

## **Communication Patterns and Parent-Child Relationship Issues: A Case Study of Families Resident in University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State**

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### **Abstract**

This study focused on issues relating to communication patterns and parent-child relationships among households resident in University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) senior staff quarters. Specifically, the study determined ways family communication patterns influence parent/adolescent-child relationship among residents of UNN senior staff quarters (SSQs), digital communication channels used by families to enhance parent/adolescent-child relationship among residents of UNN SSQs, challenges that militate against parent/adolescent-child relationship and communication among residents of UNN SSQs and solutions to challenges militating against parent/adolescent-child relationship and communication among residents of UNN SSQs. The study adopted a survey design. Population for study comprised of residents of senior staff quarters in University of Nigeria Nsukka. Data were collected using questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings include 11 possible ways communication patterns (open, close, aggressive and passive) influence parent/adolescent-child relationship. For instance, open communication pattern can engender "trust" ( $\bar{X} = 2.97$ ), "enjoyment" ( $\bar{X} = 3.37$ ), instruction/teaching/learning ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), and so on. Other findings include seven groups of digital channels used in parent/adolescent-child communication. These include mobile application (APPs) ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$ ), video calls ( $\bar{X} = 3.12$ ), social media ( $\bar{X} = 3.03$ ), online learning ( $\bar{X} = 2.72$ ), and others. Further findings are eight challenges militating against parent/adolescent-child relationship and communication, such as, busy schedules of parents ( $\bar{X} = 3.22$ ), differences in communication styles among family members ( $\bar{X} = 3.11$ ). More findings are seven measures for ameliorating the challenges, including, establishing regular family communication time ( $\bar{X} = 3.03$ ), respect for other opinions ( $\bar{X} = 3.11$ ), use open communication patterns and be honest ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ). and others. Based on the findings four recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Communication, Parent/Adolescent-child, Relationship, Family, Patterns, Positive, Negative

### **Introduction**

The family is the basic unit of any society and the welfare of any nation

depends on that of each of the families therein. According to Anyakoha (2015), family is a group of persons united by

the ties of marriage, blood or adoption and could be characterized by common residence and economic cooperation. The basic family is a group made up of a man, his wife and their children. The relationship within the family is of utmost importance as it significantly influences the welfare of the individuals therein and the unit itself. Relationships in family are between husband-wife, siblings relationship and between parent-child relationship. Husband-wife relationship is the relationship between the husband and the wife and they are key persons in a family. In order for the well-being of the family to be sustained, this relationship must continue to be strengthened through effective communication, affection and cooperation. Sibling relationship are those between children of the same parents and such relationship gives individuals benefits such as companionship, learning of manners, securing, understanding and support. Parent-child relationship is the unique and enduring bond between parents and children. According to Anyakoha (2015), parent-child relationships are broken into four types which are protective-dependence relationship, instruction-learning relationship, enjoyment-companionship relations and advising-evaluation relationship. Protective dependence is inevitable because the child is fully dependent on the parents who are generally looked upon to give protection to the child. Instruction-learning is also inevitable because through parental love and provision of experiences, instruction-learning relationship is established and

children learn good behaviour. Furthermore, enjoyment-companionship is inevitable because when children grow towards adulthood, a feeling of companionship with the parents arises and it involves sharing of interests and pleasures by parents and children on the basis of equality. Advising-evaluation is inevitable as when a child has reached adulthood and gained a large amount of independence from parents, giving rise to a situation in which the parents give advice to the child. The parent-child relationship is the crux of this study, especially the relationship between parents and their adolescent children.

Adolescence is a transition stage of development between childhood and adulthood, typically characterized by physical, psychological and social changes. It is marked by the onset of puberty, which involves the development of secondary sexual characteristics and usually extends until the individual reaches full physical and emotional maturity. According to Sawyer, Azzoipadi, Wickermanthne and Patton (2018), adolescents are individual between the ages of 13-19 years. These individuals are usually under the care of parents and are still given instruction, protection, companionship and advice. According to Hidayah, Lestari and Artha (2021), achieving a good relationship between parents and their adolescent children requires communication. It helps in building trust and creating emotional connection among parents and children. Furthermore, communication

encourages expression, helps in settling conflict and provision of support in the family.

Communication is defined as the process of exchanging ideas, information, thoughts and feelings between individuals or groups through verbal and non-verbal means (McPhee and Zaug, 2000). It involves the transmission of messages from a sender to a receiver through various forms such as verbal, written or through facial forms and body language. Effective communication requires not only the transmission of a message but also the understanding of the message by the recipient.

Communication has various elements which include, but are not limited to; sender, message, encoding, channel, receiver and feedback. The sender of a message is the person who initiates the communication process by creating and sending a message. This individual converts his/her thoughts or ideas into a form that can be transmitted. The message is the information, emotion or idea that the sender wants to communicate through various channels such as spoken words, body language or symbols. Encoding involves the process of converting the message into a format or code that can be easily understood by the receiver. The channel is the medium through which the message is sent from the sender to the receiver. Channels can include, but are not limited to; face-to-face communication, written communication and electronic communication. The receiver is the individual for whom the message is intended. Upon receiving the message,

he/she decoded it, interprets the symbols, words or other forms used by the sender. Feedback is the response or reaction of a receiver to a sender's message. It allows the sender to gauge whether the message was understood as intended. Feedback can be verbal or non-verbal and is crucial for effective communication.

Communication follows various patterns in the family. Communication patterns are the recurring and predictable ways in which information is exchanged and shared among individuals or groups. It encompasses the various styles, methods and channels through which people convey messages, ideas and emotions to one another. Communication patterns are usually influenced by cultural norms, social context, individual preferences and the nature of the relationship between individuals.

The most common patterns of communication are open communication pattern, aggressive communication pattern, closed communication pattern and passive communication pattern. Open communication pattern is a communication style characterized by openness and transparency. In such a communication pattern, individuals communicate freely, honestly and without withholding any information. Aggressive communication pattern on the other hand is a style of communication that involves expressing one's thoughts, feelings and needs in a way that is forceful, dominating or confrontational. People who use aggressive communication often prioritize their own needs and

desires over the needs of others and may disregard or disrespect the opinions and feelings of those they are communicating with. Passive communication pattern is one that is characterized by a lack of assertion or a tendency to avoid expressing one's needs, desires or opinions. Individuals who exhibit passive communication patterns often prioritize the needs of others over their own, usually tend to avoid conflicts and confrontations as well as sometimes have difficulty in setting boundaries. This communication style can lead to unexpressed feelings and frustrations as passive communicators may not assert themselves or communicate their thoughts effectively. Closed communication pattern is one in which information flows in a restricted or limited manner. In this pattern, communication tends to be more one-way and follows a structured and controlled path. Closed communication is usually characterized by limited information flow, a rigid and formal structure, controlled feedback and defined roles.

Different communication patterns are used in homes between parents and children. None of these communication patterns however can be classified as perfect as each has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to Uddin (2008), communication patterns between parents and children play a crucial role in shaping the family dynamics, influencing the child's development and establishing a parent-child relationship. The right communication pattern can also benefit parents as it

could help them have peace at home and be optimally productive in their careers, especially those working in mentally tasking careers such as university staff.

The University of Nigeria Nsukka, where this study is undertaken, is located in Nsukka town of Enugu State in the South-East zone of Nigeria. It is a residential university, thus staff live within the campus with their families. Located within the campus is also a primary school and a secondary school, which meets the educational needs of the adolescent children of staff. The university campus also has sports facilities that cater for the recreational needs of staff and their children, thus making it imperative that parents need to communicate with their children regularly within the campus. The study is conducted at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) to explore the current scenario of family communication patterns and parent-child relationships among the residents. The choice of UNN as the study location is due to its diverse population with a mix of cultural backgrounds and generational influences provides a suitable setting to explore how communication patterns vary within families and influence parent-child relationships.

The study's justification lies in its potential to contribute valuable insights into the importance of positive communication patterns for fostering healthy parent-child relationships and overall family well-being. Understanding the factors influencing communication patterns and their

implications on relationships can inform the development of effective family-centered interventions to promote positive parent-child interactions. Additionally, by exploring the communication channels used within families, the study can shed light on how communication patterns manifest and affect family dynamics in diverse context

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study focused on issues relating to communication patterns and parent-child relationships among households resident in University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) senior staff quarters. Specifically, the study determined:

1. ways family communication patterns influence parent/adolescent-child relationship among residents of UNN senior staff quarters (SSQs).
2. digital communication channels used by families to enhance parent/adolescent-child relationship among residents of UNN SSQs.
3. challenges that militate against parent/adolescent-child relationship and communication among residents of UNN SSQs.
4. solutions to challenges militating against parent/adolescent-child relationship and communication among residents of UNN SSQs.

### **Methodology**

*Design of the study:* The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study.

*Area of the study:* The University of Nigeria Nsukka campus has

approximately 599 housing units which are categorized into senior and the junior staff quarters. The senior staff quarters has a total of 517 housing units (households) while the junior staff quarters has 82 housing units/households. This study focused on the senior staff units.

*Population for the study:* The population for this study comprised the residents of the senior staff quarters of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, which include, among others, parents and children within the age bracket of 13-17 years. The population was made up of parents and their adolescent children aged 13-17 years, in the households within the senior staff households. Population size was 517 households.

*Sample for the study:* A total of 176 households, each of which had an adolescent child (13-17 years) at the time of the study was purposively selected for the study. One parent (father or mother) and one of their adolescent child, all of who were willing to participate in the study, were also purposively selected for the study. These gave a sample of 352 respondents for the study.

*Instrument for Data Collection:* Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. It was developed based on literature review and the specific objectives of the study. It was validated by three university-based communication experts. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section being the demographic information of the respondent while the second section contained items relating to the specific

objectives that guided the study. A four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used in the research instrument.

**Data Collection Method:** The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and was distributed across the campus with the help of 3 (three) research assistants. A total of 352 questionnaires were distributed with a total of 343 filled and returned, making for a 97.4% return rate. The

instrument's reliability coefficient was determined using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. A reliability level of 0.88 was obtained, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability

**Data analysis techniques:** Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A 4-point scale with a real limit of 2.50 was used for decision making in deciding whether had an item indicates acceptable level or unacceptable level.

## RESULTS

**Tables 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on Ways Communication Patters (CP) Influence Parent/Adolescent-Child Relationship**

S/ N	Ways CP Influence Parent/Adolescent-Child Relationship Communication pattern can generate:	Communication Patterns Means ( $\bar{X}$ )									
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_3$	SD <sub>3</sub>	$\bar{X}_4$	SD <sub>4</sub>	$\bar{X}_{om}$	
1.	trust	2.97	0.69	2.43	0.49	2.49	0.51	2.51	0.51	<b>2.60</b>	
2.	hostility	2.33	0.41	3.11	0.81	2.45	0.48	2.53	0.54	<b>2.61</b>	
3.	cooperation	3.12	0.79	2.35	0.46	2.39	0.41	2.66	0.59	<b>2.63</b>	
4.	enjoyment	3.37	0.83	2.47	0.42	2.37	0.39	3.03	0.74	<b>2.81</b>	
5.	support	3.21	0.81	2.48	0.43	3.10	0.82	2.78	0.68	<b>2.89</b>	
6.	criticism	2.76	0.62	2.92	0.68	2.92	0.66	2.83	0.70	<b>2.86</b>	
7.	instruction/teaching/ learning	2.92	0.67	2.77	0.62	3.01	0.79	2.91	0.73	<b>2.90</b>	
8.	satisfaction	3.01	0.71	2.67	0.59	2.33	0.38	2.65	0.58	<b>2.67</b>	
9	intimacy/closeness	3.03	0.72	2.33	0.44	2.44	0.41	2.92	0.68	<b>2.68</b>	
10	care	2.99	0.68	2.71	0.63	2.97	0.69	2.99	0.68	<b>2.92</b>	
11	protection	2.95	0.67	2.82	0.71	2.91	0.63	3.01	0.72	<b>2.92</b>	
	<b>Cluster Mean for CP (<math>\bar{X}_{cm}</math>)</b>	<b>2.97</b>		<b>2.64</b>		<b>2.67</b>		<b>2.80</b>			

$\bar{X}_1$  = Mean score for open pattern; SD<sub>1</sub> = Standard deviation for open pattern;  $\bar{X}_2$  = Mean score for closed pattern; SD<sub>2</sub> = Standard deviation for closed pattern;  $\bar{X}_3$  = Mean score for aggressive pattern; SD<sub>3</sub> = Standard deviation of aggressive pattern;  $\bar{X}_4$  = Mean score for passive pattern; SD<sub>4</sub> = Standard deviation of passive pattern;  $\bar{X}_{om}$  = Overall means for Ways;  $\bar{X}_{cm}$  = Cluster means for communication patterns.

Table 1 shows four communication patterns namely, open (OP), close (CP), aggressive (AP) and passive (PP) and

11 possible ways the patterns could influence parent/adolescent-child relationship. These 11 ways represent

possible outcomes of the communication patterns, that is, their resultant influences on parent/adolescent-child relationship. The Table further shows that the open communication pattern obtained the highest mean score for “trust” ( $\bar{X} = 2.97$ ) while closed pattern obtained the least mean score of  $\bar{X} = 2.43$ . The Table also shows that the open pattern has the highest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.37$ ) for generating “enjoyment”. Thus, the four types of communication patterns obtained varied mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores for the 11 influence outcomes. The Table also

shows the overall mean score of each of the 11 ways for the four communication patterns. The ways with the highest overall means are, “caring” ( $\bar{X}_{om} = 2.92$ ); “protecting” ( $\bar{X}_{om} = 2.92$ ), and “instruction/teaching/learning” ( $\bar{X}_{om} = 2.90$ ). Table 1 further shows the cluster mean ( $\bar{X}_{cm}$ ), that is the mean scores for each communication pattern based of all the 11 ways the patters could influence parent/children relationship. Here, the “open” communication pattern has the highest cluster mean ( $\bar{X}_{cm} = 2.97$ ).

**Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Digital Communication Channels Used in Parent/Adolescent-Child Relationship**

S/N	Digital Channels Used	Utilization $\bar{X}$	SD	R
1	Video calls	3.12	0.81	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Social media	3.03	0.76	3 <sup>rd</sup>
3	Mobile applications	3.31	0.84	1 <sup>st</sup>
4	Gaming	2.92	0.71	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Online learning	2.77	0.64	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	Educational application	2.65	0.61	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Parental control measures	2.52	0.53	7 <sup>th</sup>

$\bar{X}$  = Utilization Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; R = Ranking of Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores.

Table 2 shows the digital channels used for communication between parents and adolescent children. The Table shows that among the digital channels, mobile applications rank highest with the mean score of ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$ ). These mobile applications involve the use of mobile phones for phone calls, instant messages such as whatsapp and short message services and conference calls. Results also showThe Table further shows that video calls rank second among digital

channels used in communication between parents and children. Such video calls are done through mobile phones as well as via the use of personal computers, laptops and tablets. The social media channels used by parents and children in the environment for communication include Facebook, Instagram and Tik-Tok. Parents and their adolescent children use these channels to entertain each other as well as to keep each other abreast with their activities.

**Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Challenges Militating Against Parent-Child Relationship**

S/N	Challenges	$\bar{X}$	SD	R
1	Busy schedules of parents	3.22	0.81	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Busy schedules of children	2.82	0.71	5 <sup>th</sup>
3	Technology taking valuable time of parents	2.78	0.68	6 <sup>th</sup>
4	Social media taking valuable time of parents	2.69	0.64	7 <sup>th</sup>
5	Lack of trust and openness	2.65	0.63	8 <sup>th</sup>
6	Power struggle between parents and children	2.83	0.73	4 <sup>th</sup>
7	Differences in communication styles among family members	3.11	0.81	2 <sup>nd</sup>
8	Emotional barriers between family members	2.99	0.74	3 <sup>rd</sup>

$\bar{X}$  = Utilization Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; R = Ranking of Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores.

Table 3 shows the challenges militating against parent-child relationship. The Table also shows that “busy schedule of parents” and “differences in communication styles among family members” are the top ranked ( $\bar{X}$  =3.22 and  $\bar{X}$  =3.11, respectively), challenges militating against parent-child

communication among UNN campus residents. The Table further shows that “emotional barriers between family members” ( $\bar{X}$  =2.29) and “power struggle between parents and children” are ( $\bar{X}$  =2.83), also high ranking challenges militating against parent-child relationship.

**Table 4: Measures for Ameliorating the Challenges Militating Against Parent-Child Relationship**

S/N	Amelioration measures	$\bar{X}$	SD	R
1	Establish regular family communication time	3.03	0.81	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Practice active listening	2.94	0.75	5 <sup>th</sup>
3	Use open communication patterns and be honest	2.92	0.76	7 <sup>th</sup>
4	Respect for others’ opinions	3.11	0.89	1 <sup>st</sup>
5.	Avoid negative language	3.01	0.80	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6.	Find common interests	2.95	0.77	4 <sup>th</sup>
7.	Seek outside help when necessary	2.93	0.76	6 <sup>th</sup>

$\bar{X}$  = Utilization Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; R = Ranking of Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) scores.

Table 4 shows that respecting each other’s opinions and establishing regular family time rank high  $\bar{X}$  =3.11 and  $\bar{X}$  =3.03 respectively, ameliorating as measures for the challenges militating against parent-child relationship in the family. The Table also shows that “avoiding the use of negative language” and “finding

common interests” are also high ranking measures for ameliorating the challenges militating against parent-child relationship. Furthermore, “using open and honest communication” ( $\bar{X}$  =2.93) as well as “seeking outside help when necessary” ( $\bar{X}$  =2.93) are also fairly high ranking measures for



ameliorating against the challenges faced in parent-child relationship.

### **Discussion of findings**

Results from the study show that open family communication pattern build trust, foster cooperation and enjoyment as well as create a supportive atmosphere in the family. This is in line with the reports of Koerner and Schrod (2014) that open communication enables family members trust each other with the deepest secrets and concerns. The reports further indicated that this communication pattern makes family members better rely on each other for advise and also assurance that matters are kept confidential within the family. Results from the study also showed that closed communication patterns and aggressive communication patterns could lead to hostility and increase in criticisms between family members. This is in line with the views of Egenti (2014) who mentioned that the wrong communication pattern can engender hostility and weaken trust in families. Results from the study also showed that the four communication patterns engender learning, create satisfaction promote intimacy, care and protectiveness in the family. This is in line with the views of Singh and Tyagi (2023) who opined that parents usually see provision, care and protection as the crux of their responsibility the family. The authors further mentioned that parents take pride in protecting their children and see it as a necessity, as they view that their children do not

have what it takes to survive the perils of the times at a very young age.

Results from the study showed that the digital channels used by families to enhance parent-child relationship include video calls, social media, mobile applications, gaming and online learning. These gaming activities include the playing of board games and video games between parents and children. Mobile applications used include phone calls, texts messages as well as messages on platforms such as whatsapp and viber. Results further showed that educational applications and parental control television applications significantly enhance parent-child relationships. The educational applications used by parents and children in enhancing their relationship include pre-loaded computer applications such as "U-Lesson" and "Smart-Teache"r applications. These findings are in line with the postulations of Gyasi, Kwarteng-Nantwi and Dery (2023) who mentioned that mobile phones and internet powered digital facilities such as tablets, laptops and personal computers significantly improve parent-child relationships as they make for seamless and quick real-time communication between parents and children. The author further mentioned that social media, games and online learning help in improving family bonding as both parents and children get to learn from each other. This is also in alignment with the views of Achakpa-Ikyo and Ogaba-Egba (2016) who mentioned that families who make effort to inculcate technology

positively in their communication measures experience significant success in creating strong family bonds. The authors further mentioned that the use of technology driven measures such as mobile telephones, video conferencing at given times help families to bridge geographical constraints and maintain family bonds.

Results from the study showed that some of the challenges militating against parent-child relationship in the University of Nigeria Nsukka include busy schedules of parents and children, technology and social media taking up valuable time of both parents and children as well as a lack of trust and openness on the part of both parents and children. These are in line with the views of Galvin and Braithwaite (2014) who opined technology, social media and tighter work and study schedules have significantly hampered the relationship between parents and children. Results also showed that a lack of trust and openness, power struggle between parents and children, differences in communication style among family members as well as emotional barriers between family members are a significant challenge that hamper parent-child communication. This is in line with the views of Koerner and Braithwaite (2012) who mentioned that lack of trust and openness prevents members of family from expressing their fears to each other and seeking advice from one another. The authors further mentioned that differences in communication styles could bring about friction and power struggle between parents and children, making

for constant conflicts that could hamper communication in the family.

Results from the study showed that measures which can be used for ameliorating the communication challenges experienced between parents and children include establishing regular family communication, practicing active listening, the use of open and honest communication as well as respect for each others' opinions. These are in line with the observations of Akintayo and Fakorede (2019) who mentioned that regular communication between parents in an open and honest manner creates a conducive environment for inculcating trust, intimacy and understanding between parents and children. The author further mentioned that actions such as active listening and, setting apart fixed regular times for communication significantly deepen the relationship between parents and children. Results also showed that respect for each other's opinions, avoidance of the use of negative language, finding common interests and seeking outside help when necessary are significant measures for ameliorating the challenges militating against parent-child relationships in the family. These are in line with the views of Olapegba and Okuneye (2019) who mentioned that finding common interests helps parents and children to spend time with each other performing activities and enables them open up to each other well. The results are also in agreement with the views of Adegbola (2014) who mentioned that seeking professional help significantly improves communication among

family members and helps them ameliorate the challenges they face in communication with each other.

### Conclusion

Communication influences every facet of family life and it being done properly can enhance the quality of life of the individual members of the family. The right communication pattern helps in building strong relationships between parents and children as well as improves the overall well-being of the family as a whole as it creates a harmonious atmosphere within the home. This paper provides a framework for understanding the different communication patterns used in families and how it impacts on various important attributes of family relationship.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. The different communication patterns should be used in the right balance within the family in order to achieve optimal results.
2. Both parents and children should practice active listening in order to create an atmosphere of empathy and more trust.
3. Respectful and constructive feedback should be used to encourage members to learn from their mistakes and be better.
4. Clear boundaries and expectations should be set so as to reduce misunderstanding. However,

reasonable flexibility should be encouraged where necessary.

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