



Family Communication Patterns and Social Competence of Secondary School Students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study investigated family communication patterns and the social competence of secondary school students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Specifically, the study examined the influence of assertive communication patterns and laissez-faire communication patterns on the social competence of students. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 2,148 SS II students in 10 public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area during the 2025/2026 academic session. A sample size of 535 students, representing approximately 13.97 percent of the population, was selected using a multistage sampling procedure involving simple random sampling and proportionate sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire titled Family Communication Patterns and Social Competence Questionnaire (FCPSCQ). The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while a dependent t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that assertive and laissez-faire communication patterns significantly influenced the social competence of secondary school students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Based on the findings, it was concluded that family communication patterns play a significant role in

shaping students' social competence. It was therefore recommended, among others, that parents should adopt assertive communication approaches that promote emotional support, openness, and proper guidance within the family, while school counselors should organize parent education programs on the importance of positive family communication in enhancing students' social development.

Keywords: family, communication, pattern, assertive, laissez-faire, social competence

Introduction

Social competence among secondary school students has increasingly attracted the attention of educators, counselors, and researchers due to the growing incidence of antisocial and maladaptive behaviors in schools. Many secondary school students today exhibit behaviors such as aggression, poor interpersonal relationships, bullying, emotional instability, social withdrawal, and inability to communicate effectively with peers and teachers. These behavioral deficiencies often interfere with students' academic performance, classroom participation, emotional well-being, and overall adjustment within the school environment. Social competence refers to the ability of an individual to interact effectively with others, maintain positive social relationships, regulate emotions appropriately, and function successfully in different social situations. It includes communication skills, empathy, cooperation, self-control, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities (Gresham, et al., 2021). Students who demonstrate high social competence are more likely to establish healthy peer relationships, display socially acceptable behaviors, and adapt positively to school life (Niu et al., 2025). In contrast, students with poor social competence often experience peer rejection, behavioral difficulties, emotional distress, and social maladjustment (Denham et al., 2020).

The family serves as the first and most influential socialization environment where children acquire attitudes, values, communication skills, and behavioral patterns that shape their interactions with others. Within the family setting, communication patterns play a significant role in determining how children learn to express themselves, manage emotions, and relate with people around them. Family communication patterns refer to the regular ways through which family members exchange information, express feelings, resolve conflicts, and regulate behavior within the home. These communication styles provide children with models of interpersonal interaction, which they may transfer into their relationships outside the

family environment. Among the various family communication patterns, assertive and laissez-faire communication patterns appear particularly important in explaining students' social competence.

An assertive communication pattern is characterized by openness, clarity, respect, emotional support, and mutual understanding among family members. Parents who adopt assertive communication encourage their children to express opinions freely while also teaching them to respect the feelings and opinions of others. Such communication patterns create supportive family environments that enhance children's confidence, emotional stability, and social interaction skills (Alegre, 2022). Students raised in assertive family environments are often more capable of expressing themselves appropriately, resolving interpersonal conflicts peacefully, cooperating with peers, and demonstrating empathy in social situations. Several empirical studies have supported the positive influence of assertive communication on children's social development. Alegre (2022) reported that assertive parenting significantly predicted adolescents' emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior. Similarly, Carvalho et al. (2021) found that open communication and parental responsiveness positively influenced peer acceptance and social competence among secondary school students. These findings suggest that assertive communication serves as an important factor in promoting positive social adjustment among adolescents.

Conversely, a laissez-faire communication pattern is characterized by limited parental control, weak supervision, excessive permissiveness, and lack of consistent guidance. In such family environments, children are often given unrestricted freedom with little direction regarding acceptable social behavior. Although laissez-faire communication may encourage independence and freedom of expression, it may also deprive children of the structure and guidance necessary for developing self-discipline, emotional control, and effective interpersonal skills. As a result, students raised in laissez-faire family settings may exhibit impulsive behaviors, poor emotional regulation, weak communication skills, and difficulties in maintaining healthy social relationships. Hosokawa and Katsura (2020) observed that permissive parenting styles, which reflect laissez-faire communication, were associated with behavioral problems and lower social competence among children. Likewise, Pinquart (2021), in a meta-analysis, reported that permissive parenting negatively affected children's social adjustment and self-regulation abilities. These studies indicate that the absence of structured communication and parental guidance may hinder the development of appropriate social competencies among adolescents.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the relationship between family communication patterns and students' behavioral and social outcomes. For instance, Opoh et al. (2024) found that effective family communication significantly influenced emotional adjustment among secondary school students in Cross River State. Similarly, Olugbeko and Lana (2024) reported that supportive family interactions positively predicted social adjustment among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Despite these studies, there remains limited empirical evidence specifically investigating the influence of assertive and laissez-faire communication patterns on social competence among secondary school students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. This gap in literature therefore necessitated the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Social competence is essential for students' successful interaction within school and society. However, many secondary school students exhibit poor interpersonal skills, including inability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and maintain positive relationships. These issues manifest in behaviors such as aggression, social withdrawal, peer rejection, and emotional instability. Such challenges may hinder students' academic engagement and overall development. Observations indicate that family communication patterns may significantly contribute to these problems. While some parents adopt assertive communication styles that promote guidance and emotional support, others adopt laissez-faire approaches characterized by a lack of structure and minimal supervision. Students from such environments may lack the necessary skills required for effective social interaction. Despite the importance of family communication, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how these communication patterns influence the social competence of secondary school students in Ikot Ekpene. This creates a gap that the present study sought to fill.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of family communication patterns on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the following:

- i. The influence of assertive communication patterns on the social competence of secondary school students.

- ii. The influence of the laissez-faire communication pattern on the social competence of secondary school students.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will be beneficial to secondary school students as they will help them understand how family communication patterns influence their ability to interact effectively with others, regulate emotions, and maintain positive social relationships. The findings may encourage students to improve their communication skills, interpersonal relationships, and social behaviors both within and outside the school environment.

More so, parents will benefit from the findings of this study because it will create awareness on the importance of effective family communication in promoting children's social competence. Specifically, the findings will help parents understand how assertive communication can positively influence their children's emotional stability, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships, while laissez-faire communication may negatively affect appropriate social development. This may encourage parents to adopt healthier communication styles within the family. Additionally, guidance counselors will benefit from the findings because the study will provide empirical information that can guide counseling interventions aimed at improving students' social competence and behavioral adjustment. Counselors may use the findings to design family-based counseling programs, communication skills training, and social adjustment strategies for students experiencing interpersonal and emotional difficulties.

Teachers will also benefit from the findings of the study because socially competent students are more likely to cooperate with peers, participate actively in classroom activities, and maintain positive relationships within the school environment. The findings may therefore help teachers understand some family-related factors responsible for students' behavioral and social challenges and adopt appropriate supportive strategies in managing students.

Furthermore, educational administrators and policymakers will benefit from the findings because the study may provide useful information for developing programs and policies that promote positive family communication, students' social adjustment, and emotional well-being. Such programs may include parent education seminars, school-family partnership initiatives, and counseling support services aimed at promoting students' social development.

Finally, the findings of this study will serve as useful reference material for future researchers by contributing to existing literature on family communication patterns

and social competence among secondary school students. The study will also provide a basis for further research in related areas within and outside Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the influence of assertive communication patterns on the social competence of secondary school students?
- ii. What is the influence of the laissez-faire communication pattern on the social competence of secondary school students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

- i. An assertive communication pattern does not significantly influence the social competence of secondary school students.
- ii. A laissez-faire communication pattern does not significantly influence social competence among secondary school students.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on the influence of family communication patterns on social competence among secondary school students. Family communication patterns such as assertive communication patterns and laissez-faire communication patterns served as the independent variables, while social competence served as the dependent variable. The study was delimited to secondary school students in public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State during the 2025/2026 academic session.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977)

Social Learning Theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory explains that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, modeling, and interaction with significant individuals within the social environment. According to Bandura, children acquire attitudes, communication patterns, emotional responses, and social behaviors by observing how parents and family members behave and interact with one another. The family therefore serves as an important environment where children learn acceptable and unacceptable patterns of behavior through daily



interactions and experiences. Social Learning Theory further explains that children tend to imitate behaviors that are consistently reinforced or rewarded within the family. When parents demonstrate positive communication patterns such as openness, empathy, respect, cooperation, and emotional support, children are more likely to develop positive interpersonal skills and socially acceptable behaviors. On the other hand, when parents display poor communication patterns characterized by neglect, lack of guidance, or excessive permissiveness, children may develop weak social adjustment skills, poor emotional regulation, and inappropriate social behaviors. The theory therefore emphasizes that family communication patterns significantly shape children's social competence and behavioral outcomes.

The relevance of social learning theory to this study lies in its explanation of how assertive and laissez-faire communication patterns influence social competence among secondary school students. Assertive communication patterns provide students with positive behavioral models that encourage effective communication, emotional control, empathy, and cooperation. Conversely, a laissez-faire communication pattern may expose students to inadequate guidance and weak behavioral regulation, thereby limiting the development of appropriate social skills and competence.

Attachment Theory by John Bowlby (1969)

Attachment theory was propounded by John Bowlby in 1969. The theory explains that the emotional bond established between children and their caregivers significantly influences children's emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and social adjustment throughout life. According to Bowlby, children who experience warm, supportive, and responsive relationships with parents are more likely to develop secure attachment, emotional stability, confidence, and healthy social interactions. In contrast, children who experience neglect, inconsistent communication, or lack of emotional support may develop insecurity, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and social difficulties. Attachment theory further explains that communication within the family plays an important role in shaping children's feelings of security, acceptance, and belongingness. Parents who communicate assertively by listening attentively, expressing warmth, and guiding children appropriately help to foster secure attachment and positive social development. Such children are more likely to trust others, cooperate effectively, regulate emotions, and establish healthy peer relationships. However, a laissez-faire communication pattern, characterized by weak supervision, limited guidance, and emotional



detachment, may weaken parent-child attachment and negatively affect children's social competence and emotional adjustment.

The relevance of attachment theory to this study is evident in its explanation of how family communication patterns influence social competence among secondary school students. Assertive communication patterns may strengthen emotional attachment, social confidence, and interpersonal effectiveness among students, while laissez-faire communication patterns may contribute to insecurity, poor emotional regulation, and weak social adjustment. Therefore, the theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between family communication patterns and social competence among secondary school students in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Survey research design is a method used to collect data from a population in order to describe existing conditions, relationships, and behaviors without manipulating the variables under investigation. This design was considered suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to examine the influence of family communication patterns on social competence among secondary school students without any form of experimental manipulation.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised 2,148 SS II students in 10 public secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area during the 2025/2026 academic session. The population figure was obtained from the records of the Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board for the 2025/2026 academic session.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 535 students was selected for the study. This represents approximately 13.97 percent of the total population. A multistage sampling procedure was adopted, involving simple random sampling and proportionate sampling techniques. First, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the schools included in the study. Thereafter, a proportionate sampling technique was employed to select respondents from each selected school based on their population size. This procedure ensured that each student had an equal and fair chance of being selected, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire titled Family Communication Patterns and Social Competence Questionnaire (FCPSCQ). The instrument contained items developed to measure assertive communication patterns and laissez-faire communication patterns among families. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while dependent t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Dependent t-test on the influence of assertive communication patterns on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Std. Error	p-value	Decision
Assertive communication	535	68.42	6.51	0.35	.000	Sig.
Social Competence	535	64.35	5.98	0.32		

Table 1 presents the summary of the dependent t-test on the influence of assertive communication patterns on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. The result reveals that the assertive communication pattern has a mean score of 68.42 with a standard deviation of 6.51, while social competence has a mean score of 64.35 with a standard deviation of 5.98. The probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that an assertive communication pattern has a significant influence on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.

Table 2: Dependent t-test on the influence of the laissez-faire communication pattern on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Std. Error	p-value	Decision
Laissez-faire	535	42.18	5.74	0.31	.000	Sig.
Social Competence	535	64.35	5.98	0.32		

Table 2 presents the summary of the dependent t-test on the influence of the laissez-faire communication pattern on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. The result shows that the laissez-faire communication pattern has a mean score of 42.18 with a standard deviation of 5.74, while social competence has a mean score of 64.35 with a standard deviation of 5.98. The probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the laissez-faire communication pattern has a significant influence on the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.

Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that an assertive communication pattern significantly influences the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. This finding may not be surprising because children who are raised in families where communication is open, respectful, supportive, and emotionally balanced are more likely to develop positive interpersonal skills, emotional stability, self-confidence, and the ability to interact effectively with others. Assertive communication within the family creates an enabling environment where children are encouraged to express themselves freely while also learning respect, empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. Such positive family interactions may contribute significantly to the development of students' social competence both within and outside the school environment.

This present finding agrees with Alegre (2022), who found that assertive parenting significantly predicted adolescents' emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior. However, the present finding disagrees with the study conducted by Hosokawa and Katsura (2020), which suggested that family communication patterns had minimal direct influence on children's social competence when compared with peer and school environmental factors. The disagreement between the two studies

may be attributed to differences in cultural setting, area of study, population characteristics, research design, and social environments of the respondents.

The finding of the study revealed that the laissez-faire communication pattern significantly influences the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. This finding may be attributed to the fact that family environments characterized by weak supervision, lack of guidance, excessive freedom, and limited parental involvement may affect the development of appropriate social behaviors among students. Children raised in laissez-faire family settings may lack the necessary structure, discipline, emotional guidance, and communication support required for the development of effective interpersonal skills and emotional regulation. As a result, such students may experience difficulties in maintaining healthy peer relationships, respecting social boundaries, and adapting appropriately within social environments.

This present finding agrees with Pinquart (2021), who reported in a meta-analytic review that permissive parenting was negatively associated with children's social adjustment and self-regulation skills. However, the present finding disagrees with the study conducted by Carvalho et al. (2021), which revealed that family communication patterns that encourage openness and freedom of expression could positively enhance adolescents' confidence and peer interactions. The disagreement between the studies may be attributed to differences in cultural environment, parenting orientation, study population, and societal expectations regarding parental control and child behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was observed that family communication patterns play a significant role in influencing the social competence of secondary school students in the Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Thus, the study concluded that the quality of communication within the family remains a critical factor in shaping students' social adjustment and behavioral outcomes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- i. Parents and guardians should adopt assertive communication patterns that encourage open interaction, emotional support, respect, and proper guidance within the family in order to enhance the social competence of secondary school students.



- ii. School counselors and educational authorities should organize parent education programs, seminars, and workshops aimed at sensitizing parents to the negative effects of laissez-faire communication patterns and the importance of structured family communication in promoting positive social behavior of students.

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