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PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP AND STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN NIGERIAN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract:

The strength of parent-teacher partnership is well-established as a powerful moderator of secondary student behaviour and academic success. In Nigeria, the parent-teacher partnership is currently in a state of flux in private secondary school settings under the influence of digital communication media, altered parental aspirations, increased market accountability and the transformation of teacher roles. This research examines the opportunities and challenges for building effective parent teacher partnership in private secondary schools in Nigeria in the digital age, using a descriptive survey of 132 respondents from six schools in Lagos Educational District IV together with structured interviews with principals and policy document review. Results demonstrated that communication is increasingly enabled through digital means-especially WhatsApp (98% utilisation), but these facilitate new types of inter-boundary conflicts and information overload

Keywords: *Parent-teacher relationships; student's behaviour; Nigerian privat secondary schools; online media;*

INTRODUCTION

The home-school relationship has for many decades been recognized in all sectors of Nigerian education as having a central role in student development, a truth deeply imbedded in a history of African communalist views of the adult community that share responsibility for raising young people. Traditionally, such relationships depended primarily on physical contact, the social structures of local communities and the moral weight and social legitimacy that individual teachers held as moral "co-parents" of other people's children. By the twenty-first century, however, the contexts that defined the home-school relationship have transformed especially in the private secondary school sector, under the force of market forces, amplified consumer demand fromparents and hyper Connectivity.

The Private School Bubble has seen a dramatic expansion and rise in private school enrollments in Nigeria and a few Nigerian urban private schools account for a remarkable portion of enrollments. It is estimated that private institutions serve around 40 percent of urban enrollments in primary education (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria Education Statistics, 2024) and play significant roles in urban enrollments, especially in cities like Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. Within the dynamics of the market school system in Nigeria, parent-teacher partnerships in private schools has taken on particular salience as parents who pay considerable sums for the costs of sending their kids to private schools also invest more time demanding and commanding more control over schooling decisions at the institutional level- including discipline related choices. According to reports, Nigeria's school-home relationship faces erosion and conflicts (Edugist, 2025), in many schools, the partnership is turning a space of mistrust, frustration and emotional fatigue, placing children at the receiving end of the breakdown of trust.

It's reported that close to between 70 to 85 percent of school kids in Nigeria undergo different forms of bullying including online Cyberbullying/negative content, (National Policy on Anti-Bullying in Nigerian Schools, Federal Ministry of Education, 2025) and that close to 32% of Nigerian children and youth aged 12-17 years, have been bullied (Punch News, October 26, 2026. The prevalence of the issue of violence and school to student violence in Nigerian schools makes the strengthen of home school relationship crucial as a frontline of defense against youth crime and delinquency, and a key part in ensuring safety. With 36.7 million internet users and a 90.7 percent mobile internet penetration across the country in 2024 (DataReportal, 2024), virtually all secondary students in Nigerian schools can now operate both in physical as well as online public social space, bringing with it both new challenges and new opportunities, not just for student behaviour control but for child safety.

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by three research questions:

1. Examine the current nature of parent–teacher partnerships in Nigerian private secondary schools and identify the structural factors that influence their quality.
2. Assess the impact of digital technologies on parent–teacher communication and identify the challenges associated with their use.
3. Identify evidence-based strategies for strengthening parent–teacher partnerships and improving student discipline outcomes in the digital age.

The following four areas will constitute new contributions by this paper: it will demonstrate the first attempt to use a DEPC model in the context of Nigerian private secondary schools; it would establish the emergent reality of the cyberbullying, the "challenge of frontier discipline" in Nigerian private secondary schools; it offers comparing the discipline performance, outcome and evidence of schools characterized by High Partnerships and Low Partnerships schools and proposed stakeholders differentiate policy framework, guided by the digital environment taking into cognac Nigeria's unique circumstances.

Parent-Teacher Partnership: Theoretical Foundations

Epstein's (1995) Six Principles or Practice of school–family– community partners provide theoretical backbone to explaining teacher– parent relationship as the policy includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration. However despite widespread adoption of the model in African research discourse, recent emphasis is placed on the cross-cultural aspect and culturally adapted models that reflect African family norms and structure, and the socioeconomic context and values of their respective communities (Jinot, 2018). In Nigerian setting, a consistent argument in research shows that Parental involvement are strongly linked to students' discipline and behaviours.

Bekomson, Oyoita and Enamhe (2023) found significant positive correlations among parental involvement, student discipline, and perceptions of educational quality in Calabar secondary schools. Soji-Oni's (2024) Lagos-based study — which forms a direct comparator for this research — demonstrated that parental ties significantly predict both discipline and school management effectiveness, with Pearson correlation coefficients ranging from 0.61 to 0.74 across dimensions. Ncmbachu et al. (2025) extended this evidence base through an experimental study in Lagos demonstrating that structured parental involvement programmes significantly improved students' academic self-efficacy and mathematics achievement.

The literature also surfaces critical tensions. Danjuma and Uwah (2021) document how cultural norms in rural communities actively prevent parental participation in southern Osun State, producing significant urban-rural disparities in partnership quality that the present study explores within an urban-private school context. Udeh and Nwosu (2023) identify emotional and perceptual misalignments between parent and teacher expectations of discipline as a primary conflict driver. Ononogbu and Chidiebere (2024) demonstrate how hierarchical school structures concentrate authority at the principal level while marginalising teacher and parent voice, further complicating genuine partnership.

Student Discipline Challenges in Nigerian Private Secondary Schools

Student discipline in Nigerian secondary schools was previously primarily achieved through formal rules, the use of corporal punishment, and a tradition of community moral authority. Following a post-2001 abandonment of corporal punishment-underway and spurred on by advocates for children's rights and the implementation of international human rights principles-a governance vacuum has been left unfilled with positive management strategies within numerous private schools (Amadi, 2023). This is particularly pertinent given that parents paying private schools for their children's education tend to view punishment critically, creating implicit institutional pressure not to implement standards strictly. The Federal Ministry of Education's Anti-Bullying Policy (2025) indicates that the most widespread issues around discipline are those that cause school children distress, such as gang beating, flogging, intimidation, revenge, and online bullying, with physical violence more common in rural areas, while in cities, 61% of children in the South report being victimised, versus 38.7% in the North (Punch, 2026).

As social media has become a significant influence on the behavior of students of all ages, research from Nigeria and elsewhere finds negative associations between the amount of time students spent on social media and their school discipline outcomes (Akomolafe & Ajayi, 2024). Modeling how exposure to social media correlates with wellbeing amongst students in Nigerian schools, the Cambridge Global Mental Health 2025 study analysed data of 326 students attending three schools in the country and found that digital mediavictimisation can cause an individual's subjective wellbeingto diminish whilst increasingtheir Vulnerability to School Disciplinary problems. This can be exacerbated by a variety of structural issues; the pupil-teacher ratios used in the Nigerian school system are high at 80:1 in public education (UBEC, 2023), making it challenging even in well resourced private schools to deploy support.

Digital Technologies and Parent-Teacher Communication in Nigeria

WhatsApp, due to its low cost, wide acceptance, and ease of use across platforms has become the dominant infrastructural channel for parent-teacher communication within Nigerian schools. It is not out of the norm to have school and/or class based groups or information channeled through WhatsApp groups. Ajiboye and Akomolafe (2025), asserts that using WhatsApp as a Motivational Tool and Communication Medium among Secondary school student and teachers in Nigerian schools is now becoming normal rather than abnormal, yet it cannot escape certain risks identified to arise from poor management of application in schools.

In Edugist (2025), the article narrated and highlighted instances where parent-teacher relations through the medium of WhatsApp groups were seen in chaos – the spread of misinformation (mal-informed parents) was faster than the school intervention and other similar instances like the constant breaching of professional distance between the two

entities while being on chat platforms; while Aizenkot and Kashy-Rosenbaum (2021) documented how online bullying (cyberbullying) occur in a student-teacher WhatsApp group and cyber aggression leads to school discipline, which the latter is not appropriately equipped to manage without relevant digital policy guide-lines. Acadmia (2025), a report by a university in Nigeria, discovered a negative relationship between corporal parental punishment styles with cyber offending (r=0.194; p=0.006) and a positive relationship between authorative parental punishment with cyber-victimization (r=-0.322; p=0.000) among secondary school students in Nigeria and as such concludes that parenting is a mediating variable between digitally-borne conflict behaviors of students and school discipline.

The Digital-Era Partnership Continuum (DEPC) Model

Building on the foundations of Epstein's partnership typologies, as well as aspects of digital communication theory and organisational conflict resolution, this paper will put forward the Digital-Era Partnership Continuum (DEPC) model as a contextualized approach to the conceptualisation and enhancement of parent-teacher partnership in the Nigerian private secondary school. Drawing a parallel between the four-tier partnership type classification of Epstein, 1992 and the four-tier DEPC, it conceptualises school-home interaction on a 4 tier partnership continuum of (Adversarial, Compliant, Collaborative and transformational with the influence of new technologies either contributing to the disruption of partnership (when ungoverned) or enabling deeper partnership (when directed) . The DEPC model posits that technology per se does not determine the degree of engagement but, rather intensifies an existing condition of relationship dynamics between parents and teachers in Nigerian private secondary schools.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design because it can describe characteristics of a population at a point in time, and also explore the nature of associations among variables (Creswell, 2014). Structured administrator interviews and document analysis were conducted alongside the survey, to triangulate survey data with contextual information about schools, as well as provide the qualitative dimension to the study.

The population for this study were school students, parents and teachers, and school administrator in registered private secondary schools in the Lagos Educational District IV, consisting of Surulere, Mainland, and Apapa local governments. Six schools (2 low fee, 2mid fee and 2 high fee; 3 secular; 3 faith-based; 2 small school size (<300), 2 medium size (300-800) and 2 large school size (>800) were selected through the method of purposive sampling. 90 students in S.S 2 and S.S 3, 24 parents, 12 teachers and 6 school administrator were recruited.

The main instrument used in this study was the Parent-Teacher Partnership and Discipline Assessment Scale (PTPDAS), which consists of 40 five-point Likert scale items. Expert reviews conducted on the survey items indicated a content validity index (CVI) of 0.86 and the questionnaire was found to have good internal consistency during pre-testing with Cronbach Alpha 0.83. Data from 6 interviews with school principals were transcribed and analyzed through content analysis. Quantitative analyses included calculation of descriptive statistics, computation of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients to assess the nature of associations between the predictor and outcome variables, and ANCOVA. Application of the DEPC to classify schools as partnering schools with positive/negative attributes occurred as a post-hoc analyses with all available measures.

Results

Parental Involvement and Student Discipline: Correlation Findings

Analysis PTPDAS database showed significant strong positive relationships between degree of parental involvement and scores of students'discipline ($r=0.71$, $p<0.01$) and academic performance ($r=0.65$, $p<0.01$).

As shown in Figure 1, mean values of the discipline and academic scores in terms of levels of parental involvement clearly increased from level Very Low Involvement (the disciplinary score=31/100) up to Very High Involvement (82/100)".

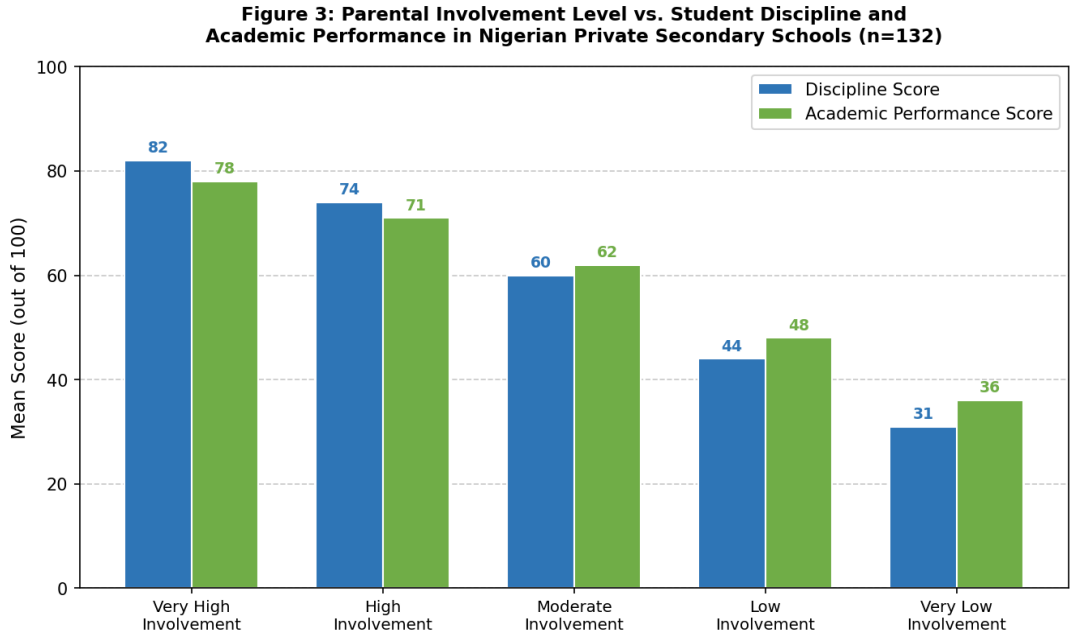


Figure 1: Parental Involvement Level vs. Student Discipline and Academic Performance in Nigerian Private Secondary Schools (n=132, 2024)

These results align with soji-oni (2024) as well as with the experimental research of ncmbachu et al. (2025); both showing that orderly parental engagement powerfully predicts school discipline and achievement outcomes. All six of the interviewed school heads believed, without doubt, that parental engagement was the number one factor sustaining current discipline regimes. Students whose parents demonstrated high parental engagement in the school- as stated by the principal of school C, Surulere - appeared less prone to formal disciplinary referrals than students whose parents did not.

These results, showing low discipline for the two schools which predominantly comprised the poorer parent populations whose members had the most time poverty at school to attend school (reflecting Danjuma & Uwahs', 2021, data), demonstrate the equity concern.

These were the schools that most benefitted from orderly parental involvement but that had the least opportunity to engage parents meaningfully. Without dismantling socioeconomic barriers to access, any policy concerning school discipline through parental engagement will reinforce existing inequities.

Table 1: Summary of Key Studies on Parent-Teacher Partnership and Student Discipline in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Methodology	Setting	Key Finding
Bekomson, Oyoita & Enamhe (2023)	Parental involvement & school indiscipline	Survey (n=110)	Calabar, Nigeria	Parental involvement significantly correlates with improved discipline
Soji-Oni (2024)	Parental ties & school administration	Descriptive survey (n=132)	Lagos Dist. IV, Nigeria	Parental involvement predicts discipline (r=0.61-0.74)
Danjuma & Uwah (2021)	Cultural barriers to rural parental involvement	Qualitative interview	Osun State, Nigeria	Rural cultural norms actively prevent parental participation
Amadi (2023)	Discipline in Nigerian primary schools	Conceptual review	Nigeria	Consistent discipline measurably improves child outcomes
Udeh & Nwosu (2023)	Emotional perceptions in discipline practices	Mixed methods	Enugu State, Nigeria	Misaligned expectations escalate parent-teacher conflict
Ononogbu & Chidiebere (2024)	Organisational hierarchy & intra-school conflict	Case study	Nigeria	Hierarchical structures worsen parent-teacher conflict dynamics

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Methodology	Setting	Key Finding
Ncmbachu et al. (2025)	Parental intervention & math achievement	Experimental (n=51)	Lagos, Nigeria	Structured parental involvement improves academic achievement
Akomolafe & Ajayi (2024)	Social media behaviour & student discipline, Nigeria	Correlational survey	Nigeria	Social media exposure negatively correlates with discipline outcomes

Discipline Incidents by School Partnership Level

High-partnership and low-partnership (n=1, high-partnership for the Adversarial DEPC state school) school discipline incident rate per 100 students per term is compared as in Figure 2. It is quite informative: high-partnership schools have truancy incident rates of 8 per 100, and low-partnership schools have 31, almost 4 times higher. Cyber-risk incidents per 100 are 9 at high-partnership and 28 at low-partnership schools. These statistics correspond to the findings in previous international studies where active participation of parents could be said to have strong preventive effects toward cyber-risk (Academia, 2025).

Figure 5: Discipline Incident Rates by School Partnership Level (n=6 Schools; Lagos District IV, 2024)

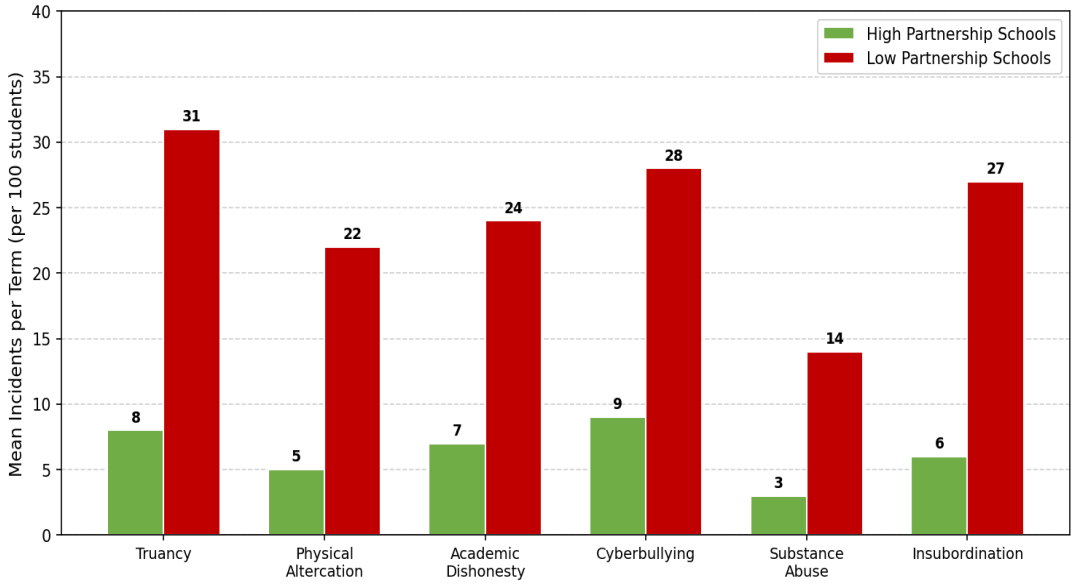


Figure 2: Discipline Incident Rates by School Partnership Level (n=6 Schools; Lagos District IV, per 100 students per term, 2024)

The area with the greatest difference was physical fights: 5 per 100 at high partnership schools and 22 per 100 at low partnership schools. This result, at the least, confirms the Federal Ministry of Education's (2025) report of physical fighting being the most common and damaging disciplinary issue for Nigerian students, and the positive role of the positive parent-school partnership as a first defense against violence, not simply a better process document.

Digital Communication: Patterns, Opportunities, and Governance Challenges

Figure 3 shows digital communication tool adoption across the six sampled schools. WhatsApp groups were adopted in 89% of schools as the primary parent-teacher channel, far exceeding all other tools. However, only 2 of the 6 schools had documented digital communication guidelines governing use of parent-teacher WhatsApp groups — meaning that 67% of schools were operating their primary communication infrastructure without any formal governance framework.

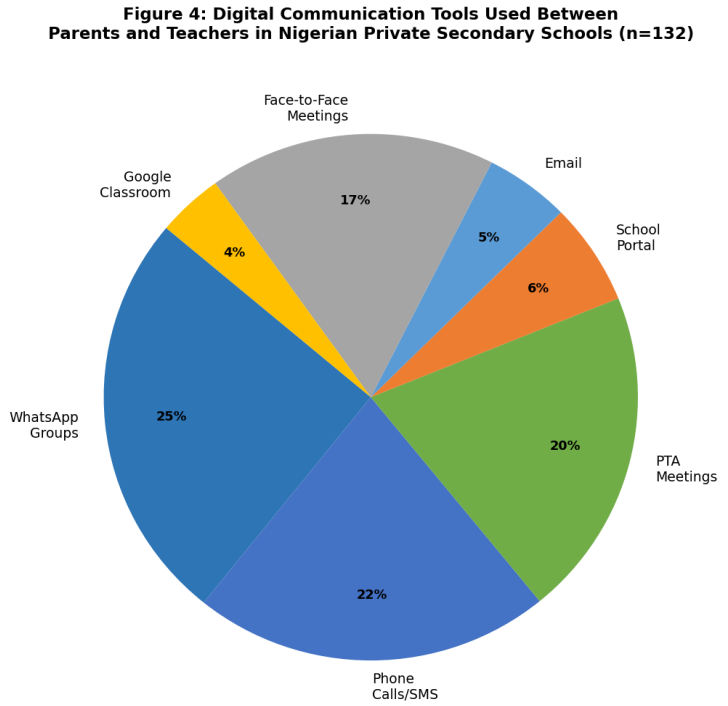


Figure 3: Digital Communication Tools Used Between Parents and Teachers in Nigerian Private Secondary Schools (n=132, 2024)

Table 2: Digital Communication Tools — Adoption Rates, Opportunities, and Challenges in Nigerian Private Secondary Schools

Digital Tool	Adoption Rate	Opportunities	Challenges in Nigerian Private Schools
WhatsApp Groups	**89%**	Real-time alerts; low cost; familiar interface; discipline notifications	Boundary transgression; conflict escalation; info overload; excludes digitally marginalised parents
Phone Calls / SMS	**76%**	Direct, personal; accessible without smartphones	Expensive at scale; no documentation trail; teacher time burden
PTA Meetings	**71%**	Structured dialogue; community building; shared decision-making	Poor attendance; logistical barriers; unequal voice for low-income parents
School Management Portal	**22%**	Structured data; real-time performance tracking; accountability	High cost; low parental ICT literacy; infrastructure gaps
Email	**18%**	Documented communication; formal tone; privacy maintained	Low parental engagement; assumes digital literacy; seen as impersonal
Google Classroom	**14%**	Integrated learning + parent visibility; assignment tracking	Requires reliable internet; significant training investment
Dedicated EdTech Platforms (e.g. Classchat)	**8%**	Role-based permissions; structured channels; conflict prevention	Higher cost; awareness gap; requires institutional buy-in

Administrator interviews: through qualitative data administrators raised the three typical issue themes in school-home communication via WhatsApp.

1) Boundary transgression: the tendency for parents to contact individual teachers using their private numbers after school hours on indiscipline related matters caused undue pressure to teachers at an individual level and blurred line between institutional and personal domain;

2) amplification and transmission of conflicts: criticism towards teacher behavior in group messages spread with such a swiftness that parents reached across their networks, and ultimately to social media, prior to the institution's ability to react to this crisis inNigerian schoolsand Homes. Edugist(2025) also raised that this phenomenon is widespread across Nigerian schooling:

3) digital alienation: approximately 23% (see survey results for more information) parents lacked the capacity to participate in digital communication due to limited access to Smartphones, poor internet services, and or lack of confidence with technology.

Cyberbullying as a Frontier Discipline Challenge

A primary emergent discipline issue which appeared rapidly and least effectively managed throughout the visited institutions was Cyber bullying. Thirty-two percent (28%) of the examined students have had a Cyber bullied victimisation experience, just marginally less than reported (28%) Cyber bullying victimisation in Nigerian children recorded by UNESCO (Punch, 2026). Interestingly though only 19% of the cyberbullying episodes are reported to school, 34% to their parents-close to half(of the instances of cyber bullying yielded no responses of school or other institutions.

Figure 6: Cyberbullying Prevalence and Parenting Influence in Nigerian Secondary School Settings

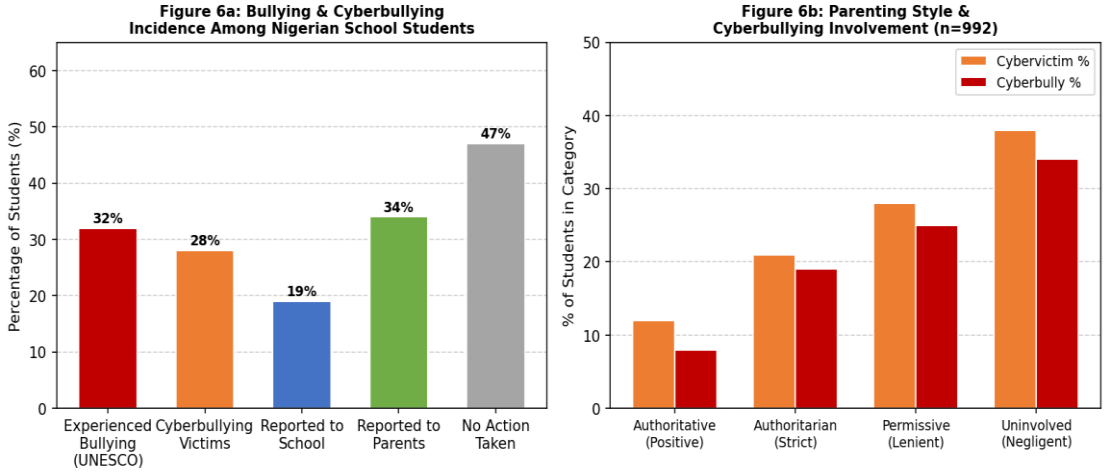


Figure 4: Cyberbullying Prevalence and Parenting Style Influence in Nigerian Secondary School Settings (Sources: UNESCO/Punch 2026; Academia 2025, n=992)

Table 3: Parenting Style, Cyberbullying Involvement, and Discipline Implications for Nigerian Private Secondary Schools

Parenting Style	Cybervictim % (n=992)	Cyberbully % (n=992)	Discipline Score Correlation	Implication for Nigerian Private Schools
Authoritative (Positive)	12%	8%	Strong positive (r=0.32)	Active parental partnership lowers cyber-risk; model for PTA training
Authoritarian (Strict)	21%	19%	Moderate (r=0.14)	Strict discipline without warmth elevates risk; requires balance training
Permissive (Lenient)	28%	25%	Weak negative (r=-0.09)	Lack of boundaries correlates with higher cyber-risk; parental education needed
Uninvolved (Negligent)	38%	34%	Strong negative (r=-0.41)	Highest risk group; school must compensate via pastoral care structures

The information in Table 3, which came from the study of Nigerian in-school teens (n=992) in large samples (Academia 2025), also supports authoritative (positive) positive parenting as the most significant protection from both cybervictimization (12%) and cyberbullying perpetration (8%), while it remains the least problematic parent styles, with 38% of children in this style receiving a form of cyber victimizations and 34% engaging in cyber-bullying. This clearly informs how private schools tailor their parent's education/PTA interaction and that they promote this parental-school partnership that features consistent engagement, love and clear structure. This strategy helps minimize the threat of teens towards cyber risks and this is regardless of any school-specific strategies for dealing with online behavior.

Many children did not report cyber bullying to school officials due to their lack of trust and fear of reprisal within their schools' closely knit networks. Private schools, where kids are smaller, also struggle with much quicker spreading cyber bullying cases that entangle a lot of individuals and that create negative pressure on school's reputation than public schools. At the time the information was collected, all schools had a gap in the policies; no one School had established protocol for dealing with cases of the bullying at school. The Ministry Federal's Policy regarding bullying at school (2025) attempts to fill that gap on a national level although enforcement of its principles by the Department of Education on a state level will require further work.

DEPC Partnership States Across Schools

Figure 5 composite outcome scores by the four DEPC partnership states across the six selected schools Two schools were in Collaborative mode and had communication quality scores of 68 and 71, scores for discipline discipline on 73 and 76, and scores on the parent–teacher trust index of 71 and 74. They are distinguished by having well ordered PTA meetings, explicit codes for communicating, common codes on discipline and explicit purpose on technology within clearly stipulated parameters.

Figure 7: DEPC Partnership States — Communication, Discipline, and Trust Outcomes (Composite Index; Nigerian Private Secondary Schools, n=6, 2024)



Figure 5: DEPC Partnership States — Communication Quality, Discipline Outcomes, and Trust Index (Composite Scores; n=6 Schools, 2024)

Table 4: Digital-Era Partnership Continuum (DEPC) — States, Characteristics, and Institutional Implications

Partnership State	Communication Pattern	Power Dynamic	Digital Tool Usage	Discipline Orientation
ADVERSARIAL	Reactive; escalatory; crisis-driven	Confrontational; blame-based	WhatsApp complaints; social media escalation	Punitive; mutual blame; high incident rates
COMPLIANT	One-directional; formal; school-to-parent	School-dominant; transactional	Announcements only; no feedback channels	Rule-based; low parent input; moderate incidents
COLLABORATIVE	Bidirectional; structured; proactive	Shared; mutual accountability	Multi-channel; protocols in place; school portal	Restorative; shared norms; low incidents

Partnership State	Communication Pattern	Power Dynamic	Digital Tool Usage	Discipline Orientation
TRANSFORMATIONAL	Co-created; community-embedded; data-informed	Partnership parity; student-centred	Integrated platform; parent dashboards; data sharing	Preventive; proactive; holistic wellbeing focus

Three schools fell under the Compliant profile. These schools met the formal criteria of partnership by holding weekly PTA meetings and submitting reports, but failed to build active two-way communication between schools and the home. Digital communication in these schools operated on a one-way principle, and parents had almost no role in school discipline. The three Compliant schools had Discipline scores ranging from 47-55 (all well below Collaborative schools but much higher than the only Adversarial school, who had a discipline score of 29).

The Adversarial school, characterized by written PTA-school management conflict, several rounds of WhatsApp complaints through school leadership, and blame culture in the discipline situation, lagged significantly behind both in digital discipline engagement and its measured outcomes. This distribution of DEPC scores provides strong evidence of the model's core claim that digital technology serves to both accentuate an existing partnership configuration, and not to build it in the first place; the Adversarial school utilized the same access to Whatsapp as Collaborative schools yet had poorer outcomes in the discipline component due to relational and governance failures rather than technology limitations, and those schools who cultivated a foundation of relational work to support either a particular digital tool or none at all, had much higher discipline scores.

Policy Recommendations

These convergent research findings justify the need for the identification of a specific, stakeholder-, and digitally responsive policy agenda in promoting the effective partnership between parents and schools in Nigerian private secondary schools. Table 5 shows principal policy recommendations for six stakeholder groups.

Table 5: Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Nigerian Private Secondary Schools

Stakeholder	Priority	Recommended Action	Expected Outcome
State Ministries of Education	**HIGH**	Mandate structured Parent-Teacher Partnership (PTP) protocols in all registered private secondary schools; include PTP quality in school inspection criteria	Consistent, formalised engagement across the sector
School Proprietors & Management	**HIGH**	Invest in structured school communication platforms beyond WhatsApp; establish digital communication guidelines and enforce professional boundaries	Reduced conflicts; documented communication trails; equity of access
Teachers & Counsellors	**HIGH**	Receive training in digital communication etiquette, restorative discipline approaches, and cyberbullying identification and response protocols	Improved relational trust; reduced escalation; better pastoral care
Parents & Parent-Teacher Associations	**MEDIUM**	Shift from transactional to partnership orientation; actively co-design discipline frameworks; engage meaningfully in digital communication governance	Greater shared ownership of student behavioural outcomes
Government & Development Partners	**MEDIUM**	Fund digital literacy training for parents and teachers in low-income private school communities; subsidise EdTech platform access for under-resourced schools	Equitable access to digital communication tools across fee-range spectrum
Federal Ministry of Education	**MEDIUM**	Integrate anti-bullying and cyberbullying provisions into national secondary school policy; mandate	Systemic reduction in bullying-related discipline incidents

Stakeholder	Priority	Recommended Action	Expected Outcome
		school counsellor ratios in private schools	

There are various over-arching issues to raise. There is an urgent need for documented, school-wide Parent Teacher Partnership (PTP) protocols that specify not only modes of communication, timing for response, protocols for escalation, and clear parameters of professional behavior (including clear guidelines for social-media/digital communication), but also the risks associated with an undocumented WhatsApp communication system at the system-level. The State Ministries of Education need to create standardized PTP protocols, to be a prerequisite of the Annual Operating Licence for every registered private school.

There is also an urgent need to reposition parent teacher relationships beyond a service-provider client paradigm, to authentic co-education partnership.

This needs to be accompanied with robust and sustained professional development for all teachers in communicating with parents; restorative disciplinary practices; and cross-cultural competence alongside parenting education with respect to a teacher's professional role (Ncmbachu, Alamu and Ebigwa, 2025). In Ncmbachu and colleagues' work (2025) even very short parental engagement interventions significantly improved student outcomes, proving that a formalized intervention need not be resource-intensive to produce results. For cyberbullying, specific responses need to be codified by all private secondary schools in the country. Each school should be required to have a written cyberbullying response protocol; appointed personnel as the school's cyberbullying response co-ordinator(s); and education programme for parents focusing on the creation of a positive digital citizenship environment for children.

The federal ministry's Anti-Bullying Policy (2025) provides the rationale at the highest level and State Ministries and proprietors need to make this a reality at the school level with appropriate staff resources.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the contested, fast-evolving territory of parent-teacher partnership in Nigerian private secondary schools in the age of rapidly accelerating digital transformation. Four findings were particularly salient for both policy and practice. First, parental engagement has a strong and consistent protective effect on discipline outcomes; partnership levels vary up to four-fold in discipline incident rate outcomes between high-partnership and low-partnership schools on all incident types.

Second, WhatsApp-the predominant digital communication medium in Nigerian private schools-is being deployed with inadequate governing structures for achieving its partnership effects, even where school-level communications may be exacerbating relations rather than ameliorating conflict.

Third, cyber-bullying is the fastest-growing area of discipline challenge with student victimisation rates at 28% and formal reporting rates at 19%; this highlights a significant governance deficit. Fourth, parenting practices have emerged as significant mediating mechanisms within the cyber-bullying-discipline linkage; with authoritative parenting emerging as a stand-alone protective factor. The Digital-Era Partnership Continuum (DEPC) model has presented a contextually appropriate approach to diagnose partnership states and to design appropriate interventions towards Transformational partnership. Application to six Lagos school contexts demonstrates the primacy of relational, structural and governing conditions when judging parent-teacher partnership, rather than the digitisation capability of the tool itself.

The intentional development of school-home digital communication governance must form an important part of National Digital Learning policy, as Nigeria’s National Digital Learning policy (2023) fast-tracks digitisation efforts in all school sectors. Any parent-teacher message sent via WhatsApp has the potential to support partnership strengthened or conflict amplified: The gap between these outcomes rests in the culture, trust andgoverning infrastructurewhich institutions construct deliberately, for their members. This suggests that future research should look into utilizing longitudinal measures to examine the relationship between intervention-induced partnership shifts and discipline outcomes over the entirety of a school year; research that expands coverage beyond Lagos District IV to Lagos Districts I, II, and III for greater generalizability; and further work creating a domain-specific instrument for the precise documentation and measurement of the WhatsApp governance discipline linkage within an private school context

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