

BRIDGING THE GAP: HARMONIZING PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP FOR EXPERIENTIAL AND HOLISTIC LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between parents and teachers is a cornerstone of a child's educational journey. However, gaps and barriers in this relationship often hinder the provision of experiential and holistic learning environments essential for young scholars' development. This paper explores the contemporary issue of strained parent-teacher dynamics, analyzing its root causes and effects on students' cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Drawing from theoretical frameworks and practical strategies, the research highlights actionable solutions to bridge these gaps. By fostering open communication, mutual understanding, and collaborative practices, this study underscores the need for collective efforts to nurture well-rounded, confident learners.

Keywords: Parent-teacher relationship, experiential learning, holistic education, communication barriers, student development, collaborative strategies

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INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of education, the collaboration between parents and teachers is pivotal in creating enriching learning environments. Experiential learning, which emphasizes hands-on and reflective practices, and holistic learning, which nurtures cognitive, emotional, and social aspects, demands seamless cooperation. Yet, the contemporary education system often grapples with barriers in parent-teacher relationships. Miscommunication, differing expectations, and lack of structured interaction often lead to fragmented educational experiences for young learners. This paper seeks to examine the underlying causes of these gaps, their impact on students, and strategies to bridge the divide, ultimately aiming to create

an inclusive, supportive learning ecosystem.

In the dynamic landscape of education, teachers and parents are the two primary pillars shaping a child's holistic growth and development. While parents play a central role in supporting learning at home, teachers act as mentors and facilitators, delivering academic knowledge and fostering critical life skills in the classroom. Together, they form a powerful alliance that has the potential to address and resolve school-related problems effectively.

Teachers, as frontline educators, are often the first to identify issues such as learning gaps, behavioural challenges, or social conflicts within the school environment. However, the responsibility of resolving these problems does not rest solely on their shoulders. Parents, as key stakeholders in their children's education, can complement teachers' efforts by providing insights into their children's behaviours, strengths, and challenges. When parents and teachers collaborate meaningfully, they create a unified approach that enhances student well-being and promotes holistic development.

School-related problems such as bullying, academic underperformance, absenteeism, lack of inclusivity, and inadequate resources often stem from a combination of systemic and interpersonal factors. Teachers, with their experience and understanding of classroom dynamics, play a critical role in addressing these challenges. Yet, their efforts can be amplified when parents actively engage as partners in the educational process. This partnership fosters open communication, builds trust, and promotes a shared sense of accountability for creating positive change.

The concept of parents and teachers as co-agents of change is grounded in the belief that education is a shared responsibility, extending beyond the classroom to the home and the wider community. Teachers, through their professional expertise, provide the structure, guidance, and strategies required to address school-related issues, while parents bring valuable perspectives and resources that enrich these efforts. By working together, they can transform school-related problems into opportunities for growth and innovation, creating an environment where children can thrive both academically and personally.

Teachers hold a transformative position in shaping the behaviour and character of students, making them powerful agents of behavioural change. Beyond delivering academic knowledge, teachers act as role models, mentors, and guides, influencing students' attitudes, values, and interpersonal skills. Through their daily interactions, they instill discipline, empathy, and resilience in students, fostering a positive classroom culture where respect and responsibility are prioritized. Teachers are often the first to identify behavioural challenges, such as bullying, aggression, or lack of self-control, and can intervene constructively to redirect students toward positive behaviours. By implementing strategies like reinforcement of good behaviour, open communication, and setting clear expectations, teachers create a structured environment where students learn to make responsible choices. However, the influence of teachers extends beyond the classroom. A teacher's consistent guidance, encouragement, and ability to build trust with students can inspire long-term behavioural changes that positively impact their personal and social lives. When combined with a supportive partnership with parents, the teacher's role becomes even more impactful in shaping students into well-rounded, emotionally intelligent individuals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the nature of existing gaps in parent-teacher relationships within the school ecosystem.
2. To examine teachers' and parents' perceptions regarding shared responsibility in supporting experiential and holistic learning of students.
3. To identify recurring challenges faced by teachers while engaging parents in the educational and behavioural development of children.
4. To understand how parent-teacher interactions influence students' emotional well-being, social behaviour, and learning experiences.
5. To propose practical, experience-based strategies for strengthening parent-teacher collaboration in schools.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

- Highlights the significance of meso system interactions, particularly between parents and teachers, in influencing a child's development.

2. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

- Emphasizes the role of collaborative relationships in scaffolding children's learning experiences.

3. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

- Advocates for active involvement of both parents and teachers in creating meaningful, reflective learning experiences.

Barriers in Parent-Teacher Relationships

- **Communication Gaps:** Limited interaction often leads to misunderstandings and unmet expectations.
- **Cultural and Social Differences:** Diverse backgrounds may result in differing educational priorities.
- **Lack of Training:** Both parents and teachers often lack the skills to collaborate effectively.
- **Time Constraints:** Busy schedules hinder meaningful dialogue and shared decision-making.
- **Parental Involvement Challenges:** Teachers frequently face resistance or indifference from parents when discussing the importance of their role in their child's education. Many parents struggle to allocate time for sitting with their children during self-study or independent problem-solving, which leads to a lack of reinforcement of classroom learning at home.

Impact on Students

- Reduced engagement in learning activities.
- Increased emotional stress due to inconsistent support systems.
- Limited opportunities for creativity and experiential growth.

METHODOLOGY

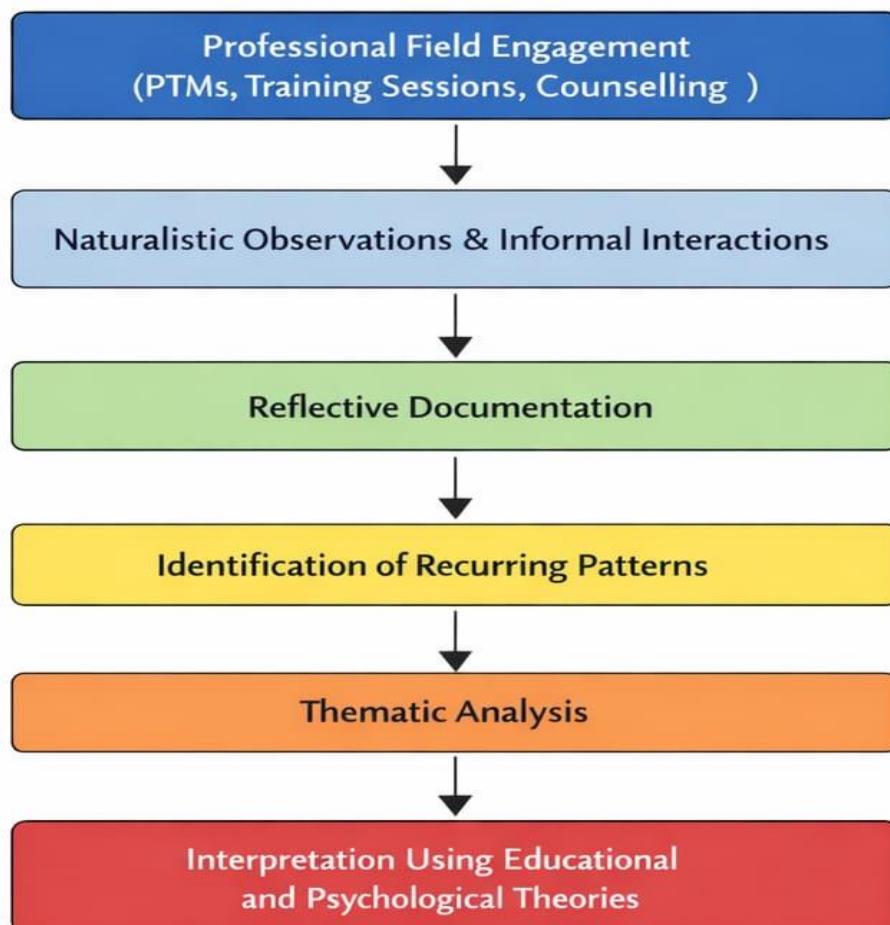


Figure 1: Flow of Qualitative Research Process

The present study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to understand the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships and their influence on experiential and holistic learning of students. The research is grounded in practice-based field observations drawn from the researcher's professional engagement as a school teacher and student counselor.

Participants

The participants included parents and teachers involved in regular school interactions such as parent-teacher meetings (PTMs), counselling discussions, and teacher training sessions at the primary school level. These interactions provided diverse perspectives on academic expectations, behavioural concerns, and collaborative responsibilities in child development.

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected through naturalistic and informal interactions, including verbal exchanges during PTMs, reflective discussions in teacher training programmes, and ongoing teacher-parent communications. Instead of structured questionnaires the study relied on observational insights and recurring viewpoints expressed by participants in real educational settings over time.

Table 1
Overview of Research Methodology

Component	Description
Research Design	Qualitative exploratory research
Research Approach	Practice-based, field-oriented inquiry
Participants	Parents and teachers involved in PTMs, counselling sessions, and training programmes
Data Sources	Informal interviews, parent-teacher meetings, teacher training discussions
Data Collection Method	Naturalistic observation and reflective documentation
Data Analysis Technique	Thematic analysis
Ethical Considerations	Anonymity, confidentiality, non-identification of participants

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring patterns, concerns, and perceptions related to communication gaps, parental expectations, teacher challenges, and shared responsibility were identified and organized into key themes. These themes were then interpreted in the light of established educational and psychological theories.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study. No personal identifiers of parents, teachers, students, or institutions were recorded or disclosed. The findings are presented in a generalized manner, ensuring confidentiality and respecting professional boundaries.

The overall flow of the qualitative research process is illustrated in Figure 1.

FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Based on sustained field observations, informal interactions, and reflective engagement during parent-teacher meetings, counselling discussions, and teacher training sessions, the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Several recurring patterns emerged, highlighting critical dimensions of the parent-teacher relationship and its influence on students' experiential and holistic learning. The major themes identified are presented below.

Theme 1: Blame-Oriented Expectations and Role Imbalance

A prominent theme that emerged was the tendency of some parents to place disproportionate responsibility on teachers for children's academic performance and behavioural issues. Teachers frequently reported being held accountable for behaviours influenced by external factors such as peer groups, social media exposure, transportation settings, and home environments. This imbalance in expectations often resulted in strained interactions and reduced collaborative problem-solving.

This finding indicates a lack of shared understanding regarding the distributed nature of child development, where learning and behaviour are shaped by multiple systems beyond the classroom.

Theme 2: Emotional Labor and Professional Burnout among Teachers

Teachers expressed experiencing emotional fatigue due to repeated efforts to engage parents meaningfully. Continuous follow-ups, unreciprocated communication, and defensive parental responses contributed to feelings of stress and professional exhaustion. Many teachers felt unsupported despite investing significant emotional energy in addressing students' academic and emotional needs.

This theme highlights the psychological burden placed on teachers when parent-teacher partnerships lack mutual trust and empathy.

Theme 3: Limited Parental Understanding of Experiential and Holistic Learning

The findings revealed that many parents primarily associate learning with academic outcomes such as grades and test performance. Experiential learning approaches—such as hands-on activities, reflective practices, emotional skill-building and social learning—were often undervalued or misunderstood. As a result, reinforcement of such learning at home remained limited.

These disconnect created inconsistency between school practices and home support, thereby reducing the effectiveness of holistic educational initiatives.

Theme 4: Communication Gaps and Mistrust

Both parents and teachers acknowledged the presence of communication gaps. Parents often perceived teachers as unapproachable or overly authoritative, while teachers reported difficulty in establishing open and constructive dialogue with parents. Lack of structured communication platforms and time constraints further intensified misunderstandings.

These gaps frequently led to mistrust, defensive attitudes, and missed opportunities for collaborative decision-making in the child's best interest.

Theme 5: Impact on Students' Emotional and Social Development

Inconsistent parent-teacher collaboration was found to have a noticeable impact on students' emotional well-being and social behaviour. Teachers observed increased anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and confusion among students when expectations at home and school were misaligned. The absence of a unified support system limited students' opportunities to fully benefit from experiential and holistic learning environments.

This theme underscores the importance of cohesive adult partnerships in fostering emotionally secure and socially competent learners.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings collectively suggest that ineffective parent-teacher relationships are characterized by role ambiguity, emotional strain, limited awareness of holistic education, and communication breakdowns. These challenges directly influence the quality of learning experiences and emotional support available to students. Strengthening collaboration, therefore, emerges as a critical requirement for nurturing well-rounded and resilient learners.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the gaps in parent-teacher relationships and their implications for experiential and holistic learning of students through a qualitative, field-based lens. The findings reveal that while both parents and teachers share a common concern for students' well-being and academic success, misaligned expectations, communication barriers, and role ambiguity often hinder effective collaboration.

A recurring concern identified in the findings is the imbalance of responsibility placed on teachers for children's academic performance and behavioural outcomes. This aligns with Bronfenbner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that child development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including home, school, peer groups, and the broader social environment. When parents attribute behavioural or emotional challenges solely to teachers, the mesosystem—the crucial interaction between home and school—becomes weakened. Such fragmentation disrupts consistency in guidance and support, ultimately affecting students' emotional security and learning engagement.

The theme of emotional labour and professional burnout among teachers highlights the psychological toll of strained parent-teacher interactions. Teachers reported investing significant emotional energy in engaging parents, often without reciprocal support. This finding resonates with existing research on teacher well-being, which suggests that persistent relational stress can reduce instructional effectiveness and job satisfaction. From a psychological perspective, emotionally exhausted teachers may find it challenging to sustain the enthusiasm and sensitivity required for experiential and student-centred pedagogies.

Another important finding relates to the limited parental understanding of experiential and holistic learning approaches. Many parents continue to prioritise traditional academic indicators, such as grades and test scores, over emotional development, creativity, and social learning. This disconnect can be examined through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which underscores the importance of guided support and shared meaning-making in learning. When

parents are unaware of or disengaged from experiential learning practices, children receive inconsistent scaffolding across home and school contexts, weakening the effectiveness of such pedagogical approaches.

Communication gaps and mistrust further compound these challenges. The findings suggest that unstructured or infrequent communication fosters defensive attitudes and misunderstandings between parents and teachers. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, meaningful learning emerges through reflection, dialogue, and active experimentation. In the absence of reflective communication between parents and teachers, opportunities for shared problem-solving and adaptive strategies remain limited. This reduces the collective capacity to respond constructively to students' evolving academic and emotional needs.

The impact of these relational gaps is most evident in students' emotional and social development. Teachers observed increased anxiety, reduced confidence, and behavioural inconsistencies among students when expectations at home and school were misaligned. These observations reinforce the idea that holistic learning cannot be effectively nurtured in isolation. Emotional safety, consistency, and collaborative adult support are essential conditions for students to engage meaningfully in experiential learning environments.

Overall, the discussion underscores that parent-teacher collaboration is not merely supportive but foundational to holistic education. Strengthening this relationship requires a shift from blame-oriented interactions to shared accountability, from transactional communication to reflective dialogue, and from isolated efforts to collaborative partnerships. By recognising parents and teachers as co-constructors of the child's learning ecosystem, schools can foster environments that support not only academic achievement but also emotional resilience, social competence, and lifelong learning skills.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that effective parent-teacher collaboration is a critical yet often overlooked component of experiential and holistic learning. The findings demonstrate that gaps in communication, role ambiguity, and limited shared understanding between parents and teachers significantly affect students' emotional well-being, social development, and engagement in meaningful learning experiences. When collaboration is weak, students encounter inconsistent expectations and fragmented support systems, which can undermine their confidence and overall development.

The study reinforces that education is a shared responsibility, extending beyond the classroom into the home and community. Teachers, while serving as facilitators of learning and behavioural guidance, cannot function in isolation. Similarly, parents play a vital role in reinforcing learning experiences, values, and emotional regulation at home. Harmonizing these roles is essential for nurturing students who are not only academically competent but also emotionally resilient and socially responsible.

Grounded in established theoretical frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, this research emphasizes the need for structured, empathetic, and reflective parent-teacher partnerships. The study suggests that schools should actively invest in capacity-building initiatives, including communication training, parent awareness programmes, and collaborative platforms that promote shared decision-making.

In conclusion, bridging the gap between parents and teachers is not merely a supportive strategy but a foundational requirement for holistic education. Strengthening this partnership can lead to sustainable improvements in student well-being, learning outcomes, and school culture. Future research may build upon this work by incorporating longitudinal studies and broader participant groups to further explore the long-term impact of strengthened parent-teacher relationships on student development.

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