

Reframing School–Family Partnerships: A Systematic Literature Review on Effective Models of Parental Involvement

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Abstract: This systematic literature review examines modern approaches to parental involvement and school–family partnerships in education. Using the PRISMA framework, the study analyzed peer-reviewed literature from major academic databases published mainly between 2018 and 2026. The findings show that effective school–family partnerships are built on collaborative communication, trust, cultural responsiveness, digital engagement, shared leadership, and community participation. The review also identifies barriers such as socioeconomic inequality, language challenges, institutional bias, inadequate teacher training, and weak policy support. Overall, the study concludes that schools should move beyond traditional parental involvement models and adopt equitable, partnership-based approaches that recognize families as active partners in educational decision-making. These approaches positively influence student achievement, motivation, attendance, social-emotional development, and overall school climate

Keywords: parental involvement, school–family partnerships, family engagement, PRISMA systematic review, educational leadership, community collaboration, student achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

School–family partnerships have increasingly become a central concern within contemporary educational discourse due to their significant influence on educational effectiveness, student achievement, and holistic child development (Mejía-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Across diverse educational contexts, there is growing recognition that learning extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom and is shaped by the interaction between schools, families, and wider communities. As educational systems continue to confront complex challenges such as widening achievement gaps, socio-economic inequalities, digital transformation, cultural diversity, and changing family structures, the need for meaningful and equitable collaboration between schools and families has become more urgent than ever (Malik, 2018).

Historically, parental involvement was narrowly conceptualized through school-centered activities such as assisting children with homework, attending parent–teacher meetings, volunteering in school programs, or participating in school events. While such forms of participation remain important, contemporary scholarship increasingly critiques traditional involvement models for being hierarchical, deficit-oriented, and institutionally controlled. In many cases, these approaches position schools as dominant authorities while families, particularly those from marginalized or culturally diverse backgrounds, are treated as passive recipients rather than equal educational partners. Consequently, recent literature has expanded the conceptualization of parental involvement toward more reciprocal, relational, and equity-oriented models characterized by trust, shared decision-making, advocacy, communication, cultural responsiveness, and collaborative responsibility for student success (Haisraeli & Fogiel, 2023).

The growing emphasis on school–family partnerships is also reflected in international educational policy and reform agendas. Global organizations such as UNESCO and OECD consistently advocate for stronger collaboration between schools, families, and communities as a critical component of inclusive, sustainable, and high-quality education systems.

Empirical studies conducted across various educational settings demonstrate that meaningful parental engagement contributes positively to students' academic achievement, school attendance, motivation, classroom behavior, emotional well-being, and long-term educational attainment (Morris & Nóra, 2024). Nevertheless, despite widespread policy endorsement and substantial scholarly attention, the implementation of effective school–family partnerships remain inconsistent across many educational institutions.

A significant body of contemporary research argues that dominant parental involvement frameworks continue to reproduce structural inequalities and institutional power imbalances. Families from low socio-economic backgrounds, minority linguistic communities, and marginalized cultural groups frequently encounter barriers that limit meaningful engagement within school systems. Such barriers include inadequate communication practices, limited technological access, institutional bias, cultural misunderstandings, inflexible school structures, and insufficient teacher preparation for family engagement practices (Deslandes, 2025). As a result, many schools continue to adopt transactional forms of parental involvement that prioritize compliance and school-directed participation rather than authentic collaboration and shared educational responsibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified scholarly and policy discussions surrounding school–family relationships. During periods of school closure and remote learning, families assumed unprecedented educational responsibilities, highlighting the indispensable role parents and caregivers play in supporting student learning and well-being. At the same time, the pandemic exposed significant inequities in access to digital technologies, institutional support systems, and effective communication channels, particularly among disadvantaged communities (Sugrue et al., 2023). These experiences challenged traditional assumptions regarding the boundaries of teaching and learning while simultaneously reinforcing the necessity for flexible, inclusive, and culturally responsive partnership models capable of adapting to rapidly changing educational realities.

Although extensive research exists on parental involvement and family engagement, the literature remains conceptually fragmented and often characterized by inconsistent definitions, competing theoretical perspectives, and limited integration of equity-centered approaches. Furthermore, much of the existing scholarship has historically emphasized school-driven participation models while insufficiently addressing relational, culturally responsive, and partnership-oriented frameworks within contemporary educational environments. In addition, the rapid expansion of digital communication technologies and the post-pandemic transformation of educational practices have created new dynamics that require further scholarly synthesis and critical examination.

Against this backdrop, this systematic literature review critically examines contemporary models of parental involvement and explores effective strategies for strengthening school–family partnerships in modern educational contexts. Using the PRISMA framework, the study synthesizes recent empirical and theoretical literature to identify emerging trends, conceptual developments, persistent barriers, and evidence-based practices related to family engagement.

The review further seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions concerning educational leadership, inclusive policy development, culturally responsive practice, and the transformation of school–family relationships from transactional involvement toward equitable and collaborative educational partnerships.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This systematic literature review is significant because it critically synthesizes contemporary scholarship on school–family partnerships and addresses the growing need for more inclusive, equitable, and collaborative approaches to parental involvement within modern educational systems. Despite extensive research on parental engagement, the literature remains conceptually fragmented, with many educational institutions continuing to rely on traditional school-centered models that inadequately address issues of equity, cultural diversity, and shared decision-making. By examining contemporary theoretical and practical developments, this review contributes to the reconceptualization of parental involvement as a relational and partnership-oriented process rather than a transactional form of school participation. The study further advances scholarly understanding by identifying evidence-based strategies that educational leaders, teachers, and policymakers can adopt to strengthen communication, trust, cultural responsiveness, and community collaboration within increasingly diverse and digitally mediated educational environments. In addition, the review contributes to ongoing policy and leadership discussions concerning educational equity, inclusive school governance, and family-centered educational reform, particularly within post-pandemic contexts where school–family relationships have become increasingly critical to

student learning and well-being. Furthermore, the study provides an important foundation for future empirical and theoretical research by highlighting persistent gaps, emerging trends, and unresolved challenges associated with the development of effective and sustainable school–family partnership frameworks across diverse educational settings.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite longstanding recognition of parental involvement as a significant contributor to student achievement and educational effectiveness, many educational institutions continue to struggle with the development of meaningful, equitable, and sustainable school–family partnerships. Traditional parental involvement models remain largely school-centered and are frequently limited to narrow forms of participation such as attending meetings, volunteering in school activities, and monitoring homework completion. While these forms of involvement may support certain aspects of student learning, contemporary scholarship increasingly argues that such approaches inadequately address the relational, cultural, structural, and power-related dimensions of family engagement (McWayne et al., 2022). Consequently, many existing models continue to position schools as dominant authorities while families, particularly those from marginalized and culturally diverse communities, are treated as passive participants rather than equal educational partners.

The limitations of traditional involvement frameworks have become increasingly visible within contemporary educational environments characterized by multicultural populations, digital learning systems, nontraditional family structures, and widening socio-economic inequalities. Although educational systems have become more diverse and complex, many schools continue to implement standardized engagement practices that fail to reflect the lived realities, cultural values, and communication needs of diverse families (Berryhill et al., 2022). As a result, parents from minority linguistic groups, low socio-economic backgrounds, and marginalized communities frequently experience exclusion, mistrust, inadequate communication, and limited participation in educational decision-making processes (Lee, 2025). Such patterns not only weaken school–family relationships but also contribute to the reproduction of educational inequities and institutional power imbalances within school systems.

In addition, the effectiveness of school–family partnerships is further constrained by insufficient professional preparation among teachers and school leaders regarding culturally responsive and collaborative family engagement practices. Many educators receive limited training in communication, intercultural competence, and partnership-building strategies, resulting in inconsistent engagement practices and deficit-oriented assumptions about families and communities. Furthermore, existing educational policies often fail to provide coherent and sustainable frameworks capable of supporting authentic collaboration between schools, families, and communities (Antony-Newman, 2024). These institutional limitations continue to undermine efforts to establish inclusive and reciprocal educational partnerships capable of responding effectively to contemporary educational challenges.

Although scholarly interest in parental involvement and family engagement has expanded considerably in recent years, the literature remains conceptually fragmented and frequently characterized by inconsistent definitions, competing theoretical perspectives, and limited integration of equity-centered and culturally responsive approaches. Furthermore, much of the existing scholarship continues to emphasize school-directed participation models while insufficiently addressing relational and partnership-oriented frameworks within increasingly digital and post-pandemic educational contexts. Consequently, there remains a critical need for a systematic synthesis of contemporary evidence regarding effective school–family partnership models, persistent barriers, and evidence-based practices that can inform educational leadership, policy development, and inclusive educational reform.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine contemporary models of parental involvement in educational settings.
2. To analyze factors influencing effective school–family partnerships.
3. To identify best practices from recent literature on family engagement.
4. To synthesize lessons for educational institutions and policymakers.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by three major theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the multidimensional nature of school–family partnerships and parental involvement within contemporary educational contexts.

5.1 Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence remains one of the most widely applied frameworks for understanding relationships among schools, families, and communities (Salac & Florida, 2022). The theory conceptualizes these institutions as interconnected spheres whose level of collaboration significantly influences student learning and development. Epstein identifies six forms of parental involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration (Epstein et al., 2025). The framework provides a practical structure for designing family engagement initiatives and strengthening school–family relationships. However, contemporary scholars argue that traditional applications of the model may remain overly school-centered and insufficiently responsive to issues of equity, cultural diversity, and institutional power. As a result, recent scholarship emphasizes adapting the framework toward more reciprocal, culturally responsive, and partnership-oriented approaches.

5.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory explains child development as being shaped by interactions within multiple environmental systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. School–family partnerships are particularly situated within the mesosystem, where interactions between home and school environments influence educational outcomes (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). This perspective highlights that parental involvement is not solely an individual responsibility but is also shaped by broader social, cultural, economic, and institutional conditions. The theory therefore supports contemporary views that effective family engagement requires context-sensitive, inclusive, and collaborative educational practices.

5.3 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parental Involvement

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model explains the motivational and relational factors influencing parental involvement in education. The model emphasizes parental role construction, self-efficacy beliefs, school invitations, and life-context variables as key determinants of parental participation (Sivabalan et al., 2024). The framework further demonstrates that schools significantly influence parental engagement through communication practices, institutional climate, and relationship-building efforts. In addition, the model explains how parental involvement contributes to student achievement through encouragement, reinforcement, modeling, and instructional support.

5.4 Integration of Theories

Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding school–family partnerships from practical, ecological, and motivational perspectives. Epstein’s framework explains the dimensions of parental involvement, Bronfenbrenner contextualizes engagement within broader environmental systems, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler highlight the relational and motivational processes shaping participation. Together, these perspectives support the argument that effective school–family partnerships require inclusive, culturally responsive, and collaborative approaches that recognize families as active and essential educational partners.

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study views school–family partnerships as dynamic and reciprocal relationships shaped by communication, parenting support, trust, decision-making, and community collaboration. Drawing from Epstein’s theory, the framework emphasizes the importance of inclusive involvement practices such as communication, shared decision-making, and school–community partnerships. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective highlights that parental engagement is influenced by broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts, while the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model explains how trust, school climate, and parental self-efficacy influence participation. Within the framework, trust and engagement function as mediating variables that strengthen collaboration between schools and families. Effective, culturally responsive communication enhances trust and parental participation, which in turn positively influences student success, including academic achievement, motivation, attendance, behavioral outcomes, and social-emotional development. The framework therefore assumes that equitable, collaborative, and context-sensitive school–family partnerships contribute significantly to improved educational outcomes.

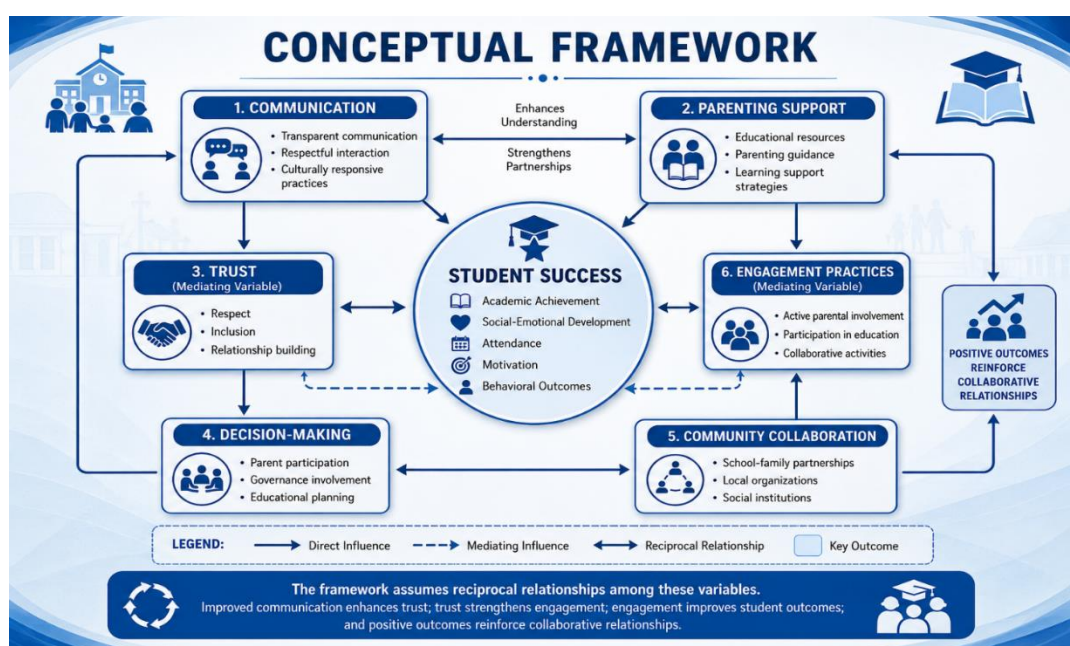


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, Source (Own Creation 2026)

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic literature review design to critically synthesize contemporary evidence on parental involvement and school–family partnerships. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews follow structured and transparent procedures that enhance methodological rigor, minimize bias, and improve replicability (Paul & Barari, 2022). The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, which provided standardized procedures for study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Agrawal et al., 2024).

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect, due to their extensive coverage of educational and interdisciplinary research. The search primarily focused on studies published between 2018 and 2026, while earlier seminal works were included where necessary to support theoretical discussions. Multiple combinations of keywords and Boolean operators were used to maximize comprehensiveness, including terms such as “parental involvement,” “family engagement,” “school–family partnerships,” “community collaboration,” and “educational leadership.” Citation tracking, reference list reviews, and database filtering techniques were also applied to identify relevant studies.

The PRISMA-guided selection process involved four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, approximately 120 records were retrieved from the selected databases. After removing duplicate and irrelevant records, the remaining studies underwent title and abstract screening. Full-text articles were then assessed based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria relating to educational relevance, methodological quality, publication type, language, and direct focus on school–family partnerships. Studies lacking sufficient empirical or theoretical rigor were excluded. Ultimately, 58 peer-reviewed empirical and theoretical studies met the inclusion criteria and were synthesized thematically according to the research objectives and emerging patterns within the literature.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Years	2018–2026 primarily	Studies before 2018 unless seminal
Language	English	Non-English publications
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Blogs, editorials, opinion papers
Research Focus	School–family partnerships and parental involvement	Non-educational studies
Educational Context	Primary, secondary, and higher education	Non-educational contexts
Methodological Quality	Empirical and theoretical scholarly studies	Weakly documented studie

8. LITERATURE REVIEW: THEMATIC REVIEW

8.1 Models of Parental Involvement

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates a significant shift in the conceptualization of parental involvement from traditional school-centered participation toward more collaborative and equity-oriented partnership models. Earlier approaches primarily emphasized parental attendance at school meetings, volunteering, and homework supervision. While these practices remain relevant, recent literature argues that such models often privilege middle-class norms and narrowly define meaningful participation (Cook, 2024). Epstein's six-type framework continues to influence educational policy and school engagement practices due to its practical structure for organizing school-family partnerships (Alizadeh & Habib, 2025). However, contemporary scholars increasingly critique traditional implementations of the framework for insufficiently addressing issues of cultural diversity, institutional power, and inclusive participation.

Emerging research therefore advocates for more relational and learning-centered approaches to family engagement. Özdemir et al. (2021) argue that parental involvement should move beyond school-directed participation toward collaborative engagement that supports learning across home, school, and community contexts. Similarly, Amevordzie (2025) emphasizes equitable partnership models that recognize families as active knowledge holders and participants in educational decision-making. These perspectives align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological view that parental engagement is shaped by broader social and institutional conditions rather than individual parental behavior alone. In response to growing educational inequalities and increasingly diverse school communities, community-based engagement frameworks have also gained prominence. Such approaches emphasize collective responsibility, culturally responsive practices, and collaboration among schools, families, and local organizations. The literature increasingly suggests that integrated partnership models combining home-based learning support, shared governance, digital engagement, and community collaboration are more effective in fostering inclusive and sustainable school-family relationships, particularly within marginalized and underserved communities.

8.2 Communication and Engagement Strategies

Communication remains one of the most significant dimensions of effective school-family partnerships. Research consistently demonstrates that transparent, respectful, and reciprocal communication strengthens parental trust, participation, and collaborative engagement (Xu, 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Gerdes et al., 2022). Consistent with Epstein's communication dimension and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, contemporary scholarship highlights that schools play a central role in shaping parental involvement through inclusive communication practices and relationship-building strategies.

Although traditional communication methods such as parent-teacher meetings, report cards, and printed notices remain important, digital technologies have substantially transformed school-family interaction. Mobile applications, online portals, messaging platforms, and social media increasingly facilitate immediate and continuous communication between schools and families (Lee et al., 2026; Johnson & Rogers, 2024). However, the literature emphasizes that effective communication extends beyond information dissemination. Graham-Clay (2024), in the study *Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers*, argues that two-way communication practices that encourage dialogue, parental feedback, and responsiveness are more effective than one-directional communication approaches.

Despite the advantages of digital engagement, contemporary studies also highlight persistent challenges associated with technological inequality, digital literacy, and access to communication resources. Families from low-income, rural, and marginalized communities often experience limited access to reliable internet connectivity and digital devices, thereby restricting equitable participation in school activities (Danaci, 2026). Furthermore, Weber (2022) emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive communication practices that acknowledge linguistic diversity, cultural backgrounds, and family experiences. Schools that adopt multilingual communication systems and inclusive engagement strategies are more likely to foster trust, strengthen participation, and develop sustainable school-family partnerships across diverse educational contexts.

8.3 Barriers to School-Family Partnerships

Despite extensive evidence supporting parental involvement in education, numerous barriers continue to hinder effective school-family collaboration. One of the most significant challenges is socioeconomic inequality. Families experiencing

economic hardship often face multiple constraints, including limited time, unstable employment, transportation difficulties, and inadequate access to educational resources, all of which restrict their ability to participate actively in school activities (Nenadić & Mohorić, 2023). Language barriers also substantially affect parental engagement, particularly among immigrant and multilingual families. In many educational contexts, schools lack adequate translation services and culturally responsive communication systems, thereby limiting meaningful interaction between educators and parents (Elkjer, 2023). Such communication gaps frequently contribute to parental exclusion and reduced participation in school-related decision-making processes.

Institutional bias and deficit-oriented perceptions further weaken school–family relationships. Some educators perceive parents from marginalized communities as uninterested or uninvolved in their children’s education, despite evidence demonstrating that many families highly value education but encounter structural and institutional barriers that constrain participation (Chapman, 2026). These deficit perspectives may negatively influence trust, communication, and collaborative engagement between schools and families. Teacher preparation programs have also been criticized for providing insufficient training in family engagement practices. As a result, many educators lack the confidence, cultural competence, and communication skills necessary for building effective partnerships with diverse families (Hannon & O’Donnell, 2022). Additionally, rigid institutional structures and inflexible school scheduling often exclude working parents from meaningful participation opportunities, thereby reinforcing inequalities in engagement (Mampane et al., 2024). Overall, the literature suggests that barriers to school–family partnerships are multidimensional and interconnected, involving socioeconomic, linguistic, institutional, and organizational factors that collectively shape the quality of parental involvement.

8.4 Technology and Digital Family Engagement

Technology has become increasingly central to school–family partnerships, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of digital communication and online learning platforms. Digital tools now enable schools to provide real-time updates, virtual meetings, online academic support, and broader communication accessibility for families. Studies indicate that digital engagement can improve parental awareness of student progress and increase participation in educational activities (Smith, 2023). However, scholars caution against assuming that technological solutions automatically produce equitable family engagement. Significant digital divides remain across socioeconomic and geographic contexts, particularly among low-income and rural families who may lack access to reliable internet connectivity, digital devices, or technological literacy. Consequently, unequal access to digital resources may reproduce existing educational inequalities rather than reduce them.

Effective digital engagement therefore requires schools to provide technological support, digital literacy training, and flexible communication strategies tailored to diverse family needs. Hybrid engagement models that combine online and face-to-face interaction have been identified as particularly effective in promoting accessibility and sustained parental participation (Desmarianti et al., 2025; Elias et al., 2022). Recent scholarship further highlights the growing role of artificial intelligence, learning management systems, and mobile applications in supporting personalized family engagement strategies. Nevertheless, concerns regarding surveillance, privacy, ethical data usage, and information security continue to generate scholarly debate regarding the long-term implications of digital engagement practices (Li et al., 2025).

8.5 Cultural Responsiveness in Parental Involvement

Culturally responsive family engagement has emerged as a significant area of educational scholarship in recent years. Traditional parental involvement frameworks have frequently been criticized for privileging dominant cultural norms while marginalizing diverse family practices and forms of participation. Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate for asset-based approaches that recognize families’ cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and community strengths rather than framing marginalized groups through deficit-oriented perspectives (Cariaga et al., 2025). Culturally responsive schools actively incorporate community languages, traditions, and perspectives into educational practices while creating inclusive environments in which families feel respected, represented, and valued (Banwo et al., 2022). Such approaches seek to strengthen trust and collaboration between schools and diverse communities by acknowledging cultural diversity as an educational asset rather than a barrier.

Empirical studies demonstrate that culturally responsive engagement contributes positively to trust-building, parental participation, and student identity development (Spear, 2025; Famely, 2023; Moye, 2025). These practices also enhance communication and strengthen relationships between educators and families from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Educational leaders play a critical role in promoting equity-oriented family engagement by addressing institutional bias, diversifying communication strategies, and fostering inclusive school climates that encourage meaningful parental participation (Yulianti et al., 2022; De Guzman, 2024). Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate the extent to which schools can fully implement culturally responsive practices within rigid institutional and policy structures.

8.6 Leadership and Policy Support

Educational leadership significantly influences the effectiveness of school–family partnerships. School leaders shape institutional culture, communication practices, and policy priorities that directly affect parental engagement initiatives. Research indicates that transformational and distributed leadership approaches are strongly associated with collaborative school climates and stronger family partnerships (Azizi et al., 2024). Principals who prioritize relationship-building, shared decision-making, and inclusive participation are more likely to foster positive collaboration between schools and families. Such leadership practices contribute to improved trust, communication, and stakeholder engagement within educational institutions.

Policy frameworks also play an important role in shaping family engagement practices. National and local educational policies that promote parental involvement often enhance institutional accountability and improve the allocation of resources for partnership development (Goodall, 2022). However, the implementation of such policies varies considerably across educational contexts. In some cases, family engagement policies emphasize compliance-oriented participation rather than authentic collaboration and shared decision-making. Leadership preparation programs increasingly recognize the need to equip educational leaders with competencies in community engagement, cultural responsiveness, and partnership development (Mayger, 2024). Despite these developments, challenges related to policy implementation, institutional capacity, and resource limitations continue to affect the sustainability of effective school–family partnerships.

8.7 Community-Based Partnership Models

Community-based partnership models extend parental involvement beyond traditional school boundaries by promoting collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, healthcare providers, religious institutions, and social service agencies. These models emphasize collective responsibility for student development and educational success. Community schools represent one of the most prominent examples of integrated partnership models. Such schools provide wraparound services designed to address students' academic, social, emotional, and health-related needs through coordinated community support systems (Keung & Cheung, 2023). Research indicates that community-based approaches strengthen trust, improve access to resources, and enhance student well-being by creating stronger connections between schools and local communities (Michael et al., 2023). Collective impact frameworks further emphasize coordinated action among multiple stakeholders working toward shared educational goals. These collaborative approaches seek to address complex educational challenges through integrated and community-centered interventions. However, scholars also note that community-based partnerships often face challenges related to sustainability, funding, coordination, and institutional collaboration.

8.8 Impact of Parental Involvement on Student Achievement

One of the most extensively researched dimensions of family engagement concerns its relationship with student achievement. Existing literature consistently demonstrates positive associations between parental involvement and academic outcomes such as improved grades, attendance, motivation, literacy development, and graduation rates (Wilder, 2023; Jeynes, 2024; Cancino, 2022; Kanyoi & Kirimi, 2025). Home-based involvement practices, including educational discussions, academic encouragement, reading support, and parental expectation-setting, appear particularly influential in supporting student learning and achievement (Angwaomaodoko, 2023; Alfred et al., 2023; Hussein, 2024; Mchia & Mwila, 2024). Such forms of engagement contribute to stronger learning environments and reinforce positive educational attitudes among students.

Parental involvement also contributes significantly to students' social and emotional development. Studies show that students with engaged families often demonstrate higher self-esteem, greater resilience, improved behavioral outcomes, and stronger school connectedness (Kwarteng et al., 2022; Hakizimana & Sikubwabo, 2024; Isabelle, 2023). Nevertheless, scholars caution against simplistic causal interpretations of the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. The effectiveness of parental engagement depends heavily on contextual factors such as school climate, family

socioeconomic resources, cultural alignment, and institutional support systems. Furthermore, variations in parental involvement practices across different social and cultural contexts suggest that family engagement strategies should be understood as dynamic and context-specific rather than universally uniform

9. FINDINGS AND LESSONS FROM LITERATURE

9.1 Effective Partnership Practices

The literature consistently demonstrates that effective school–family partnerships are founded upon relationship-centered and collaborative engagement practices rather than traditional one-directional models of parental involvement. Across diverse educational contexts, reciprocal communication emerges as one of the most critical components of successful partnerships. Schools that prioritize active listening, transparency, mutual respect, and continuous dialogue tend to establish stronger trust and more sustainable relationships with families. Such communication practices promote shared understanding and encourage parents to participate more meaningfully in educational processes.

The literature further emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive engagement practices in strengthening participation among diverse communities. Studies indicate that schools adopting inclusive communication strategies, multilingual resources, and culturally sensitive approaches are more successful in engaging families from marginalized and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These practices challenge deficit-oriented assumptions that often portray underrepresented families as disengaged, instead recognizing community knowledge, cultural identity, and lived experiences as valuable educational resources.

Flexibility in engagement structures also appears consistently associated with improved parental participation. Contemporary scholarship highlights that rigid institutional arrangements frequently exclude working parents and economically disadvantaged families from school activities. Consequently, hybrid engagement models incorporating virtual participation, flexible scheduling, and multiple communication platforms have become increasingly important in expanding accessibility and reducing participation barriers.

In addition, distributed leadership and collaborative governance structures significantly influence the effectiveness of school–family partnerships. Educational institutions that encourage shared decision-making, stakeholder participation, and collective responsibility tend to foster stronger institutional trust and collaborative school climates. However, the literature also suggests that the effectiveness of these practices remains context-dependent and influenced by broader institutional, socioeconomic, and policy conditions.

9.2 Critical Success Factors in School–Family Partnerships

The review identified several interconnected factors that contribute significantly to successful school–family partnerships. Among these, mutual trust and respect emerge as foundational conditions for sustained collaboration. Trust influences parental willingness to engage with schools, while respectful relationships strengthen communication, participation, and shared responsibility for student learning outcomes.

Inclusive and equity-oriented leadership also constitutes a critical success factor. Educational leaders play a central role in shaping institutional culture, promoting inclusive participation, and addressing structural barriers that limit family engagement. Leadership practices grounded in collaboration, transparency, and cultural responsiveness are consistently associated with stronger partnership outcomes. Culturally responsive practices further enhance the effectiveness of school–family relationships by acknowledging the diversity of family structures, cultural traditions, communication styles, and community experiences. Such practices contribute to stronger relational trust and reduce exclusionary institutional dynamics that often marginalize underrepresented groups.

Consistent and meaningful communication likewise remains essential for sustaining productive partnerships. The literature indicates that effective communication extends beyond information sharing and involves reciprocal dialogue, responsiveness, and active collaboration between educators and families. Institutional support mechanisms, including policy commitment, resource allocation, teacher preparation, and administrative support, further influence partnership sustainability. Schools that provide structured support for family engagement are more likely to institutionalize collaborative practices effectively. Finally, community collaboration and flexible engagement structures strengthen accessibility and broaden participation opportunities. Partnerships involving community organizations, healthcare services,

and local stakeholders contribute to more comprehensive support systems that address both educational and social dimensions of student development. Overall, the literature suggests that successful school–family partnerships are multidimensional and depend on the interaction of relational, cultural, institutional, and organizational factors rather than isolated interventions.

9.3 Weaknesses in Existing Partnership Models

Despite substantial progress in the scholarship and practice of family engagement, several weaknesses remain evident within existing partnership models. A significant limitation concerns the continued dominance of school-centered approaches that position educational institutions as primary authorities while limiting genuine parental agency and shared decision-making. Many traditional frameworks continue to conceptualize parental involvement in terms of school-defined participation rather than collaborative partnership, thereby reinforcing unequal power relations between schools and families.

The literature further indicates that some engagement initiatives prioritize procedural compliance and participation metrics over authentic relationship-building. In such contexts, parental involvement is often reduced to attendance at meetings, school events, or administrative activities rather than meaningful collaboration in educational planning and decision-making processes. Consequently, engagement practices may become symbolic rather than transformative. Another major limitation involves the insufficient representation of developing-country contexts within the existing body of research. Much of the literature on school–family partnerships originate from Western educational systems, raising concerns regarding the applicability and generalizability of existing models across diverse socioeconomic and cultural environments. Educational realities in developing contexts, including resource constraints, infrastructural limitations, and differing cultural understandings of parental involvement, remain comparatively underexplored.

Technological engagement strategies also present important challenges. Although digital communication platforms have expanded opportunities for parental participation, unequal access to internet connectivity, digital devices, and technological literacy may exacerbate existing inequalities among families. As a result, digital engagement initiatives may unintentionally reproduce forms of exclusion they seek to address. Furthermore, several studies rely heavily on self-reported perceptions of parental involvement, thereby limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between engagement practices and educational outcomes. This methodological limitation suggests the need for more contextually grounded, longitudinal, and mixed-method research capable of capturing the complexity of school–family partnerships across diverse settings.

9.4 Lessons for Educational Leaders

The literature provides several important lessons for educational leaders seeking to strengthen school–family partnerships. First, family engagement should be recognized as a central component of school improvement and educational effectiveness rather than as an auxiliary or peripheral activity. Schools that institutionalize collaborative engagement practices tend to develop stronger relational trust, improved communication systems, and more inclusive educational environments.

Educational leaders must therefore prioritize relationship-building, cultural responsiveness, inclusive governance, and collaborative communication within institutional practice. Effective leadership requires moving beyond compliance-oriented models toward partnership approaches grounded in shared responsibility, equity, and mutual respect. The literature also highlights the importance of teacher professional development in enhancing family engagement practices.

Teachers frequently serve as the primary point of interaction between schools and families; however, many educators receive limited preparation in communication, cultural competence, and partnership-building strategies. Consequently, professional development initiatives should incorporate practical competencies related to community engagement, conflict resolution, culturally responsive communication, and collaborative educational planning.

Additionally, schools should adopt flexible and context-sensitive engagement strategies responsive to the realities of diverse communities. Educational leaders must recognize that parental involvement is shaped by socioeconomic conditions, cultural expectations, employment responsibilities, technological access, and institutional structures. Effective partnership strategies therefore require adaptability rather than standardized approaches. Finally, the literature suggests that sustainable school–family partnerships depend upon broader institutional and policy support. Without adequate resources, leadership commitment, and inclusive policy frameworks, engagement initiatives are unlikely to produce long-term and equitable outcomes. Educational leaders must therefore advocate for systemic approaches that integrate family engagement into broader educational planning, policy implementation, and school improvement processes.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Recommendations for School Administrators

School administrators should institutionalize family engagement as an integral component of school improvement planning rather than treating it as a supplementary activity. This requires the development of structured policies, accountability mechanisms, and leadership practices that embed collaborative family engagement within the broader institutional culture of schools.

Educational leaders should establish inclusive communication systems capable of accommodating linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity among families. Such systems should incorporate multilingual communication channels, culturally responsive outreach strategies, and accessible platforms that encourage reciprocal interaction between schools and parents. Administrators should further prioritize continuous professional development programs focusing on culturally responsive family engagement, communication competencies, conflict resolution, and collaborative partnership-building. Given that many educators receive limited formal preparation in family engagement practices, institutional training is necessary to strengthen teachers' capacity to engage effectively with diverse communities.

Schools should also adopt flexible and context-sensitive participation structures that respond to the realities of working families and marginalized communities. These may include hybrid communication systems, virtual participation opportunities, flexible scheduling arrangements, and community-based outreach initiatives designed to reduce structural barriers to parental involvement. Importantly, school leaders should recognize that effective family engagement requires sustained institutional commitment, adequate resource allocation, and leadership support rather than isolated short-term initiatives.

10.2 Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers should adopt relationship-centered communication approaches grounded in empathy, mutual respect, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving. Effective communication should move beyond one-directional information sharing toward reciprocal dialogue that values parental perspectives and encourages meaningful participation in students' educational experiences. Educators should also recognize and affirm the diverse cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and educational aspirations that families contribute to children's learning and development. Culturally responsive engagement practices are essential in fostering trust and reducing exclusionary dynamics that may discourage parental participation.

Furthermore, teachers should provide consistent and constructive communication regarding student progress, academic expectations, behavioral development, and learning support strategies. Home-based learning partnerships may be strengthened through regular feedback mechanisms, accessible communication platforms, and collaborative educational planning between schools and families. However, successful implementation of these practices requires institutional support, manageable workloads, and adequate professional preparation to ensure that family engagement responsibilities do not become an additional burden on already constrained teaching environments.

10.3 Recommendations for Parents and Families

Parents and families should be encouraged to participate actively in school communication processes, educational decision-making, and home-based learning support activities. Meaningful parental engagement contributes positively to students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, and school connectedness. At the same time, schools and policymakers must recognize that parental participation is shaped by broader socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional conditions. Consequently, family engagement strategies should avoid deficit-oriented assumptions that place sole responsibility for involvement on parents without addressing structural barriers such as poverty, language exclusion, limited technological access, and inflexible work conditions.

Families should therefore be supported through inclusive engagement opportunities, accessible communication systems, and collaborative school environments that recognize parents as co-educators and active educational partners rather than passive recipients of institutional directives. Community organizations, parent associations, and local stakeholders should further advocate for equitable and inclusive engagement policies capable of strengthening collaboration between schools and communities.

10.4 Recommendations for Governments and Policymakers

Governments and educational policymakers should develop comprehensive national and regional frameworks that position school–family partnerships as central components of educational quality, equity, and school improvement. Such frameworks should move beyond compliance-oriented participation models toward policies that promote authentic collaboration, shared decision-making, and community engagement. Teacher education institutions should integrate mandatory training in school–family partnerships, culturally responsive communication, and community engagement into pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs.

Strengthening educators' competencies in these areas is essential for promoting sustainable and inclusive partnership practices.

Policymakers should also allocate adequate funding for digital engagement infrastructure, translation services, community liaison programs, and school-based outreach initiatives, particularly within underserved and marginalized communities. Without sufficient institutional resources, engagement policies are unlikely to produce equitable and sustainable outcomes. Additionally, educational policies should address structural inequalities that limit parental participation, including socioeconomic disparities, technological exclusion, and linguistic barriers. Equity-oriented engagement policies are particularly necessary in developing and resource-constrained educational contexts where institutional inequalities may significantly affect school–family collaboration. Governments should further support collaborative partnerships among schools, community organizations, healthcare providers, and social service institutions to promote holistic student development and integrated educational support systems.

10.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should expand the geographical and contextual scope of school–family partnership scholarship, particularly within underrepresented regions and developing educational systems where empirical evidence remains comparatively limited. Existing literature remains heavily concentrated within Western educational contexts, thereby limiting the contextual applicability of many prevailing engagement models. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies examining the long-term impact of parental involvement on students' academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional outcomes are also needed. Such approaches would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and evolving nature of school–family relationships over time.

Further research should critically investigate the ethical, social, and educational implications of digital family engagement technologies, particularly regarding surveillance, data privacy, digital inequality, and technological exclusion. Additional studies exploring power relations, institutional bias, culturally responsive engagement practices, and informal community-based participation models may also contribute to the development of more contextually grounded and equity-oriented family engagement frameworks. Finally, future scholarship should prioritize context-sensitive and culturally relevant models of parental involvement capable of reflecting the diverse realities of educational systems across different socioeconomic and cultural environments.

11. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined contemporary parental involvement and school–family partnership models using the PRISMA framework. The review established that meaningful family engagement positively influences student achievement, socio-emotional development, school connectedness, and overall educational effectiveness. The findings indicate a shift from traditional school-centered approaches toward collaborative, culturally responsive, and partnership-oriented models that recognize families as active educational partners and co-educators. Effective partnerships are characterized by reciprocal communication, mutual trust, inclusive leadership, cultural responsiveness, community collaboration, and flexible engagement structures. However, persistent barriers such as socioeconomic inequality, institutional bias, inadequate teacher preparation, linguistic exclusion, and digital divides continue to limit equitable parental participation. The review also identified limitations in existing scholarship, particularly the dominance of Western perspectives and the limited representation of developing-country contexts. Overall, the study emphasizes that sustainable educational improvement requires inclusive, equity-oriented, and community-centered family engagement approaches capable of addressing structural inequalities and promoting holistic student success.

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