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Tripartite Collaboration: Strengthening Learner, Teacher, and Parent Partnerships

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Abstract

Aim: The study explored the tripartite collaboration of learners, teachers, and parents in school community.

Methodology: This study used a descriptive quantitative method using a structured survey questionnaire. The study consists of 60 learners, 62 teachers, and 60 parent from Zuni High School, Zuni, New Mexico, U.S.A.

Results: Effective communication and engagement is always observed by parents (3.36) while sometimes observed by learners (3.24) and teachers (3.13). Collaboration practices that foster shared responsibility for learners' success are always observed by learners (3.31) and parents (3.40) and sometimes observed by teachers (3.13). Also, strengthening school-community relationships is always observed by learners (3.28) and parents (3.38) while sometimes observed by teachers (3.22). Supporting a positive learning environment is always observed by learners (3.30) and parents (3.43) but sometime observed by teachers (3.13).

Conclusion: There is communication gap among learners, teachers, and parents, particularly in how each group perceives their level of collaboration along effective communication and engagement, shared responsibility for learners' success, strengthening school-community relationships, and creating a positive learning environment. While parents and learners feel actively involved, teachers do not always demonstrate the same level of involvement.

Keywords: tripartite, collaboration, learner-teacher-parent partnerships, school community

INTRODUCTION

Partnerships take many forms, but at their core, they involve two or more individuals or groups working toward shared goals. In education, partnerships enhance student learning and foster collaboration among schools, families, professionals, and communities. According to Squad Forward (2024), collaboration among various educational stakeholders is essential for students' academic success. Through collaboration and working together, stakeholders can better prepare students for practical life and support their academic growth. There are various collaboration strategies that educational stakeholders can use for collaboration. The educational community can also help them in applying these strategies in the curriculum and classroom.

The Educate America Act states that "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children". Many researchers believe that when teachers and parents collaborate, it will positively influence the social and academic growth of children. They also believe that if students collaborate with teachers, it can enhance their skills and knowledge. However, despite these benefits of partnership, many educational stakeholders are not actively collaborating. This often stems from a lack of knowledge and awareness of how to build effective partnerships (Squad Forward, 2024).

A well-established example of educational partnerships is the work of Joyce Epstein and Steven Sheldon at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland to inform and promote community partnerships to enhance education for students and families. (Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, 2023). According to Myers (2021), there was once a serious debate about whether families



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or schools played a key role in a student's education. Today, most agree that families and schools share that responsibility. James Coleman and his colleagues conducted the first large national study of the educational conditions in the United States and the equality of educational opportunities in schools for students with diverse backgrounds. Among its more provocative findings, the report revealed that the family had the most significant role in a child's academic achievement, regardless of family background. Epstein quoted, "*It was, indeed, a social fact that when families are engaged in their children's education, regardless of background, their children do better in school.*" However, that fact hides two unacceptable inequalities. Epstein stated that not all families are welcomed by schools as partners in education, and as a result, not all children benefit from family support for education. Both home and school are crucial for student achievement and well-being, and they must work together.

Guidelines for effective partnerships have been developed to set clear expectations for collaboration. According to St. Louis County (2021) in their educational partnerships, they are committed to a collaborative model to include expectations in the following categories: staffing; teaching, learning, and accountability; collaboration of responsibilities and resources; student services; data and technology; transportation; and career and technical education. These structured agreements ensure that schools and their partners work towards common objectives while maintaining accountability.

Another important aspect of educational partnerships is the active engagement of students in their learning, as there are many benefits to be gained when students play an active role in shaping and enhancing their learning experiences. The Squad Forward (2024) emphasized that students should develop self-directed learning habits to collaborate with the teachers. Students should exercise various active learning practices such as time management and spaced repetition to learn effectively. Moreover, maintaining open communication with parents and teachers when facing challenges is important. They must consume all the resources and apply strategies that their teachers and parents have recommended to them.

international institutions like the Buckinghamshire New University, emphasize school-to-learner partnerships through the revised Educational Partnership Agreement (Bucks Students' Union, 2022). This approach highlights student engagement in decision-making. The new agreement states the commitment of the students, which includes taking personal responsibility for learning and development; contributing to an effective and enjoyable community of learning and growth; maintaining punctuality, submitting work on time, practice of academic honesty, following university rules, give notice of any absences, participating in feedback processes, seeking support when needed, and respecting the university including Halls of Residence and behave considerately towards the local community.

Institutions have developed a structured process for forming and evaluating agreements to ensure that partnerships are well-managed. This includes the University of Tasmania's (2023) comprehensive framework, which consists of several stages: the initial evaluation phase, the risk assessment phase, and the due diligence phase. In addition, the National Center of Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSE (2022) highlights the importance of school-to-community and school-to-family partnerships to support early childhood education. The NCSSE emphasizes that family-school-community partnerships are a shared responsibility and a reciprocal process in which schools, community agencies, and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways. In contrast, families actively take the initiative to support their children's development and learning.

Epstein's theory of partnership serves as the foundation for this study. It emphasizes the importance of school-family-community partnerships and describes effective partnerships as family-like schools. This mutual relationship fosters an environment where all stakeholders work together to support student success (Epstein, et al., 2019).

In the Zuni Public School District in New Mexico, USA, educational partnerships are valued. However, there is still limited research on how the tripartite collaboration among learners, teachers, and parents is practiced to support student success and enhance the overall learning environment. Hence, this study aimed to address this gap.

Objectives

The study explored the tripartite collaboration among learners, teachers, and parents.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following question:

1. How do the three groups of respondents assess their collaboration practices in terms of:
 - 1.1 effective communication and engagement,
 - 1.2 shared responsibility for learners' success
 - 1.3 strengthening school-community relationships, and
 - 1.4 supporting a positive learning environment?
2. Based on the results of the study, what recommendations may be proposed?



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METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative method to examine the collaboration practices of learners, teachers, and parents. According to McCombes (2023), descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. It can answer what, where, when and how questions, but not why questions. This study described the tripartite collaboration practices among learners, teachers, and parents in the school community.

Population and Sampling

The study's population consists of learners, teachers, and parents of Zuni Public School District, Zuni, New Mexico, U.S.A. The respondents purposively chose 60 learners, 62 teachers, and 60 parents from Zuni High School.

Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study is a structured survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested to test its reliability.

Data Collection

The researcher sought approval from the school district's superintendent and coordinated with the school Principal. Upon approval, the researcher completed the informed consent form and, after which, set a schedule to distribute the survey questionnaire to the respondents. After a week, the researcher collected the completed questionnaires.

Treatment of Data

The 4-point Likert scale was utilized to rate the responses to the survey questionnaire. "Highly practiced" was rated 4, "Moderately practiced" was rated 3, "Slightly practiced" was rated 2, and "Not practiced" was rated 1. Meanwhile, descriptive statistics, specifically the weighted mean, were employed to analyze and interpret the respondents' assessment of their collaboration in the school community. The range of mean values and descriptive interpretation are as follows: 3.25-4.00 (Highly practiced), 2.50-3.24 (Moderately practiced), 1.75-2.49 (Slightly practiced), and 1.00-1.75 (Not practiced).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that the learners', teachers', and parents' consent was considered for inclusion in the study. Furthermore, learners' participation in the study did not affect their class performance. Within the scope of the study, the researcher assured that there was negligible or minimal risk in the participation of the learners in the research study. The respondents were free to skip specific questions if they felt discomfort or inconvenience or if they believed they did not have the proper authority to answer such questions in the survey questionnaire. Additionally, the respondents were not given incentives or monetary compensation for their participation in the study.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Level of collaboration in the school community in terms of effective communication and engagement

Table 1 presents the perceived level of collaboration in the school community among the three groups of respondents, focusing on effective communication and engagement. Effective communication and engagement occur when learners, teachers, and parents work together to establish clear and open communication. The findings indicate that parents always observe collaboration in this area, as reflected in an aggregate mean of 3.36. Meanwhile, learners perceive it as sometimes observed (3.24), and teachers also view it as sometimes observed (3.13). These findings suggest that parents believe that open communication and active involvement are consistently present in the school community. However, learners and teachers perceived collaboration as occurring only sometimes, which implies a possible gap in how the different groups experience communication and engagement. Parents feel well-informed and engaged, while learners and teachers may not be putting in enough effort for full engagement.



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Parents always observed *communicating with the learners' teacher from the beginning and throughout the school year*. The parents express their desire to be involved in the education of their children. However, learners and teachers, only sometimes observe this practice. This conveys that while parents believe they are actively engaging with the teachers, this effort may not always be fully recognized both by the learners and the teachers. The communication gap might be attributed to the different expectations, such that what parents regard as active engagement might not align with what teachers and learners perceive as meaningful communication and engagement. American University School of Education (2020) states that parent-teacher communication begins at the start of a school year and lasts until students move on to the next grade. Teachers and parents will make introductions and gradually establish a relationship based on what they have in common: the student.

Moreover, learners (3.32) and parents (3.45) always observe the practice of *discussing methods to ensure that parents and teachers are on the same page regarding learning expectations*. This partnership reinforces a consistent message to the child that both parents and teachers are working together to support their learning. Similarly, learners (3.30) and parents (3.47) always observe the practice of *understanding teachers' goals and expectations for the learners*. Therefore, it is necessary to communicate how parents can partner with teachers to help learners achieve their goals. Both learners and parents believe that understanding teachers' goals and expectations requires clear communication to actively partner with teachers in attaining these goals. This collaboration practice, however, is only sometimes observed by teachers (3.09). The teacher's lack of engagement with parents may be due to barriers such as lack of time or competing priorities. According to Barkley (2019), it is essential to recognize what teachers want to accomplish as they work with students. Thus, learners seek to examine the learning activity from their perspective and the teacher's point of view.

In terms of *contacting families of learners with academic or behavioral problems*, this practice is always observed by parents (3.33), while it is sometimes observed by learners (3.20) and teachers (3.19). This implies that parents are consistently proactive in reaching out to their children's teachers regarding any academic or behavioral issues. They always want to be updated and deem it necessary to be involved in addressing these issues. However, to communicate with parents about these issues. On the other hand, teachers have limited ability to make this connection regularly due to other priorities. In a study conducted by Cotton and Wikelund, cited in Tutt (2021), parent's active involvement such as directly participating in a child's learning proves to be effective in the educational process.

Table 1. Assessment of the three groups of respondents on their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of *effective communication and engagement*.

Statements	Learners		Teachers		Parents	
	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. Communicate with the learners' teacher early on and throughout the school year.	3.22	Sometimes observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.30	Always observed
2. Discuss the best ways to communicate with the learners' teacher.	3.23	Sometimes observed	3.08	Sometimes observed	3.32	Always observed
3. Establish frequent, two-way communication to stay updated on school activities and learners' needs.	3.15	Sometimes observed	3.08	Sometimes observed	3.27	Always observed
4. Discuss methods for ensuring parents and teachers are "on the same page" regarding learning expectations.	3.32	Always observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.45	Always observed
5. Try to understand teachers' goals and expectations for the learners.	3.30	Always observed	3.09	Sometimes observed	3.47	Always observed
6. Contact families of learners having	3.20	Sometimes	3.19	Sometimes	3.33	Always



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academic or behavioral problems.		observed		observed		observed
Aggregate Mean	3.24	Sometimes observed	3.13	Sometimes observed	3.36	Always observed

Legend:

Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Always observed
2.50 – 3.24	Sometimes observed
1.75 – 2.49	Rarely observed
1.00 – 1.74	Never observed

Level of collaboration in the school community in terms of shared responsibility for learners’ success

Table 2 displays the assessment of the three groups of respondents regarding their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of shared responsibility for learners’ success. In this collaboration, teachers guide learning, parents provide home support, and learners take responsibility for their progress. Overall, learners (3.31) and parents (3.40) always observe the practice of shared responsibility for learners’ success within the school community, while sometimes observed by the teachers (3.13). This result means that both learners and parents always recognize and practice shared responsibility in supporting the success of the learners. Learners develop a deep understanding of their role in the learning process and take responsibility for their progress, while parents provide support at home.

Specifically, learners (3.28) and parents (3.43) always observe the practice of *asking and suggesting ways for parents to support their children’s learning at home*, while sometimes observed by teachers (3.13). It is a fact that parents are a child’s first teachers, and the home serves as their first classroom. As partners in learning and growth, parents play a vital role in supporting their child’s learning journey, particularly at home. Also, learners (3.37) and parents (3.42) always observe the practice of *planning and problem-solving around possible issues, ensuring collaborative planning between home and school*, which is sometimes observed by teachers (3.08). This suggests that both learners and parents recognize the importance of planning and problem-solving to address potential challenges in the child’s learning process. The active involvement of both learners and parents shows their shared commitment to supporting the child’s learning journey. Teachers, on the other hand, who sometimes observe this practice may face barriers to collaboration, such as time constraints, workload, and other challenges. Hall (2024) noted that some of the effective strategies for collaborative problem-solving with students include (1) the provision of a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment, (2) encouraging self-awareness and critical thinking, and (3) the use empathetic communication to collaborate with students and their caregivers.

In terms of *requiring parent approval on learners’ choice of activities*, findings show that only parents always observe this practice (3.50), while sometimes observed by both learners (3.23) and teachers (3.17). This suggests that parents, who are proactive in their child’s learning have become more aware of the requirement for their approval in their children’s choice of activities. On the other hand, learners and teachers do not always observe such practices. Even though parents are involved in the decision-making process, the collaborative partnership in this process may not always be clear to the learners and teachers.

Table 2. Assessment of the three groups of respondents on their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of shared responsibility for learners’ success.

Statements	Learners		Teachers		Parents	
	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. Asks about and suggests ways parents can work with their children at home to encourage learning.	3.28	Always observed	3.13	Sometimes observed	3.43	Always observed
2. Plans and problem-solves around possible issues, ensuring collaborative planning between	3.37	Always observed	3.08	Sometimes observed	3.42	Always observed



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home and school.						
3. Provides ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist learners with skills that need improvement.	3.25	Always observed	3.14	Sometimes observed	3.38	Always observed
4. Assists parents in helping learners set academic goals and select courses and programs.	3.40	Always observed	3.14	Sometimes observed	3.25	Always observed
5. Requires parent approval on learners' choice of activities.	3.23	Sometimes observed	3.17	Sometimes observed	3.50	Always observed
Aggregate Mean	3.31	Always observed	3.13	Sometimes observed	3.40	Always observed

Legend:

Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Always observed
2.50 – 3.24	Sometimes observed
1.75 – 2.49	Rarely observed
1.00 – 1.74	Never observed

Level of collaboration in the school community in terms of strengthening school-community relationships

Table 3 shows the assessment of the three groups of respondents regarding their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of strengthening school-community relationships. Strengthening school-community relationships is when all stakeholders collaborate to build an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The findings reveal that learners (3.28) and parents (3.38) always observe collaboration towards strengthening school-community relationships. However, teachers (3.22) sometimes observe partnerships in this area. These findings suggest that learners and parents believe that efforts toward strengthening school-community relationships are consistently present. Eden et al. (2024) stated that effective parent involvement encompasses various dimensions, including parental engagement in their children's academic journey, participation in school activities, and advocacy for educational equity. The significance of parental involvement cannot be overstated, as it has been consistently linked to positive outcomes for students and schools alike. However, teachers perceived collaboration as occurring only sometimes, which implies that while collaboration is happening, teachers may not always feel fully engaged or there is an engagement gap. There are instances wherein teachers always observe full partnership between themselves, the learners, and the partners.

As presented in the table, *providing a parent/family room for volunteers and family members to work, meet, and access resources* is always observed by the learners (3.28), teachers (3.25), and parents (3.29). The findings convey that providing a dedicated space for volunteers such as parents and family members shows the school's commitment to strengthening relationships with other members of the school community. This also means the presence of a shared responsibility between the school and the community, which further encourage meaningful support for student success. This finding supports the statement of Otani (2020) that parental involvement encompasses actions taken by parents to support their children's learning and educational success. This involvement can occur both within and outside the classroom, and it may include activities such as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school events, and advocating for educational policies that benefit all students.

Similarly, learners (3.35), teachers (3.33), and parents (3.32) always observe the practice of *involving parents and learners in planning, reviewing, and improving school programs*. This means that partnerships and collaborations help shape school programs in which the learners, teachers, and parents consistently observed. Since the learners, teachers, and parents are involved in planning, reviewing, and improving school programs, this is an indication that the school values shared decision-making among its members. This further shows that learners and their families have a voice in shaping educational goals and programs, thus, fostering a sense of belongingness. With a shared decision, school programs will remain relevant, responsive, and supportive to the needs of the whole school community. This result corroborates the notion of Hagos and Van Wyk (2021) that parents can contribute to school



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life by attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in classrooms, participating in school committees or parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and attending school events such as performances, sports games, and fundraisers. According to Prakhov et al. (2020) and Bowen and Kisida (2024), students whose parents are actively involved in their education tend to achieve higher grades, perform better on standardized tests, and have greater motivation to succeed academically. Parental involvement has been associated with reduced absenteeism and disciplinary issues among students, as parents play a role in reinforcing the importance of attendance and positive behavior. Children whose parents are involved in their education tend to have higher levels of self-esteem, better social skills, and greater resilience in the face of challenges (Aparício et al., 2020).

Table 3. Assessment of the three groups of respondents on their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of strengthening school-community relationships.

Statements	Learners		Teachers		Parents	
	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. Sponsors home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and vice versa.	3.20	Sometimes observed	3.14	Sometimes observed	3.37	Always observed
2. Respect the different cultures represented in the learners' population.	3.22	Sometimes observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.38	Always observed
3. Conducts annual surveys for families to share information and concerns about children's needs and school programs.	3.25	Always observed	3.17	Sometimes observed	3.48	Always observed
4. Conduct an annual survey to identify parent volunteers' interests, talents, and availability.	3.25	Always observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.40	Always observed
5. Provides a parent/family room for volunteers and family members to work, meet, and access resources.	3.28	Always observed	3.25	Always observed	3.29	Always observed
6. Reduces barriers to parent and learners' participation.	3.27	Always observed	3.19	Sometimes observed	3.30	Always observed
7. Encourages parents and learners to be involved with the school in a variety of ways.	3.22	Sometimes observed	3.14	Sometimes observed	3.30	Always observed
8. Involves parents and learners in planning, reviewing, and improving school programs.	3.35	Always observed	3.33	Always observed	3.32	Always observed
9. Includes students (with parents) in decision-making groups.	3.30	Always observed	3.34	Always observed	3.43	Always observed
10. Ask involved parents to connect with less-involved parents to gather ideas and feedback.	3.43	Always observed	3.30	Always observed	3.53	Always observed
Aggregate Mean	3.28	Always observed	3.22	Sometimes observed	3.38	Always observed

Legend:

Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Always observed
2.50 – 3.24	Sometimes observed
1.75 – 2.49	Rarely observed
1.00 – 1.74	Never observed



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Level of collaboration in the school community in terms of supporting a positive learning environment

Table 4 presents the perceived level of collaboration in the school community among the three groups of respondents in terms of supporting a positive learning environment. Supporting a positive learning environment is when learners, teachers, and parents promote a respectful and inclusive school culture. The findings indicate that parents and learners always observe collaboration in this area, as reflected in an aggregate mean of 3.43 and 3.30, respectively. Meanwhile, teachers perceive it as sometimes observed (3.13). These findings imply that parents and learners generally have a strong sense of collaboration in fostering a positive and inclusive culture. Meanwhile, teachers perceive this practice as less consistent, which may be attributed to several factors such as time constraints due to workloads. According to Hawthorne (2022), a learning environment is forever 'under construction.' It will need to be constantly adapted to suit learners' needs. Teachers need to reflect on the learning environment their learners experience. However, due to factors such as time constraints caused by school workloads, they may be less consistent in their efforts to support a positive learning environment compared to parents.

More specifically, parents (3.52) and learners (3.25) always observe that, to promote a positive learning environment, they *attend meetings with questions and observations about learners' efforts and behaviors, not just their grades*, however teachers (3.05) perceive this practice as sometimes observed. This shows that both learners and parents recognize the importance of discussing efforts and behaviors beyond grades. In addition, parents (3.40) and learners (3.28) always observe the practice of building policies that encourage teachers to communicate frequently with parents about curriculum and homework expectations. Watts (2022) discussed the importance of parent-teacher conference in developing a positive learning environment. Conferences are meant to be a feedback loop where both families and students learn more about their child's experiences in the classroom, hearing directly from their teachers. In the study by Santiago (2022), teachers were actively involved in reaching out to their learners' parents, providing feedback on their behavior and effort in the classroom, in addition to their academic standing. When a particular parent was absent from a meeting, the teacher made sure to follow up with them. In addition, Sword (2020) emphasized the importance of discussing to the parents about sensitive subjects – such as behaviour issues, learning problems, and the student's strengths and weaknesses – without making the parent feel confused or defensive.

Similarly, parents (3.33) and learners (3.27) always observe that teachers are willing to meet outside school hours with parents who have work conflicts. When it comes to dealing with conflict openly and respectfully among learners and the school community, this practice is always observed by parents (3.45) and learners (3.38). This means that parents and learners recognize open and respectful resolution of conflict, which validates Hesmondhalgh's (2024) statement that effective conflict resolution in schools can help create an environment where school community member feels equipped and supported in resolving conflicts constructively.

Table 4. Assessment of the three groups of respondents on their level of collaboration in the school community in terms of supporting a positive learning environment.

Statements	Learners		Teachers		Parents	
	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. Attends meetings with questions and observations about learners' efforts and behaviors, not just their grades.	3.25	Always observed	3.05	Sometimes observed	3.52	Always observed
2. Builds policies that encourage teachers to communicate frequently with parents about curriculum and homework expectations.	3.28	Always observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.40	Always observed
3. Have teachers willing to meet outside school hours with parents with work conflicts.	3.27	Always observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.33	Always observed



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4. Deals with conflict openly and respectfully among the learners and school community.	3.38	Always observed	3.16	Sometimes observed	3.45	Always observed
Aggregate Mean	3.30	Always observed	3.13	Sometimes observed	3.43	Always observed

Legend:

Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Always observed
2.50 – 3.24	Sometimes observed
1.75 – 2.49	Rarely observed
1.00 – 1.74	Never observed

Conclusions

There is communication gap among learners, teachers, and parents, particularly in how each group perceives their level of collaboration along effective communication and engagement, shared responsibility for learners’ success, strengthening school-community relationships, and creating a positive learning environment. While parents and learners feel actively involved, teachers do not always demonstrate the same level of involvement, possibly due to time constraints, workload, or differing expectations of collaboration, which could affect meaningful tripartite partnerships in the school community.

Recommendations

The study recommends that, to bridge the communication gap among learners, teachers, and parents, schools should regularly conduct learner-teacher-parent conferences and parent-teacher meetings to ensure that all parties share the same understanding and expectation regarding their roles in the learner’s educational journey. Schools should also maintain accessible communication channels to accommodate all parties involved. Teachers can be supported with strategies to manage their workload while maintaining active partnerships with learners and parents. Meanwhile, the school administration can promote collaborative activities that strengthen school-community partnerships and contribute to a positive learning environment.

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