

ROLE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN BRIDGING THE LEARNING GAP BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract

This study examines how parental participation in early childhood education (ECE) helps close the learning gap between the home and the classroom. Four aspects of parental involvement i.e. home-based support, communication and teamwork, school participation, and closing learning gaps were investigated. A structured survey was completed by 347 ECE teachers from public schools (169 men and 178 women). Both gender- and location-based differences as well as general perceptions were examined using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. The results show that parents are most involved in providing support at home, participate in school activities and communication to a moderate degree, but are less successful in filling in particular learning gaps. Although male teachers reported higher perceptions of home-based support, gender differences were negligible. On the other hand, when compared to their rural counterparts, urban educators consistently reported much greater parental involvement in every category. The findings emphasize the necessity of focused interventions to improve parental involvement in rural areas and fortify parents' ability to close learning gaps in their children.

INTRODUCTION

The period between birth and age eight is crucial for the development of cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional skills. Children develop fundamental abilities during these early years, such as vocabulary, early math concepts, self-regulation, and learning styles, all of which are highly predictive of subsequent academic paths (Vygotsky, 1978; Hart & Risley, 1995). However, there is significant variation in children's preparedness for school, which is commonly referred to as the "learning gap," even though early learning is generally important. Socioeconomic differences, unequal access to enriching experiences, and uneven alignment between the home learning environment (HLE) and early childhood education (ECE) settings are all linked to this gap, which usually appears prior to formal schooling (Bierman, Domitrovich, & Clarke, 2023; Prime, 2023).

In early childhood, parental involvement has been extensively suggested and researched as a key strategy to close the gap between the home and the school. A multifaceted concept, parental involvement encompasses both school-based participation (e.g., attending conferences, volunteering), home-based activities (e.g., shared book reading, everyday talk, numeracy play), and the relational/communicative processes that link educators and families (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Family-school partnerships are based on a simple conceptual and empirical reasoning: children learn coherently across contexts when families and educators coordinate expectations, activities, and supports. This eliminates confusion caused by contradictory messages and increases practice and reinforcement opportunities (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

A growing body of research indicates that certain types of parental involvement, especially responsive, high-quality home interactions, are linked to improvements in socioemotional skills, early language, and emergent literacy (Bierman et al., 2023; Prime, 2023). Randomized and quasi-experimental studies have shown that interventions that teach parents dialogic reading, responsive talk, and structured home routines improve children's vocabulary, narrative skills, and self-regulation (Wasik, Hindman, & Snell, 2016; Doyle, 2024). Furthermore, recent systematic reviews show that the quality of parental interaction is more important than its frequency or attendance: activities that are responsive and contingent have greater effects than those that are passive or routine (Prime, 2023). These results suggest that parental involvement can help lessen early disparities, but only if it is conceptually and practically in line with classroom instruction.

However, there are a number of contextual and structural factors that influence the complex relationship between parental involvement and child outcomes. Due to time, resource, and information limitations, low-income families frequently have fewer opportunities for the kinds of rich interactions linked to school readiness (Hart & Risley, 1995; Wildmon, 2024). Although families are very involved in their children's education, cultural and linguistic differences between the home and the school can also lead to misalignments in expectations and communication styles, making them less visible in school life (Guo, Zhang, & Wang, 2025). Additionally, changes brought about by the pandemic era sped up digital communication between educators and families, creating new avenues for interaction while also posing questions regarding access and unequal adoption (OECD, 2024; Xiao et al., 2025).

In terms of policy and practice, effective bridging strategies have the following characteristics in common: (a) clear alignment of activities at home with curriculum (e.g., curriculum-linked take-home activities); (b) professional development for teachers in culturally responsive communication and family engagement; (c) strategies that reduce the cost of activation for families (e.g., home visiting, family navigation); and (d) measurement systems that capture the quality of engagement rather than just the quantity (Feinberg et al., 2023; Bierman et al., 2023; OECD, 2024). The body of research indicates that parental involvement can serve as a bridge between the home and the school and significantly reduce early learning disparities if it is of high quality, reciprocal, and policy-supported.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical frameworks:

Epstein's typology of school-family-community partnerships and psychological process models of parental involvement are two fundamental theoretical frameworks. Program design and policy frameworks aimed at enhancing partnerships have been informed by Epstein's (1995) six actionable types of involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. In addition to Epstein, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) outline the proximal mechanisms through which involvement impacts children (increased learning opportunities, modeling, and reinforcement) and explain why parents want to get involved (role construction, self-efficacy, and invitations). Together, these frameworks explain how parental behaviors result in developmental gains as well as why some parents engage.

The mechanisms at play are clarified by additional developmental theory. Children's learning is scaffolded through social interaction, according to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD); parents who offer contingent support extend the ZPD by allowing their children to complete tasks that are beyond their level of independence. Parent sensitivity promotes socio-emotional regulation, which in turn supports learning engagement and classroom readiness, according to attachment and responsive caregiving literature (Prime, 2023). The practical implication of these theoretical frameworks is that the strongest link between the home and the school is created by responsive, contingent, and classroom-aligned parental actions.

Home-based involvement:

A substantial body of research relates early language and literacy outcomes to activities conducted at home (Wasik et al., 2016; Bierman et al., 2023). Particularly well-documented in randomized and quasi-experimental studies is dialogic reading, an organized interactive reading method that encourages children to produce language while offering expansions and feedback (Wasik et al., 2016; Doyle, 2024). The fidelity and responsiveness of parent implementation moderate effect sizes, according to meta-analytic syntheses, which show consistent positive effects on vocabulary and emergent literacy (Prime, 2023). Digital tools can support fidelity and scale, but they work best when used in conjunction with human coaching rather than in place of it (Xiao et al., 2025; Hen, 2025). These promising but conflicting results come from recent trials comparing face-to-face coaching with technology-assisted or AI-guided dialogic reading.

School-based involvement:

The main way that school-based involvement (such as parent-teacher conferences and volunteer work) improves student outcomes is by fostering better communication and collaboration between educators and families. Although frequent attendance at school has less of a direct academic impact in the early years than consistent, home-based interactions, school involvement builds relational trust and shared expectations, which can help aligned practices (Epstein, 1995; Bierman et al., 2023). Classroom updates, curriculum-linked messages, and linguistically appropriate translations are examples of two-way communication systems that have been linked to better attendance and retention. These systems increase children's exposure to instruction, which helps close learning gaps (OECD, 2024; Pilarz, Delaney, & Kinsler, 2024).

Mechanisms:

According to the literature, there are three overlapping ways that parental involvement helps to close the gap between the home and the school:

1. Coherence and continuity. Children receive repeated, dispersed practice that solidifies learning when parents adopt routines and language practices that reflect what is taught in the classroom (Bierman et al., 2023).

2. The ZPD's scaffolding. Skill extension is made possible by parental scaffolding, which offers support that is just a little bit above level (Vygotsky, 1978; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

3. Setting expectations and providing motivation. Motivation and school engagement are fostered by parents who establish regular routines and set an example of positive attitudes toward learning (Prime, 2023).

A synergy hypothesis was supported by trials that purposefully matched preschool curricula with activities at home, which showed greater gains than those that used home or school strategies separately (Bierman et al., 2023).

Equity issues:

Inequalities, both material and structural, are the root cause of achievement gaps. Early learning gaps are still caused by differences in access to books, safe play areas, parental time, and institutional support, according to recent research. Hart and Risley's seminal work from 1995 revealed notable differences in language exposure across families based on socioeconomic status (Hart & Risley, 1995; Wildmon, 2024). According to qualitative and quantitative research conducted in a variety of settings, parents who are unable to attend recommended school activities due to long work hours, transportation issues, or limited school invitations are more likely to have low participation rates, which are often the result of access issues rather than a lack of parental motivation (Guo et al., 2025; Feinberg et al., 2023). More marginalized families have embraced program designs that lower activation costs (e.g., family navigation, flexible scheduling, translated materials).

Measurement advance

The use of parent self-report and imprecise participation counts was a recurring limitation in earlier research. Multi-method measurement is emphasized by recent methodological advancements, including ecologically valid tasks, teacher reports, activity diaries, and structured observational coding of parent-child interactions (Moore et al., 2024; Wasik et al., 2016). Compared to frequency alone, these methods more accurately reflect the quality of interactions (responsiveness, expansion, contingent feedback, etc.), which is a better indicator of child outcomes. Researchers can now test mediation models and determine which aspects of involvement are causal drivers of progress thanks to improved measurement.

Intervention evidence

Dialogic reading coaching, targeted home visits that promote responsive caregiving, and family navigation models that boost service uptake are among the interventions that have consistently produced positive results (Wasik et al., 2016; Feinberg et al., 2023; Bierman et al., 2023). Although relational components are still essential for parental self-efficacy and long-lasting behavior change, recent RCTs demonstrate that hybrid models that combine human coaches and digital resources can achieve fidelity at a lower cost (Xiao et al., 2025). According to implementation research, the likelihood that classroom and home supports are cohesive is increased when teachers receive professional development in family engagement and curriculum-linked home activities. Scalability and cost are still significant barriers; system-level policy investments are frequently required for fair scale-up (OECD, 2024).

Research gaps

The field's top priorities include (a) adapting engagement strategies for multilingual and diverse communities in a culturally sensitive manner; (b) conducting long-term follow-up studies that link early parental involvement to later academic trajectories; (c) conducting rigorous implementation and cost-effectiveness studies to guide scale-up; and (d) integrating hybrid digital-human models that maintain relational coaching while expanding reach (Hen, 2025; Xiao et al., 2025; OECD, 2024). Lastly, to make sure that interventions lessen inequality rather than make it worse, research should keep refining measurement, especially observational metrics of interaction quality, and examining subgroup effects.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent of parental involvement in early childhood education in home-based support dimension.
2. To find out the extent of parental involvement in early childhood education in communication and collaboration dimension.
3. To diagnose the extent of parental involvement in early childhood education in school participation dimension.
4. To find out the extent of parental involvement in early childhood education in bridging learning gaps dimension.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are parents involved in Early Childhood Education (ECE) through home-based support activities?
2. To what extent do parents engage in effective communication and collaboration with teachers and school regarding their children's Early Childhood Education?
3. To what extent do parents participate in school-based activities related to Early Childhood Education?
4. To what extent does parental involvement contribute to bridging the learning gap between home and school in Early Childhood Education?

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how parental involvement helps close the learning gap between early childhood education and the home, this study used a quantitative, descriptive, and comparative survey design. In order to ensure gender and geographic representation, a sample of 347 early childhood education (ECE) teachers—169 men and 178 women—was chosen using stratified random sampling from the population of ECE teachers employed by public schools. The research tool was a structured questionnaire that was created using Epstein's (1995) framework for parental involvement. Four components made up the tool: communication and teamwork, school involvement, home-based support, and closing learning gaps. Self-administered questionnaires were used to gather data, and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to evaluate general perceptions. Gender and rural-urban differences were examined using independent samples t-tests. The methodology offered a methodical way to comprehend parental participation in ECE settings.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 *Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education*

Dimensions of Bridging Gap	Number of teachers	Mean	Std. Dev.
Home-Based Support	347	3.9811	.48959
Communication and Collaboration	347	3.9107	.27255
School Participation	347	3.8973	.63755
Bridging Learning Gaps	347	3.3770	.77441
Overall: Parental Involvement	347	3.7915	.48774

Teachers' opinions of parental involvement in closing the home-school learning gap in early childhood education are highlighted by the results in Table 1. Home-Based Support had the highest mean score ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .49$) out of the four dimensions, indicating that parents are most involved in helping their kids learn at home by doing things like reading to them and keeping an eye on their homework. Strong involvement was also demonstrated by School Participation ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .63$) and Communication and Collaboration ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .27$), albeit slightly lower. Although parents actively participate, their direct role in addressing particular learning gaps is still limited, as evidenced by the lowest score for Bridging Learning Gaps ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .77$). Parental involvement is generally positive but could be improved, according to the overall mean ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .48$).

Table 2 *Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Home-Based Support) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education*

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	169	4.0855	.45989	3.95	.000
Female	178	3.8820	.49752		

Teachers' opinions about Home-Based Support in bridging the learning gap between home and school in early childhood education are compared by gender in Table 2. Compared to female teachers ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .49$), male teachers ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .46$) reported noticeably higher perceptions of parental home-based support. This difference is statistically significant, as indicated by the t-value of 3.95 and the p-value of .000. These results point to a gender-based difference in perceptions, with male teachers reporting slightly lower levels of parental involvement in assisting children's learning at home and male teachers perceiving parents as more actively involved.

Table 3 *Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Communication and Collaboration) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education*

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	169	3.9236	.26989	1.92	.389
Female	178	3.8984	.27524		

Teachers' perceptions of communication and collaboration as a component of parental involvement in bridging the learning gap between home and school in early childhood education are compared by gender in Table 3. Compared to female teachers ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .27$), male teachers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .26$) reported somewhat higher mean scores. But according to the computed t-value of 1.92 and p-value of .389, the difference is not statistically significant. This indicates that opinions regarding the importance of parent-school cooperation and communication in promoting early childhood education are nearly identical among male and female educators.

Table 4 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: School Participation) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Gender	N		Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	169	3.9645	.59688	169	-1.65	.099
Female	178	3.8335	.66933	178		

Teachers' perceptions of school participation as a component of parental involvement in closing the learning gap in early childhood education are compared by gender in Table 4. Parental school participation was rated marginally higher by male teachers ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .59$) than by female teachers ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .66$). However, this difference is not statistically significant, as indicated by the t-value of -1.65 and the p-value of .099 respectively. This suggests that there is consistency between the sexes in assessing this component of parental involvement, as both male and female teachers have comparatively similar opinions regarding parents' involvement in school-related activities.

Table 5 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Bridging Learning Gaps) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Gender	N		Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	169	3.3066	.82057	169	1.06	.289
Female	178	3.4438	.72388	178		

Teachers' perceptions of Bridging Learning Gaps as a component of parental involvement in early childhood education are compared by gender in Table 5. Compared to male teachers ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .82$), female teachers ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .72$) expressed somewhat higher opinions about the role of parents in filling in their children's learning gaps. However, this difference is not statistically significant, as indicated by the t-value of 1.06 and the p-value of .289. This shows that parents' contributions to directly bridging children's learning gaps between home and school are generally viewed similarly by male and female educators.

Table 6 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Home-Based Support) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Locale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Rural	225	3.6796	.29295	-28.48	.000
Urban	122	4.5373	.21360		

Teachers' perceptions of Home-Based Support as a component of parental involvement in bridging the learning gap between home and school in early childhood education are compared by locale in Table 6. Compared to rural teachers ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .29$), urban teachers ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .21$) reported significantly higher levels of parental home-based support. A highly significant difference between the two groups is indicated by the large negative t-value (-28.48) and p-value of .000. These results imply that, in contrast to rural parents, who exhibit relatively lower levels of involvement, urban parents are thought to be significantly more involved in assisting their children's learning at home, reflecting contextual disparities.

Table 7 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Communication and Collaboration) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Locale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Rural	225	3.7786	.16109	-16.27	.000
Urban	122	4.1542	.26854		

Teachers' perceptions of communication and collaboration as a component of parental involvement in closing the learning gap in early childhood education are compared by locale in Table 7. Compared to rural teachers ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .16$), urban teachers ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .26$) gave parental communication and collaboration with schools much higher ratings. A statistically significant difference is confirmed by the t-value of -16.27 and the p-value of .000. This implies that there is a difference in parental involvement practices between rural and urban areas, with parents in the former being thought to interact with teachers less frequently and parents in the latter being more actively involved in keeping in touch and working together.

Table 8 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: School Participation) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Locale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Rural	225	3.5236	.45516	-24.52	.000
Urban	122	4.5864	.20078		

Teachers' perceptions of school participation as a component of parental involvement in bridging the learning gap between home and school in early childhood education are compared by locale in Table 8. Compared to rural teachers ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .45$), urban teachers ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .20$) thought that parents participated in school activities significantly more. A highly significant difference is indicated by the t-value of -24.52 and the p-value of .000. These results imply that parents in urban areas participate in school-related activities like meetings and volunteer work at significantly higher rates than parents in rural areas, indicating contextual differences in involvement.

Table 9 Gender wise comparison of Role of Parental Involvement in Bridging the Learning Gap (Dimension: Bridging Learning Gaps) Between Home and School in Early Childhood Education

Locale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Rural	225	2.8655	.39149	-37.98	.000
Urban	122	4.3204	.21716		

Teachers' perceptions of Bridging Learning Gaps as a component of parental involvement in early childhood education are compared by locale in Table 9. Compared to rural teachers ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .39$), urban teachers ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .21$) reported significantly higher levels of parental contribution to closing learning gaps. A highly significant difference between the two groups is indicated by the extremely high negative t-value (-37.98) and p-value of .000. This finding implies that while rural parents are thought to be significantly less involved in addressing specific learning gaps between home and school, urban parents are much more successful at directly assisting their kids in overcoming learning challenges.

The aforementioned findings show that although parents typically show a significant level of involvement in their kids' early education, they still have little direct control over certain learning challenges. There is little difference between the assessments of male and female teachers, according to gender-based perceptions, which are generally consistent. Nonetheless, there are significant disparities between rural and urban areas, with urban parents consistently being seen as more involved in all aspects of their lives. These findings underline the necessity of focused interventions to improve parental involvement in rural areas, especially when it comes to tactics meant to close learning gaps. To improve home-school collaboration and lessen contextual disparities in parental involvement, policymakers and educators should give priority to parent education, awareness campaigns, and organized communication initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate how important parental participation is in helping early childhood educators close the learning gap between the home and the classroom. Home-based support was the strongest dimension, which is in line with Epstein's (2018) framework of school-family partnerships. This supports previous research that highlights the significance of parental involvement in reading and learning activities at home as predictors of children's academic success (Fan & Chen, 2021; Wilder, 2014). Consistent school-home communication promotes shared responsibility for learning, according to Goodall and Montgomery (2017), who also found that participation in school activities and communication and collaboration with schools were positively perceived.

The comparatively low view of parents' direct contribution to closing learning gaps, however, is consistent with earlier research by Hornby and Blackwell (2018), who noted that although parents are frequently helpful, they might not have the pedagogical expertise to adequately address particular academic deficiencies. The study's notable urban–rural differences are consistent with previous research by Desforjes and Abouchaar (2016), which found that urban families had higher levels of parental engagement because they had greater access to schools, resources, and awareness.

Recommendations

✓ Rural parents were thought to be less involved, according to the study, which found notable urban–rural differences in all dimensions. In rural areas, schools and policymakers should start literacy drives, mobile support programs, and community-based awareness campaigns. The establishment of local resource centers and parent-teacher associations in rural schools can aid in closing the parental involvement gap between rural and urban areas.

✓ Schools should encourage parental involvement in school governance, events, and classroom activities by putting in place structured communication systems (such as frequent parent-teacher conferences, mobile messaging groups, and progress updates). Stronger school-home relationships and shared accountability for kids' education will result from such programs.

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