas, while conformity orientation emphasises obedience, uniformity, and adherence to parental authority (Schrodt, 2026).

Families high in conversation orientation encourage critical thinking, self-expression, and problem-solving among children, whereas those high in conformity orientation tend to restrict communication and prioritise hierarchy. These dimensions combine to form four family types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire, each with varying implications for children's development (Mohammadreza, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, family communication acts as a primary socialisation mechanism, shaping students' attitudes, motivation, and cognitive development, which ultimately influence academic achievement; (Wang, 2022).

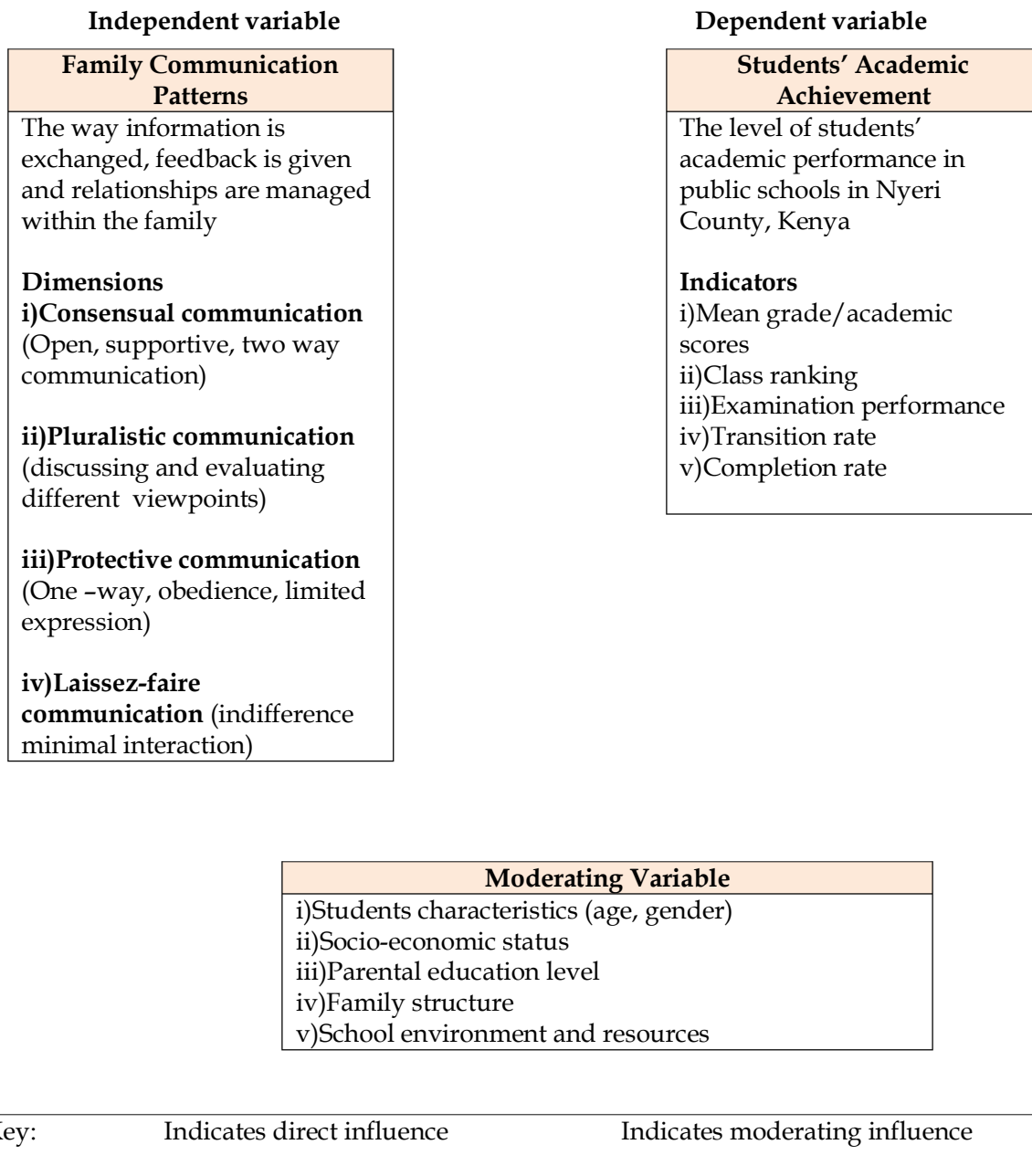


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive correlational design within a mixed-methods approach. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a large population and to describe existing conditions, relationships, and patterns as they naturally occur, without manipulating



variables. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to students to assess family communication patterns and their perceived influence on academic performance. Academic achievement was measured using students' mean scores obtained from school records. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with selected parents and education officials to provide deeper insights into how family communication influences students' learning outcomes.

The strata consisted of students from (boys, girls' boarding schools as well as mixed secondary schools), parents, teachers, and education officials in public secondary schools in Nyeri County. The sample size was selected using appropriate sampling techniques, such as stratified and simple random sampling, which included (36 teachers, 128 parents and 236 students) to ensure representativeness. This enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

Study Locale

The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, targeting students, teachers, parents and education officials.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study was derived from the target population, which includes 19,176 students in 221 public secondary schools in Nyeri County, 2,900 teachers, and 10,200 parents. A sample of 400 respondents, which included (36 teachers, 128 parents and 236 students), was selected using stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques. This ensured that the selected sample was representative of the population, allowing for statistically valid conclusions.

Nyeri County has different categories of public schools (e.g., boys' schools, girls' schools, boarding schools, and mixed-day secondary schools). Stratified sampling ensured that each subgroup was adequately represented. Schools were first grouped into strata, and a proportional number of schools/students were selected from each stratum. This improved representativeness of the target population and reduced sampling bias.

Within selected schools, students were selected using simple random sampling (e.g., random numbers or the ballot method). This ensured an equal chance of selection and minimisation of researcher bias. Purposive sampling was used for selecting education officials. These respondents were chosen because they had specific knowledge relevant to family communication and student performance.

Together, these methods enhanced the credibility, validity, and reliability of the study findings and ensured that the study adequately represented students in Nyeri County. This strengthened the research's ability to accurately assess how family communication patterns influence academic achievement.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire and interview guides designed in line with Family Communication Patterns Theory. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic information, family communication patterns, and academic achievement. Family communication patterns were measured using Likert-scale items capturing consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire communication styles. Academic achievement was assessed using students' mean scores obtained from school records.



To ensure validity, the instrument underwent expert review to establish content validity, and construct validity was established by aligning items with theoretical constructs of family communication patterns. A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity and relevance of the items.

Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable. The results indicated satisfactory internal consistency for all scales.

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to students and teachers to assess family communication patterns and their perceived influence on academic performance. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with selected parents and education officials who provided deeper insights into how family communication influences students' learning outcomes.

Sample items included: "My parents encourage me to express my opinions freely." (Pluralistic) , "In my family, children are expected to follow decisions without question." (Protective), "We openly discuss issues but must agree with parents' final decision." (Consensual) and "Family members rarely discuss academic matters." (Laissez-faire).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires and academic records were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the characteristics of the collected data. This included: frequencies and percentages for categorical variables (e.g., types of family communication patterns), means and standard deviations for Likert-scale items measuring communication patterns. The results were presented using tables, bar charts, and pie charts to enhance clarity and interpretation.

Inferential statistics were used to determine the relationship between family communication patterns and students' academic achievement. Correlation Analysis (Pearson's r) was used to assess the strength and direction of relationships among family communication patterns. Qualitative data obtained from interviews with teachers and school administrators were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Findings

The findings from Table I indicated that family communication patterns vary in their potential influence on students' academic achievement. Consensual communication pattern recorded the highest composite mean ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.90$), indicating strong agreement among respondents that parents encourage the expression of ideas while still maintaining authority. This pattern reflects balanced parent-child interaction, which may positively correlate with students' academic performance by promoting discipline alongside open communication.

Similarly, the high composite means for the pluralistic communication pattern ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.96$) suggest that families characterised by open discussions, equal participation, and collaborative problem-solving are likely to foster positive academic outcomes. Such environments encourage critical thinking, confidence, and active learner engagement, which are positively correlated with academic achievement.

The protective communication pattern also showed a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.07$), suggesting that many parents closely monitor and direct their children's decisions and social activities. While this conformity-oriented approach may contribute to discipline and academic focus, excessive



parental control could limit independent thinking. Therefore, the relationship between protective communication and academic achievement may be moderate or mixed depending on the extent of control exercised.

In contrast, the laissez-faire communication pattern recorded the lowest composite mean ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.17$), indicating limited parent-child interaction and minimal discussion of personal issues. This low level of communication may be negatively correlated with academic achievement because students may lack emotional support, guidance, and motivation from their parents. The higher standard deviation further suggests that respondents' experiences with parental disengagement vary.

Table 1: Composite Mean Scores for Family Communication Patterns

Communication Pattern	Items Included	Composite Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Pluralistic	Spontaneous conversations; Equal participation; Problem-solving through discussion	3.91	0.96	High conversation orientation
Consensual	Encouraged expression of ideas; Parents listen seriously	4.05	0.9	Open but authority-guided communication
Protective	Monitoring friends/social activities; Parents make major decisions	3.75	1.07	High conformity orientation
Laissez-faire	Rare discussion of personal issues; Little communication with parents	2.36	1.17	Low conversation and low conformity

It's therefore worth noting that;

“The way families communicate shapes the way students learn, behave, and achieve in school; therefore, healthy family communication patterns are not only foundations of strong relationships but also critical determinants of academic success among learners in public secondary schools.”



Table 2: Family Communication Patterns and Academic Achievement (Conversation Orientation – Openness)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Family members often have spontaneous conversations about a variety of topics.	4.5	6.3	10.9	41.6	36.7	3.99	0.98
Parents encourage expression of ideas and thoughts, even if they differ from theirs.	3.2	5.4	8.6	39.8	43	4.14	0.91
All family members participate equally in family discussions.	6.8	12.2	14.5	37.6	28.9	3.69	1.07
Parents listen to opinions and take them seriously.	4.1	7.7	11.8	40.3	36.1	3.96	0.99
When there is a problem, the family works together to find a solution through discussion.	3.6	6.3	9.5	42.5	38.1	4.05	0.93
Parents often monitor friends and social activities.	5	8.1	13.1	39.4	34.4	3.9	1.02
Parents make most of the important decisions in the family.	7.2	14	16.3	36.2	26.3	3.6	1.12
Family members rarely discuss personal issues.	28.5	34.8	15.4	12.2	9.1	2.38	1.18
There is little communication between me and my parents.	31.2	33.5	14.9	11.3	9.1	2.33	1.16

Inferential Findings

The study established a positive and statistically significant relationship between family communication patterns and academic achievement:

Correlation coefficient: **r = .581**

Significance level: **p=.000**

Table 3: Correlation between Communication Patterns and Academic Achievement

Variable	r	Sig. (p)
Family Communication	0.581	0.000

This implied that improved communication within the family is associated with better academic performance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings confirmed that:

Open communication fosters trust, motivation, and academic engagement. Students from communicative families demonstrate better problem-solving and learning behaviours. Poor communication is associated with emotional distress, reduced motivation, and low academic achievement.



These results align with Family Systems Theory, which emphasises the role of family interactions in shaping individual outcomes.

Conclusion

This study set out to assess how communication patterns within the family influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Nyeri County, Kenya. The analysis indicates that family communication plays a significant role in shaping learners' academic outcomes. Specifically, consensual and pluralistic communication between parents and students enhances academic achievement by fostering positive attitudes toward learning, strengthening motivation, and promoting emotional stability.

The findings suggest that students who experience effective family communication are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement, confidence, and problem-solving ability. Such communication environments enable learners to freely express academic challenges, seek guidance, and receive encouragement, thereby improving performance. Conversely, limited, inconsistent, or conflict-ridden communication within the family may negatively affect students' emotional well-being and concentration, ultimately hindering their academic success.

Furthermore, the study established that family communication is not merely a background factor but a critical determinant of academic achievement, interacting with other educational variables. It influences learners' self-discipline, study habits, and overall perception of education. Therefore, improving communication patterns within families can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing students' academic performance.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of fostering positive family communication as a key component in promoting academic achievement among learners in public secondary schools. Stakeholders in education, including parents, teachers, and policymakers, should recognise and support the role of the family environment in shaping educational outcomes.

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