

Influences of Parental Engagement on Students' Educational Outcomes in the Secondary Schools of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia

Demissie Dalelo Hankebo

demissiedalelo@gmail.com

Wolaita Sodo University

Mebratu Belete Beka

Wolaita Sodo University

Deneke Dana Dabara

Wolaita Sodo University

Wubalem Girma Giday

Wolaita Sodo University

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Abstract

Parental engagement is essential in fostering the academic success of students; however, there is little knowledge about its different forms, contexts, and ways of improving it in secondary schools in Ethiopia. The current study sought to investigate parents' views on parental engagement and its influences on the academic success of their children in secondary schools of the Wolaita Zone of Ethiopia. Using the framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's School, Family and Community Partnerships Framework, the current study examined the effects of parents' demographic and socio-economic variables on their involvement in students' learning process, the forms of engagement, the context of engagement, and ways of improving family-school partnership. An embedded mixed-methods research design with a focus on qualitative inquiry was adopted. Data was gathered from 133 parents using questionnaires that had both open and closed questions. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis technique, and the quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. These findings indicate that parent engagement is a multifaceted process that consists of providing education at home, participating in school activities, parent-teacher interaction, provision of learning materials, and continuous monitoring of the progress and behaviour of their children at school. Parents who were younger, more educated, and had professional employment were found to be more involved in school-related activities, while older parents provided emotional and moral support to their children. Poverty, unemployment, scarcity of educational resources, ineffective school management, inefficient communication channels, and lack of commitment by teachers were identified as some of the key obstacles that hampered parental engagement in secondary schools. Some of the suggested solutions included improvement in partnerships between homes and schools, teacher accountability, provision of tutoring and counselling services, availability of educational resources, mobilisation of the local community, enhancement of library facilities, and educational leadership.

1. Introduction

The importance of parental involvement in the educational process as one of the key factors determining the success of learners and educational achievements has always been widely acknowledged. Nowadays, cooperation and partnership between schools and families in the modern education system have become an important tool that could help improve the quality of education and learning outcomes. Parental involvement is a term that describes the participation of parents in the process of their children's education by means of supervising homework assignments, communicating with teachers, attending school events, and providing a favourable learning environment at home. Such actions have great importance in forming students' attitudes to studying, motivation, and educational achievements since parents' involvement greatly affects their academic results [13].

Studies have found that parental involvement enhances students' academic performance and their interest in learning across different educational settings. The findings show that when parents get involved in their children's education and communicate effectively with teachers, children tend to perform better in academics, adopt good study practices, and be more engaged in their schoolwork. It

has been found that parental involvement results in high levels of motivation, good school attendance, and good classroom behaviour in children [2]. Additionally, it is noteworthy that a recent study carried out in Ethiopian secondary schools has found that parental involvement is one of the factors predicting students' academic achievement, besides teachers' motivation and school leadership [1].

Furthermore, parental involvement in education can also be analysed through the lens of ecological and socio-cultural theories. Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner suggests that the family is among the environments with high levels of influence on the development and educational achievements of the children [6]. From this perspective, parents' impact on the learning behaviours of the students via encouragement, academic advising, and creation of learning habits within the domestic home setting. This interaction between the two environments fosters the academic success or failure of the learners.

Parental participation in education among developing countries like Ethiopia is affected by various contextual factors, such as the educational background of the parents, socio-economic status of the family, cultural expectations, and their knowledge about schooling. Although the policies formulated nationally about education highlight community and parental participation in education, there have been inconsistencies in involving parents in school activities in different areas of the country. In some studies, it is observed that parental involvement in school activities like meetings with teachers is quite minimal because of various reasons, such as lack of time and awareness [15, 39].

Regarding Wolaita Zone, secondary schools operate in diverse socio-economic and educational settings, which determine how active parents are in the education of their children. Different financial backgrounds of families, educational backgrounds of the parents, work-related activities of parents and relationships between schools and communities may influence the way the parents involve themselves in the learning processes of their children. While the importance of parental involvement in terms of its contribution to success of their children in class and at home are widely recognized and established as an important determinant of academic achievements of the learners, there is very little data available about the extent of the parental involvement at secondary schools in the Wolaita Zone, its effects on the learning behavior of the students and factors which help or hinder parental involvement.

2. Literature Review

Concept of Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement is the engagement of parents in the education of their children through various activities performed both at home and school that include helping the children with their homework assignments, communicating with the teachers, and attending various meetings held in schools. As per the model by Epstein, there are six major dimensions of parental involvement, which include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community [13].

Parental involvement is highly acknowledged as an important factor contributing to the success of learners in academic work. Research has shown that learners whose parents take part in their education achieve greater academic success and have greater motivation and engagement in schools [27]. It is also evident from research in Ethiopia that parents' involvement in helping children learn at home and communicating with the school enhances academic success and motivation among learners [41].

Parental Involvement and Students' Educational Outcomes

Several empirical studies have proved the existence of a direct connection between parental involvement and academic achievements of learners. Monitoring learners' academic progress, encouraging good study habits and aspirations to get an education are key components that help to enhance their academic performance [27, 13].

Studies carried out in Ethiopia indicate the existence of a positive link between parental involvement and students' academic achievement. According to [2], learners who have actively involved parents have been doing better academically than those without active parental involvement. Various studies carried out in Ethiopia show that parental involvement contributes positively to learners' academic success in terms of promoting their learning behaviours, supervision of their school activities and giving emotional support along with school-related aspects like good school management and teacher dedication [41].

Home Learning Environment and Academic Support

The learning environment at home is essential for influencing the performance of students and their educational development. The presence of a conducive home environment, which includes learning materials, time dedicated to studies, homework assistance, and parental support, leads to good study habits and educational motivation among other factors [6, 13]. Many studies have revealed that academic guidance and support from parents lead to better academic discipline and academic success. However, there are certain barriers that can limit parental support to the students in the form of limited education and a busy schedule, among other barriers [41, 27].

Parental Involvement in the Ethiopian Educational Context

Parental involvement in Ethiopian schools has become a topic of interest in recent years as a means of raising the standard of education and academic performance of students. The national education policies promote the involvement of parents through parent-teacher associations, school meetings, and community participation. However, it has been reported that there is little parental involvement in most schools in Ethiopia [34, 41].

Several studies conducted in the secondary schools of Ethiopia have found that many parents attend school meetings occasionally, lack communication with the teacher, and lack involvement in curricular activities. Further research has revealed that the involvement of parents depends on several things, including the level of their education, socio-economic status, and awareness of the importance of

supporting their children in education [2]. This makes it essential to conduct research in the Wolaita zone to study parental involvement practices and their impact on the educational outcomes of students.

3. Theoretical Foundation of the Study

The study is anchored in a Theory of Change that postulates that educational achievements of the learners get enhanced when parents, schools, and communities collaborate for learning purposes. The model is based on several theories, namely: the Ecological Systems Theory by [6], the school-Family-Community Partnerships framework by [12], and the Social Capital theory by [8]. It is presumed that parental involvement in education through the provision of home-based learning assistance, communication between the parents and teachers, participation in school activities, expectations, and encouragement enhances the home-school relationship (mesosystem) and creates social capital to enable the learners to benefit more from the educational experience.

These engagement practices are intended to help build up positive learning behaviours among the learners, which include academic motivation, discipline in studying, doing homework, class participation, and thus leading to good academic performance, Grade 12 entrance exam scores, and general educational outcomes. However, the efficacy of such a causal relationship is thought to be affected by contextual factors, like the education level of the parents, socioeconomic status of the family, school administration, teacher assistance, available learning facilities, school and parent communication channels, and other community and cultural issues that may facilitate or hinder parental engagement. Because of these assumptions, the study investigates the impact of parental engagement practices on the educational outcomes of the learners in secondary schools of the Wolaita Zone.

4. Conceptual Framework of the Study

This research used the Ecological Systems Theory by [6] and the school-Family-Community Partnership Framework by [13] as its theoretical framework to prepare the conceptual framework of the study. According to these theories, the results of students' education are influenced by constant interaction between the family, school, and the surrounding community. For that matter, the model treats parental engagement practices as the independent variable, including home study assistance, homework monitoring, parent-teacher communication, school activity participation, academic expectations, and emotional support. Indeed, parental engagement encourages students' academic motivation, study skills, homework completion, classroom participation, and learning accountability, which in turn result in better academic performance, Grade 12 entrance examination performance, school involvement, and learning behaviours. Such a sequence is based on the hypothesis that parental engagement influences educational outcomes both directly and indirectly via affecting learning behaviours of the students [6, 13].

Furthermore, the framework understands that there exists an interaction that affects the relationship between parental involvement, student learning behaviour, and educational outcomes. Such factors

include parents' educational attainment, socio-economic class of the family, school leadership, teacher support, learning materials, communication between the school and parents, and community/cultural considerations, all of which could positively or negatively affect the effectiveness of parental involvement. In this framework, such contextual factors moderate the relationships between the independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable by affecting parents' involvement capacity in their children's education. Following from the framework, the research will focus on understanding the type of parental engagement that is needed to improve the academic performance of the student and the effect of such involvement on students' learning behaviours, as well as the moderating factors that positively or negatively affect parental engagement. Hence, the framework serves as a theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship among the constructs under investigation and for answering the four research questions posed by the study.

5. Research Questions

1. How do parents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (age, gender, educational level, and occupation) influence parental engagement, parent–school partnerships, and support for students' academic achievement?
2. What forms of parental engagement do participants perceive as essential for improving students' academic achievement and Grade 12 entrance examination performance?
3. **What contextual factors facilitate or hinder effective parental engagement in secondary schools of the Wolaita Zone?**
4. What strategies do participants recommend for strengthening parental involvement and improving secondary school performance?

6. Research Methodology

Research Design

The study design used for conducting this research was an embedded mixed-methods research design, whereby the research had a major qualitative approach coupled with quantitative data. An embedded mixed research design is suitable where one kind of data plays the major role in solving the research problem, and the other gives additional insights and information to strengthen the research [9]. In this case, qualitative research was the major part since the focus was on exploring the perspectives and experiences of the parents regarding their participation in the education of their children.

The research was primarily exploratory in nature, focusing on attaining a comprehensive understanding of parents' perceptions and experiences of their participation in school activities. Exploratory qualitative research is most suited where there is insufficient contextual information about a phenomenon or where the researcher wishes to understand participants' meanings and experiences within the context of their natural environment [10, 32]. To attain this goal, rich qualitative data were collected from 133 parents who answered five open-ended questions concerning the critical aspects of parental involvement in their

children's education. Through open-ended answers, participants were able to give a detailed account of their experiences, challenges, motivation, and suggestions, thus providing rich contextual information that would not have been possible without them [37]. Qualitative and quantitative data combined added to the richness and credibility of the results attained due to methodological complementarities and triangulations [18, 9].

Study participants

Ten secondary schools were chosen for the study using purposeful selection, considering their student population, organisational size, length of operation, establishment history, and academic success history. These secondary schools include: Sodo, Bogale Walelu, Hidase, Bodit Hibrete, Areka, Firew, Gututo, Humbo Tebela, Bedisa and Gututo, which were sampled from Wolaita Zone's five towns and Sodo City Administration. Two hundred parents from these schools were chosen at random to take part in the study. However, only 134 parents completed and returned the survey, accounting for 67% of the sample size.

Methods of Data Analysis

The qualitative dataset of the study contains answers to the first open-ended questions provided by 133 respondents and to the six main open-ended questions answered by 124 respondents. In both cases, all respondents' answers were coded using labels like R1, R2, ..., R124/R133, but when it came to reporting and further analyses, they were re-coded into participant numbers (P1, P2, P3) for uniformity and confidentiality purposes. The data set was qualitatively analysed using the established methodology of thematic analysis based on the six-phase procedure developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke.

Thematic analysis was used in the process of analysing qualitative data. This thematic analysis model involves six phases as put forward by [4, 5]. The first step of this thematic analysis model entailed familiarisation with the data through reading and re-reading all responses of the participants to develop an overall understanding of the data and identify any patterns of meaning.

The second phase involved the process of coding the responses through the systematic examination of the participants' statements, ideas, and experiences. The initial codes were compared and organised based on the conceptual similarities in the third phase. This resulted in the identification of more general categories, which reflected patterns that appeared repeatedly in the whole dataset. Review and refinement of the themes identified took place in the fourth phase to ensure their consistency and clarity with the coded extracts and the dataset. The fifth step of the thematic analysis entailed naming and defining the themes.

Thirdly, the analysis and interpretation stage entailed organising the findings based on the established themes, whereby there was provision of an interpretation of the analysis through direct and indirect quotes from the participants (e.g., P1, P15, P68). Additionally, relevant empirical and theoretical literature was used in the analysis to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. The above analysis

process ensured that the themes were anchored in the views of the participants and accurately represented their perspectives regarding parent involvement in secondary school education. Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation of participants' demographics and parent involvement.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The acquired qualitative and quantitative data were analysed jointly. The results were validated by first analysing the qualitative data and then analysing and interpreting pertinent quantitative data. To determine if the results were consistent with or inconsistent with the study's fundamental concepts, the results were finally triangulated.

Influence of Parents' Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics (age, gender, educational level, and occupation) on Parental Engagement and Support for Students' Academic Achievement

Table 1
Age Composition

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20–30	7	5.3	5.3	5.3
31–40	42	31.8	31.8	37.1
41–50	57	43.2	43.2	80.3
51 & above	26	19.7	19.7	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	—

Table 2
Parental Support Patterns by Learner Age Categories

Age Range	Typical Parental Support Pattern	Practical Indicators
20–30 (younger learners' parents)	High direct instrumental support: parents closely supervise homework, manage study routines, and communicate frequently with teachers.	Track frequency of homework help, parent–teacher contact, and supervised study time.
31–40 (mid-adolescents' parents)	Gradual shift from direct help to guided monitoring, less daily assistance, more encouragement and participation in school-related decisions.	Measure parental monitoring, academic expectations, and communication about school progress.
41–50 (late adolescents' parents)	Increased focus on academic socialisation, parents discuss educational goals, provide motivation, and convey the value of education.	Measure goal-setting discussions, emotional encouragement, and parental expectations.
51 & above (older adolescents' parents)	Reduced direct involvement but stronger emotional and moral guidance; involvement quality outweighs frequency.	Measure perceived emotional support, guidance availability, and facilitation of academic opportunities.

The findings point out that a considerable number of participants (43.2%) are between the ages of 41 and 50, with the second largest group of parents being between 31 and 40 years old (31.8%). The analysis implies that most of the parents involved with the education of their children who attend secondary schools belong to the mature or middle-aged groups. Parents of this type usually represent a phase in life where they are experiencing stability in their family and work life, which, in turn, can be linked to a greater dedication to the achievements of their children in their studies [11, 3].

Nevertheless, it is proven that the engagement of parents depends on the child's age. The works by [20, 26] indicate that while such actions as homework assistance and monitoring are particularly efficient in the early stages of children's development, they later become replaced by academic socialisation.

The meta-analysis of findings from different settings indicates that the type of participation is more important than the frequency of parental involvement for their effect to be positive [14, 43]. At the adolescent stage, when learners become independent, too much controlling parenting can be detrimental to academic motivation, whereas positive parent involvement, such as encouragement and talks on the importance of education, has positive effects on academic performance [16]. In this respect, the prevalence of middle-aged parents (31–50 years) in the Wolaita Zone sample is expected to facilitate balanced emotional, motivational, and strategic educational support, provided the parents are well guided.

In the Wolaita zone, the age pattern of the parents plays a vital role in determining the kind and effectiveness of the support provided for the students. It is clear from the data that although most parents belong to the age group that is suitable for sustained involvement, their approach must change to meet the cognitive and emotional requirements of the students studying at the secondary level.

Interventions need to be conducted for the younger adolescent students that involve helping the parents to establish regular homework patterns and enhance parent-school communication [13].

Also, older parents (51 and above) who may not be educated or energetic enough to supervise their children directly can still make a significant contribution by providing emotional and moral support, which has been found to predict resilience and academic commitment in underprivileged environments [36, 23]. This means that school administrators need to develop age-specific strategies for involving parents in the education process and provide age-appropriate counselling services for younger and older parents.

Table 3
Gender Distribution of Parents Involved in Students' Education

Gender of Parent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	99	75.0	75.0	75.0
Male	32	24.2	24.2	99.2
Not specified	1	0.8	0.8	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	—

The above data indicate a great imbalance in terms of parental involvement, with many participating parents being female (75%). This supports numerous empirical findings revealing that mothers have always been more involved in education compared to fathers, especially regarding monitoring homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and communicating with teachers [22, 23]. The same situation can be observed in Sub-Saharan African countries, where maternal involvement is more evident because social practices imply that raising children is mainly a task of mothers [36, 11].

However, paternal involvement, which is less common, usually takes on more instrumental or strategic characteristics, including provision of money, expectation-setting, and discussion about career plans. Paternal involvement in the lives of children, whenever it happens, is positively associated with motivation, discipline, and achievement among youth [26]. Thus, the gender gap that is observed in the results of this study is both a global and a local trend in parental involvement, where mothers are seen as the “visible caregivers” when it comes to schools.

Studies have shown that when both parents engage in education process of their child, they have emotional stability, motivation, and persistence. However, the result of this study indicates that maternal dominance in school involvement, which can have both empowering and limiting sides for students, is mainly prevalent. On the one hand, maternal engagement can be useful for the regular control of students' academic performance and communication with teachers [13]. These factors are related to high academic performance among students. On the other hand, the lack of paternal involvement makes it hard to provide the comprehensive advantages of having two engaged parents. Therefore, there is a

need for school-based intervention and community sensitisation to increase father engagement in the education process of their children to get more sustained support from both parents.

Table 4
Respondents' Educational Levels

Educational Levels	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Junior secondary complete	5	3.8	3.8	3.8
Secondary level complete	13	9.8	9.8	13.6
Diploma holder	11	8.3	8.3	22.0
First-degree holder	72	54.5	54.5	76.5
Second-degree and above holder	31	23.5	23.5	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	—

Table 5
Expected Parental Involvement Patterns by Educational Level

Educational Level	Typical Parental Involvement Pattern	Practical Indicators
Junior secondary complete	Limited academic guidance due to low literacy levels; rely more on school communication and peer parents for updates.	Frequency of school visits, reliance on teachers for progress updates.
Secondary complete	Moderate engagement; understands school systems but may lack confidence in academic support roles.	Monitoring homework, attendance at meetings, and feedback participation.
Diploma holder	Active participants in school–parent dialogues; moderate academic support and frequent communication.	Frequency of parent–teacher contact, home study encouragement.
First-degree holder	High awareness and strong engagement; actively supervise academic tasks and maintain close communication with teachers.	Homework supports frequency, meeting participation, and home learning resources.
Second degree and above	Highly proactive in both academic and psychosocial support; emphasise critical thinking, moral development, and long-term planning.	Mentoring role, academic monitoring, collaboration with school leadership.

According to the data presented here, an overwhelming number of parents (78%) have a tertiary level of education (Diploma and above), with 54.5% having first degrees and 23.5% second or even higher degrees. On the other hand, only 13.6% have secondary and lower levels of education, and 3.8% have junior secondary education. These educational credentials indicate literacy among Wolaita Zone parents, which means they can engage themselves meaningfully in the education of their children.

Much empirical research shows that parents' educational background is among the most important factors that predict the degree of parent engagement and quality thereof [13, 25, 3]. For example, educated parents usually create structured home environments for learning, helping with homework, setting high standards, and communicating with teachers regularly [14]. In addition, parents who have a tertiary level of education usually have all the necessary resources to be successful in dealing with educational systems [22].

In this regard, parents from low education backgrounds may show little confidence in their ability to assist in academic activities, especially where they are complicated with complex literacy and numeracy aspects [23]. This means that such parents will rely heavily on the teacher or the entire support system. In this case, it shows the way educational benefits are passed down through generations, where children of highly educated parents tend to be academically successful due to constant guidance, motivation, and support [35].

The distribution of parents' education in Wolaita Zone presents both opportunities and challenges in terms of enhancing students' academic achievements. The predominance of parents with a degree in education presents a promising ground for educational cooperation and advocacy. These kinds of parents may become the models of education, volunteers, and advisory committees for schools. They have the potential to be actively engaged in homework assistance, performance monitoring, and motivational support of value.

Nevertheless, there is a need for differentiation in the strategy to engage a small but equally important number of parents who have only secondary or junior secondary education (about 14%). Such parents might have some challenges, such as confidence issues, lack of time, or lack of understanding of the current curriculum. In this case, schools should develop capacity development programs, including literacy training for parents, mentoring from peers, and efficient means of communication to ensure inclusivity and effective parental involvement. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the level of education of parents impacts both the extent and quality of their involvement in their children's learning process.

Table 6
Respondents' Occupational Composition

Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teaching	40	30.3	30.3	30.3
Other government sector employee	40	30.3	30.3	60.6
Private business	32	24.2	24.2	84.8
NGO employee	4	3.0	3.0	87.9
Religious leader	4	3.0	3.0	90.9
Housewife	12	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	—

Table 7
Expected Parental Support Patterns by Occupational Type

Occupation Category	Typical Parental Support Pattern	Practical Indicators
Teaching	High academic involvement due to educational awareness often provides direct academic support and strong communication with schools.	Frequency of homework help, parent–teacher collaboration, participation in school meetings.
Other government employees	Moderate involvement: provide guidance, structure, and expectations, though time constraints may limit direct supervision.	Track school visits frequently, discussions about performance, and monitor assignments.
Private business	Variable involvement may offer financial and material support but less direct academic supervision due to time demands.	Measure contributions to learning materials, support for private tutoring, and school communication.
NGO employees	Typically, high awareness and advocacy-oriented; promote educational equity, though limited time due to workload.	Measure mentoring behaviour, exposure to educational programs, and moral encouragement.
Religious leaders	Emphasise moral and ethical guidance, contributing to students' discipline and value formation more than direct academic help.	Measure moral guidance, character formation support, and student discipline.
Housewives	Often offer consistent home-based academic and emotional support; strong involvement in homework supervision and communication with teachers.	Measure time devoted to homework help, emotional encouragement, and attendance at school meetings.

According to the occupational distribution, 60.6% of parents are employed as either teachers or other members of the government sector, implying the presence of a relatively larger number of educated and employed parents in the community. On the other hand, 24.2% of the parents are private businessmen,

and the rest of the parents consist of housewives (9.1%), religious leaders (3%), and NGO employees (3%). The above distribution implies that there is socio-economic diversity of the parents in the Wolaita Zone, which is important in identifying the variations in the degree of involvement in their children's education.

Empirical studies have found parental occupation and socioeconomic status to be important determinants of educational engagement and performance [13, 26]. Parents working in the education profession, such as teachers, are usually in a position where they can help their kids adjust well and effectively communicate with the school due to their understanding of what the school expects [22]. On the other hand, parents who are involved in private businesses and informal sector occupations can use money and other material resources to make up for the lack of academic assistance they may offer their children [3].

However, parents who engage in private business and government administration frequently suffer from participation fatigue, which results in diminished capacity to participate in school activities even when they are motivated [36]. In contrast, parents who are housewives have little economic power, but they always show consistent support at home and help increase their children's emotional and learning stability, particularly at secondary levels [11].

In Wolaita Zone, the occupational nature of parents serves as the critical determinant in the manner of parental support to their children in education. Since most parents belong to professions like teachers and other government professions, it creates a good opportunity for school-community collaboration because such parents can be literate and know about the curriculum requirements. But the presence of 24.2% of parents in private business and 9.1% in the category of housewives is significant in its own way.

Any attempt at improving student achievement through better parental participation requires that the school leadership come up with tailored strategies for engaging with the parents based on their different occupations. In summary, awareness of the occupational diversity makes it possible for the educators and policy makers in the Wolaita Zone to formulate contextual and inclusive parental involvement schemes that leverage the strengths of each occupation.

The results show that parental socio-demographic and socio-economic variables play a key role in shaping parental involvement, the parent-school partnership, and academic performance of students. Educated and younger parents are more involved in school activities; however, older parents only offer emotional and moral support to build resilience and dedication in students in academics. The fathers still constitute a minority group, which leads to the imbalance of parental involvement. Educational status of parents impacts the nature of involvement, and occupation affects the kind of support. The results point towards the necessity for differentiated and specific school approaches towards parents depending on their age, education, gender, and occupation.

Forms of Parental Engagement in Children's Secondary Education

Results of the thematic analysis indicated that the perception of parental involvement is a multi-faceted activity not limited to financial contribution but also includes regular academic, emotional, communication, and collaborative interaction with schools. The analysis generated five interlinked themes, which included: (1) Parental support at home, (2) Participation at school, (3) Communication between parents and teachers, (4) Provision of educational resources, and (5) Monitoring of students' education and behaviour. All these themes together show how students' success in studies hinges on cooperation among parents, schools, and society.

Theme 1: Home-based Parental Support

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the analysed data is the crucial role that parents play in the creation of positive learning environments at home. The participants frequently referred to the parents as the main facilitators who guide their children's everyday learning process through motivation, mentoring, supervision, and creation of favourable conditions for studying. Parents were seen not only as providers of food but also as those people who need to foster good study habits in their children and motivate them constantly throughout their lives.

It is worth mentioning that many of the participants pointed to the significance of creating study rooms for children, minimising household chores that interfere with studies, fostering proper study schedules, and helping children with homework. For instance, P3 noted that parents should "create study rooms for children and provide teaching materials such as reference books and smart phones," while P30 indicated the need to help children "use their time properly" and concentrate on early education. The same idea was expressed by P133, who said that parents should "create proper conditions for studying at home, supervise homework and assignments, and motivate children to read."

Emotional encouragement was stated as an important component that affects the motivation and persistence of the students. For instance, P14 suggested that parents must "provide advice and encouragement for children to attend classes regularly," while P52 stated that parents must motivate their children to take part in extracurricular activities, along with supporting the academic and personal development of their children. In addition, P65 claimed that he motivates his children to read books, do their homework and aim at getting into university. Thus, all the above-mentioned narratives point to the understanding that participants considered parental involvement as an ongoing process of motivation, guidance, and encouragement of children.

The results obtained in this research showed that parental support provided at home increases the level of self-regulation, motivation to learn, and resilience of the students. Implicitly, participants understood that positive parental expectations and constant educational support create good studying habits that are needed for successful academic achievements and preparation for university entrance exams. The above-mentioned results coincide with the theory of Epstein about the role of parental support for successful student learning [13]. Moreover, according to [22], parents' encouragement and educational support positively affect children's motivation and achievements.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics of Parental Involvement at Home in Support and Follow-Up

No.	Items	N	Mean	St. Dev.
1	Parents create a suitable study space for their children at home.	132	3.70	1.062
2	Parents follow up with their children by doing homework regularly.	132	3.63	1.080
3	Parents encourage their children to read or study daily.	132	3.78	1.058
4	Parents discuss school subjects with their children regularly.	130	3.40	1.125
5	Parents reduce the workload on their child at home to study their lessons.	132	3.49	1.136
6	Parents provide the necessary educational materials for their children.	132	3.67	1.137
7	Parents celebrate academic achievements with their children at home.	132	3.45	1.100
8	Parents follow up on their students' academic achievement and progress regularly.	132	3.57	1.079
9	Schools encourage parents to volunteer for school activities.	132	3.53	1.052
10	Schools recognise parent volunteers with awards.	132	3.46	1.073
Overall Mean		—	3.55	—

With an average rating of 3.55, there is an indication that there is a moderate degree of parental participation in the education of secondary school students in the homes in Wolaita zone. From the results, the highest item rated is "Parents encourage their children to read/study every day" (M = 3.78), implying that motivational encouragement from parents is quite high in homes. Also, providing a suitable study environment (M = 3.70) and educational materials (M = 3.67) shows material forms of participation that are very critical for academic achievement.

On the other hand, items like discussion about the topics taught in schools every day (M = 3.40) and celebrating when their children do well academically (M = 3.45) receive relatively low average ratings, indicating that although parents are providing basic involvement, they are not involved in intellectual and psychological reinforcement of academic performance.

However, the studies conducted internationally indicate that the engagement of parents in home-based activities, such as supervision of homework, reading together, and having high expectations for their children, is strongly correlated with their academic success [25, 43]. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that the quality of communication plays a more significant role than the quantity. The research conducted by [7] shows that parents who actively participate in academic conversations with children, have high

aspirations, and motivate them emotionally, contribute to the self-regulation and academic resilience of the latter.

The analysis conducted in Wolaita Zone demonstrates that parents demonstrate great commitment to their children's education through motivational and instrumental support as well as homework supervision. Nonetheless, there is a need to extend home-based involvement from homework supervision to academic socialisation to show how education is related to future life goals. In addition, partnerships between schools and homes could be made better by giving recognition to the parents' efforts and collaborative planning towards better performance of students. The findings in this study reveal that enhancing the quality of parental involvement in the homes rather than the number of such involvements greatly improves student motivation and academic performance within the secondary schools in Wolaita Zone.

Qualitative and quantitative results show that parental involvement is a multidimensional and interactive process leading to improved learning experiences of students. Qualitative research findings illustrate that participants believe parental involvement includes the provision of home-based support academically and emotionally; involvement in school activities; good communication between home and school; provision of learning materials; and monitoring students' progress both academically and behaviorally. They believe that the success of the learners is a joint effort of parents, teachers, school administration and communities at large. Likewise, quantitative results indicate that parents in the Wolaita Zone have been playing active roles in offering motivational and instrumental support, as well as homework supervision, with the quality of involvement having more impact on students' motivation and learning outcomes than the frequency of such involvement. However, both qualitative and quantitative results point out that there is a need for improvement in terms of academic socialisation through discussion of learning goals and career plans, while the schools should develop family-school partnerships by recognising parental efforts and working together to improve students' performance.

Theme 2: School-based Participation

The second significant theme revolved around the actual involvement of parents in the operations of schools and decision-making processes. The participants consistently indicated that parental involvement goes beyond the support of children in their homes but should also include involvement in school operations, meetings, school programmes, and educational activities.

Many respondents identified the presence at parent-teacher meetings as a key element in the process of good parental involvement. For instance, P24 suggested attending "parent-teacher and student meetings" and making input on policies through stakeholder meetings. Similarly, P58 noted "parental meetings" as one of the keyways of helping the students, while P61 mentioned that he was always present in meetings in schools and made his children work hard. Finally, P76 mentioned that as a parent-teacher association member, he would make suggestions regarding better performance of schools.

Furthermore, participants viewed school participation as an avenue to participate in school expansion and maintenance. For instance, P10 stressed the development and maintenance of the infrastructure in schools, while P71 proposed making financial contributions and attending school opening ceremonies. Also, P127 held that parents' ought to assist schools in addressing their inadequacies of materials and funding whenever necessary.

Apart from attending the school functions, participants viewed parental participation as an effort to share responsibility in improving the quality of education. P132 noted that "building relationships and cooperation between parents, teachers and students is very important for the improvement of the school system and teaching/learning process."

The qualitative results show that the respondents saw schools as a community that requires the active involvement of the parents in the learning process instead of just being spectators. This ensures that there is increased responsibility, an increased level of trust, and joint ownership of the success of the learners.

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics of Direct Parental Involvement in School Activities

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. De
1	Parents actively participate in different school meetings when informed.	132	3.65	1.041
2	Parents actively attend school events like opening days, fundraising, and parent–teacher conferences.	132	3.59	1.055
3	Parents observe the suitability of the school environment during visits.	132	3.60	0.987
4	Parents provide financial and non-financial support for their schools.	131	3.69	1.129
5	Parents communicate regularly with teachers about their children's academic progress.	132	3.78	4.611*
6	Schools provide information on how parents can get involved.	130	3.52	1.065
7	Schools invite parents to participate in decision-making processes.	131	3.67	1.106
8	Schools discuss with parents to make the school environment conducive.	130	3.68	0.925
9	Schools inform parents on how to support their children's learning at home.	132	3.74	0.978
10	Schools consult parents to improve the school environment.	132	4.11	3.642*
Overall Mean		—	3.73	—

The overall mean score of 3.73 is indicative of a moderate to high degree of direct involvement of parents in school-related activities in Wolaita Zone. The highest mean score (4.11) is associated with schools consulting parents to create a conducive school environment, implying that many schools regard parents as partners in creating a good learning environment. Similarly, the mean scores for parents' constant communication with teachers ($M = 3.78$) and parents' financial and non-financial support ($M = 3.69$) show the existence of a good partnership culture between the home and school.

However, aspects like providing information about how parents can be involved ($M = 3.52$) and attendance at general school events ($M = 3.59$) have comparatively low scores, indicating deficiencies in the mechanisms of institutional efforts in reaching out to parents. The findings are consistent with empirical evidence which states that schools which communicate effectively with parents through invitations and clarifying role expectations, offering flexible opportunities for involvement and valuing parent contribution are likely to attract more involvement [13, 17].

Further research by [25] and Wilder [43] suggests that there is a positive correlation between direct parental involvement in school activities and student academic success, motivation, and discipline when the level of involvement is collaborative, not intrusive. According to [22], parent efficacy, the perception of their ability to make significant contributions in educating their children, is improved by school invitation and feedback opportunities.

The findings of a high level of involvement in terms of improving the learning environment, as well as financial contributions, are an indication of collectivism culture where community members take part in the development of the school. However, involvement in pedagogic activities or decision-making activities is not institutionalised. This suggests that there is a need for schools to diversify their ways of involving parents in the process by using different platforms, including digital networks and PTAs, so that they can give reports as well as receive feedback from the parents. Capacity building exercises will help those parents who are not educated enough to be involved in decision-making, as well as the learning process in schools. Therefore, the results highlight the significance of the parents' direct involvement as an ecological element that determines the success or failure of the schooling process.

The results of both the qualitative and quantitative research prove that parent participation is a collaborative effort, which goes beyond participation in school events by involving shared efforts in terms of improvement of educational quality and performance of the learners. As per the qualitative data, it was found that the participants perceive parents to be collaborative partners, who, together with teachers, school administrators and students, collaborate to improve the teaching-learning process through proper communication, trust and shared ownership of educational outcomes. This notion is in line with the partnership theory of Epstein, which stresses family-school collaboration. Likewise, the results of the quantitative analysis reveal that the parents from the Wolaita Zone have relatively higher involvement in terms of improving the school environment and financing of education, owing to the collectivist nature of their community. But the results of both the analyses highlight the issue that the

involvement of parents in pedagogical activities and decision-making in the schools is limited due to the inadequacy of the communication process in an institutionalised form.

Theme 3: Parent–Teacher Communication

Some other important themes included those related to the theme of constant communication between parents and teachers. Constant communication is possible only because it helps both sides to monitor the process of studying by the students and to find solutions to difficulties that may come up during this process.

Moreover, many of the respondents explicitly stated communication as one of the most important responsibilities of the parents. For example, P5 stated that "Parents have to communicate with teachers about academic progress." And P20 said, "Parents have to communicate with teachers concerning the academic progress of their children, while schools have to communicate with parents about the academic progress of the students and what they can do to help."

Many respondents also pointed to the fact that communication should be reciprocal and that there should be communication between schools and families. P26 advised frequent communication between parents and teachers. On the other hand, P66 suggested continuous communication concerning the academic success of the students. And similarly, P115 pointed to the importance of parent-teacher meetings for discussing the progress of the students.

The above answers indicate that the participants saw communication not only as a process of exchanging information but as a continuous partnership marked by mutual trust, openness, and mutual responsibility for education. Proper communication enables parents and schools to share academic issues promptly and make an intervention at the right time. Many of the participants also noted that communication is a two-way process and hence needs to be mutual in nature among schools and families. P26 emphasised the need for continuous communication between parents and teachers, while P66 proposed the need for continuous communication regarding the performance of students at school. Conversely, P115 noted that parent-teacher meetings help in discussing the performance, problems, and possible solutions related to students. In such a partnership, parents get to know the strengths and weaknesses of their children, while the teachers get to know the home situation of the students.

The results of the current study are based on the parental involvement model created by [22]. According to the model, effective communication between schools and families contributes to better collaborative problem-solving and leads to improved educational achievements of the learners. Additionally, the results coincide with those obtained by [19] that parents recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their children and allow teachers to comprehend the background of learners at home that could affect academic success.

Theme 4: Provision of Learning Resources

Availability of educational resources has always been seen by participants as an obvious form of parental involvement. Participants stated that learning can only be effective if there are educational resources like textbooks, reference materials, libraries, labs, internet facilities, and other educational materials present in the process of education.

Many participants stressed the parents' role in making the educational materials available. P12 mentioned that educational materials should be provided so that students can learn, while P17 made it clear that textbooks and classroom educational materials should be made available. The same view was held by P40, who stated that educational resources should be available along with controlling students' misbehaviour. According to P69, "preparation of a well-stocked library containing different reference books will increase students' interest in reading and improve their performance."

Schools were also held responsible by participants for making educational resources available. As per P57, the school's library should remain open 24 hours, and new books should be purchased. P86 identified labs, libraries, and internet rooms as important elements of teaching and learning.

The analysis demonstrates that participants considered educational resources as enabling conditions for academic success rather than supplementary support. Respondents frequently linked resource availability with improved examination performance, greater independent learning, and increased student motivation. These findings reinforce [40]'s position that equitable access to quality learning resources remains a prerequisite for educational excellence and improved student outcomes.

Theme 5: Monitoring Students' Learning and Behaviour

The last theme revolved around the duty of the parents in monitoring the academic progress, attendance, discipline, and behavioural development of the students always. Monitoring was regarded by the participants as a way of preventing problems before they arise and keeping the students motivated to learn.

Many people pointed out the need for monitoring the academic performance of the students at home and in schools. For instance, P68 asserted that there is a need for parents to "control their children at home and provide them with reading materials." On the other hand, P77 suggested participation in the school activities coupled with supporting the students at home, while P85 mentioned monitoring of the school environment, communicating with teachers, and offering financial and nonfinancial support.

Monitoring the behaviours of the students was another area of interest as far as parental participation is concerned. P40 noted that parents should reduce the misbehaviour of the students through proper support, while P64 focused on discussing discipline matters with schools. In turn, P98 just mentioned "guiding and consulting the students."

Monitoring is seen as being associated with increased responsibility, enhanced study behaviour, less absenteeism, and increased positive behaviour. The parents who would monitor the homework, attendance, and learning of their children were seen to assist students in focusing on their academic

tasks without engaging in any negative behaviours that would make it difficult for them to succeed in their examinations.

The results show that the participants did not see monitoring as a way of controlling their children but rather as a way of showing concern, responsibility, and commitment from the parents towards academic success. This understanding supports the evidence provided by [19] regarding parental expectations, monitoring, and academic supervision.

In all five themes, the participants consistently see parental involvement as an integral process whereby the parent is involved through offering support at home, actively participating in school activities, communicating effectively, providing resources, and monitoring the academic and behavioural performance of the learners. Unlike assigning the task entirely to the school or family members, the participants saw it as a shared responsibility between the parents, teachers, administrators in the school, and other members of the community in ensuring learner success. Overall, from the analysis, the concept of parental involvement goes beyond the execution of one activity, but it involves forming partnerships to develop supportive learning environments both in the family and school contexts.

Contextual Factors that Facilitate or Hinder the Effectiveness of Parental Engagement in Education

It was found through the thematic analysis that the involvement of the parents was influenced by many interrelated socio-economic, institutional, cultural, and policy-oriented variables. Although the respondents clearly identified the significance of parental involvement in enhancing educational outcomes of the students, it was also clear to them that there are many impediments that prevent parents from becoming involved in the education of their children. There were six prominent themes identified in the thematic analysis, including (1) Economic barriers, (2) School-based barriers, (3) Barriers at the student level, (4) Commitment of teachers, (5) Cultural variables, and (6) Policy/governance related variables.

Theme 1: Economic Constraints and graduates' unemployment

Poverty was the main barrier affecting parental involvement. The participants stated that poor economic status, such as unemployment and poor family incomes, limits the ability of the parents to buy educational materials, join activities in the schools, and create a learning environment at home. Such results indicate that parental involvement is associated with the socio-economic status of families.

Financial constraints were viewed as factors affecting the educational opportunities of the learners. For example, P57 indicated that "many parents cannot afford all things needed by their children for education," while P59 cited poverty as one of the major barriers that affect parental involvement, where parents in urban areas tend to be more involved in the education of the learners compared to those in rural areas. In addition, P60 noted that "poverty is the major problem in our education system since it takes away both parents' and students' commitment to education." In the same light, P69 stated that

parents find it difficult to afford reference books or reading rooms for their children because of economic problems.

Unemployment was also seen as a key variable that decreased the educational motivation of learners. As indicated by P58, many young students had stopped putting effort into their education due to the discouragement they faced when observing that, despite graduating from university, their older siblings were still unemployed. This view was echoed by P110, P113, and P122, who noted that youth unemployment affected the self-confidence of parents regarding the benefits of education and reduced the students' interest in learning.

In conclusion, parental involvement in education is largely shaped by the socioeconomic conditions and graduate unemployment under which families operate. These ideas have been reiterated in various studies by, for example, [22], who assert that socioeconomic status significantly impacts the extent and nature of parental involvement in education. Also, as indicated by [40], economic inequality continues to be one of the most robust predictors of inequality in parental engagement and achievement.

Theme 2: School-related Barriers

The participants mentioned several institutional barriers in schools that discourage parental participation. Such barriers include lack of educational materials, lack of good school leadership, poor learning conditions, poor communication processes, poor implementation of school rules, and inadequate avenues for parents to participate in school matters.

Several participants noted the lack of learning materials as one of the key institutional barriers. P56 said that most secondary schools, especially those in remote areas, lack competent teachers and adequate educational materials. In the same line, P63 pointed out that school materials are lacking and much needs to be done. P98 and P102 also noted a lack of textbooks and teaching materials as key barriers.

Further, the participants were worried about school leadership and management. According to P64, there is a need for quality and honest school leaders to help in mobilising parental engagement in schools, while P75 claimed that the schools do not apply effective teaching methods that can help students to pass their examinations. In the same way, according to P55, government secondary schools have failed to effectively manage the teaching and learning process, hence undermining parental confidence in schools.

Communication and institutional openness were other major barriers identified by the participants. According to P117, there is a lack of effective two-way communication between schools and parents, while according to P118, there is a lack of an effective communication system that does not allow collaborative problem solving. Therefore, the participants argue that schools should be more responsive and open to increasing parental involvement.

The results above show that parental involvement is influenced not only by parents' willingness but also by the institutional capacity of schools to develop inclusive partnerships with families. According to [13],

schools play a critical role in providing a welcoming environment that would facilitate parental involvement.

Theme 3: Student-related Barriers

An additional recurring theme was the issue of problems coming from students themselves. Participants stressed that low motivation, bad study practices, absenteeism, behavioural problems, lack of educational goals, and low commitment to learning undermine the impact of parental participation.

Many participants singled out decreasing student motivation. According to P63, many students have no definite educational goals; hence, they do not get enough motivation from their parents. The same idea is reflected in P73's comment that many students waste too much time on playing, show poor time management skills, and seldom have enough time to study. Similarly, P81 just pointed to the fact that students put "less effort into learning."

Participants stressed issues connected with attendance and discipline. According to P62, poor student attendance was seen as the key problem impacting academic success, while according to P75, irregular class attendance was one of the most urgent problems in education at secondary schools. P49 pointed out students' unwillingness to attend school regularly.

Remarkably, student-related barriers were commonly perceived by participants as interrelated with family and school factors and not just blamed on students themselves. Some respondents noted that low parental supervision, insufficient teacher encouragement, and negative school atmosphere are some of the factors responsible for decreasing the motivation and behaviour of students.

This evidence implies that a successful intervention should take care not only of students' academic achievement but also provide motivation and behavioural support. Indeed, this point of view is consistent with [19]'s claim regarding the interrelatedness of family support, effectiveness of schools, and learners' engagement.

Theme 4: Teacher Commitment and Accountability

Teachers' dedication was cited by all the participants as one of the crucial facilitators of parental involvement and academic success of the children. According to the participants, dedicated and accountable teachers inspire greater parental involvement and cooperation, while incompetent teachers do not motivate parents to participate.

Some participants focused on the issue of teacher accountability. Thus, P72 suggested that teachers' classroom performance should be continuously assessed to ensure high-quality education. In addition, P75 claimed that poor pedagogical skills directly influence the low academic performance of students. P98 advised that schools should concentrate on the learning results of students and on teachers' dedication to teaching.

Collaboration between teachers and parents was another aspect which was emphasised by several participants. Specifically, P77 noted the necessity of developing positive teacher-parent relationships, while P117 suggested that teachers should have constant communication with parents concerning the progress of students in their studies. In turn, P123 stated the need for closer collaboration between parents and teachers in terms of solving academic and behavioural problems of children.

It is therefore clear that the participants considered teachers to be important partners in promoting parental involvement instead of just teaching in class. These results confirm [19]'s claim that the effectiveness of teachers and professional partnerships has a significant impact on the education of the students.

Theme 5: Cultural Influences

Several perspectives were given by the participants concerning the significance of culture and societal values about parent involvement. While some participants believe that Wolaita cultural values strongly support the significance of education, other participants thought that the changes experienced socially and economically have rendered the traditional educational values irrelevant. Many positive remarks were made with respect to the contributions of culture. For example, participant P57 believes that parents should pass down cultural values to their children not only for educational reasons but in general. The educational culture of Wolaita is considered by participant P63 to be "progressive and motivating" and by P84 to simply encourage education.

Additional participants stated that education has always been viewed by people as the greatest heritage that one's parents can leave behind for his/her children. P103, P106, P108, and P111 agreed that Wolaita people usually consider the education of their children as a family investment which will serve the next generations. Nonetheless, participants indicated a change in cultural views about education. P58 mentioned that good attitudes towards education had been deteriorating since most graduates find themselves unemployed after graduation. In a similar vein, P75 mentioned that some members of communities doubt the usefulness of education since unemployed graduates are abundant.

The divergent perspectives reveal that culture can be a facilitating and restraining influence depending on the socio-economic environment. In summary, the respondents felt that even though cultural traditions continued to promote education, economics had become an important consideration in terms of investing in education.

Theme 6: Policy and Governance Issues

The last theme was concerned with the impact of education policies, leadership, and governance on parents' involvement. The participants felt that there is a need to have supportive educational policies and good leadership to foster parents' involvement. Several participants indicated that it was necessary to have government support. Respondent P56 explained that the Wolaita Zone Education Office had

done different initiatives to change the deteriorating educational quality, while respondent P62 suggested the need for campaigning to involve parents in schools.

On the other hand, the participants identified weaknesses in the governance of the education sector. P70 identified that the educational policies were usually shaped based on political decisions rather than professional education standards in terms of student promotion policies. In addition, P71 noted the importance of timely payment of teachers' salaries as well as the provision of educational materials for better quality of education. Therefore, the involvement of the parents was seen as a governance issue that would involve coordination of efforts between the schools, education office, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Good educational leadership was regarded as necessary for establishing mechanisms for involving the parents and improving the schools.

Regarding contextual factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of parental engagement in education, the results clearly indicate that good parental involvement is a combination of several factors, including economics, institutions, education, culture, and governance. Whereas the parents' role in contributing to their children's academic achievement was seen to be constant by all the participants, the fact that willingness alone cannot change the structural challenges, including poverty, lack of employment, lack of adequate schooling, lack of good institutional leadership, lack of teacher commitment and inconsistency in education policy, was not ignored. On the other hand, good cultural values, cooperation in schools, teacher commitment, and good governance were seen as some of the key determinants for effective parental participation.

Strategies Participants Recommended for Strengthening Parental Involvement in Schooling

From the thematic analysis, it was found that participants suggested a wide variety of practical measures which would help to increase the involvement of the parents as well as improve the academic performance of the students in secondary schools. The respondents were not inclined towards holding a single party responsible but suggested collaborative measures to make sure that involvement of the parents takes place. A total of eight interrelated themes emerged from the thematic analysis as follows: (1) Improving school-home partnership; (2) Tutorial programs; (3) Teacher's accountability; (4) Guidance & Counselling; (5) Learning resources; (6) Community involvement; (7) Library improvement; and (8) Leadership & School Management.

Theme 1: Strengthening School–Home Partnerships

One of the major recommendations included enhancing collaborative partnerships among schools and families. The respondents continually stressed that successful parental involvement requires constant communication, a decision-making process, and joint responsibility from parents and schools. Instead of involving parents in meetings only occasionally, participants recommend involving parents constantly during the whole period of students' education.

Participants recommended organising regular meetings between parents and schools and keeping constant communication about students' performance. For instance, participant P48 suggested organising constant meetings between parents and schools to talk about educational matters and help females in education. Participant P53 advised keeping good communication with children at school and at home, and encouraged schools to involve parents in the educational process by giving them appropriate support. Moreover, participant P77 stressed the need for parents' participation in school meetings and constant communication with teachers about students' performance.

It was also noted that shared responsibility is another key feature of school-home partnership. Participant P114 suggested the inclusion of respected community leaders and elders in educational programs to ensure their success, while participant P115 believed that active involvement in parent-teacher associations fosters a cooperative atmosphere leading to children's academic success. Thus, these answers reflect the fact that participants see parental involvement as a partnership based on mutual trust, mutual respect, and educational responsibility rather than just the occasional presence of parents in school activities. As seen from the research results, the development of partnerships leads to improved communication and increased parental commitment, which in turn affects students' academic performance positively.

Theme 2: Tutorial Programmes

One other common strategy that the participants offered is the introduction of tutorial and remedial education programmes. The respondents constantly mentioned that there is a need to organise more tutorial classes apart from the normal classroom instructions so that the students can improve their knowledge of subjects and get prepared for the national Grade 12 exams. Tutorial classes were specifically mentioned by some of the participants. For example, participant P48 said that there is a need to organise tutorial classes and create conducive reading environments for the students. Also, participant P73 proposed organising tutorial classes for the struggling students, together with model tests to test their performance.

The other point brought out by the respondents was that the tutorial programs must be systematic and responsive to the needs of the learners. For instance, P103 suggested ensuring that tutorial sessions were facilitated while assessing the studying behaviours of the students. On the other hand, P113 suggested the incorporation of tutorial programs with remedial teaching for academically weaker learners. Similarly, P122 suggested the provision of special instructions to learners and professional development to the tutors. These responses show that the respondents viewed tutorial programs as useful tools for bridging learning gaps, reinforcing classroom instructions, and improving students' self-confidence ahead of the national exams.

Theme 3: Teacher Accountability

Teacher accountability was perceived by respondents as one of the major strategies to improve educational standards and increase the confidence of parents in the education sector. It is clear from the

responses that teachers should exhibit professionalism, high-quality teaching, and regular monitoring of students' learning status. Many respondents advised that teacher performance should be evaluated continually. For instance, P72 advised that teachers should be evaluated continually on their teaching competence and that more competent teachers be identified when required. Also, P75 said that teachers should be appreciated based on how well they teach in class.

Some participants, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of mutual accountability between teachers and parents. While P117 suggested that teachers needed to observe classroom engagement and give feedback about their performance to parents, P118 recommended that the focus should be on the extent to which the teachers were accountable for the delivery of good instruction. P123 emphasised the need for evidence-based teaching methods and assessments to ensure improved performance among the learners. The above results reveal that the participants perceived teacher accountability not as punitive supervision, but rather as professional accountability that includes good instruction, collaboration with parents, and dedication to the learners.

Theme 4: Guidance and Counselling

Another significant theme that came up was the need for guidance and counselling. The participants indicated that the need for ongoing academic, psychological and career guidance was required by the students to create good learning attitudes and motivation. The need for counselling services, among other interventions, was stressed by some of the respondents. For example, P66 stated that many students needed guidance and counselling to enhance their psychological status and stability while learning. The same suggestion was made by P73, who felt that counselling services should be offered in addition to time and study guidance.

Guidance was perceived by participants to go beyond counselling as well. P67 proposed assisting students in making their education plans and developing career ambitions, whereas P120 advised on counselling students in terms of not getting distracted by gambling and too many social activities. The above suggestions indicate that participants viewed counselling as one of the key preventative approaches for the development of both academic and personal success of students. The results show that guidance and counselling programs have a positive impact on students' resilience, motivation, educational aspirations, and mental health and improve the effectiveness of parental engagement in students' education.

Theme 5: Learning Resources

Access to educational resources was among the common suggestions from the participants for enhancing performance and increasing involvement of parents in school activities. The participants stressed the need for cooperation between parents and schools in ensuring that children have enough learning resources and conducive environments to learn. Participants noted some of the necessary educational resources, such as textbooks, references, laboratories and computers. Participant P61 suggested that the government should ensure that there are enough reference books and computers at

school. Participant P75 further suggested that there is a need to ensure that students get equal access to textbooks, references, computers, and other learning facilities in the schools.

Integration of educational technology into classroom instruction was another key point brought up by the participants. P58 suggested combining traditional instructional practices with technology, while P116 stressed the use of educational technology to boost learner engagement and instruction. It is clear from the above that the participants saw educational resources as crucial components of quality education and not just educational inputs. Educational resource availability was seen as an important means of increasing parental confidence, teaching quality, and learner performance.

Theme 6: Community Participation

Most of the participants suggested that there should be an increase in community participation to foster collective ownership of the process of improving education. Participants believed education was not the responsibility of schools and parents alone; it needed to be made the collective responsibility of the entire community. Some of the participants suggested community education campaigns and joint ventures. For instance, participant P52 suggested educational campaigns, socialising activities, and cultural events which motivate community members towards education. Similarly, P114 suggested community leaders and elders who would promote educational campaigns and increase the participation of families in education.

Financial and material support from the community was also among the key issues raised by the participants. The first participant, P117, mentioned the need for contributions from the community towards the growth of the school, while P118 called for the involvement of the public towards financial support to schools. In addition, P110 spoke about fundraising mechanisms and the cooperation of stakeholders to enhance education quality. From these findings, it is evident that the participants saw the involvement of the community as one of the ways of enhancing social accountability.

Theme 7: Library Improvement

Enhancing library services in schools was identified as yet another significant recommendation to improve the students' learning process. Participants continually stressed that library services should be developed into learning centres that will provide students with educational resources and a good reading atmosphere. Some of the participants advised developing library services. For example, P57 recommended increasing library opening time and making up-to-date reference books available in the libraries. Similarly, P58 suggested combining better library services with educational technology and tutorial classes to enhance the students' learning. P101 recommended developing library services together with tutorial classes and other academic support services.

The participants described the library from the students' perspectives as well. Thus, P104 proposed taking students to libraries to develop their habit of independent reading, while P109 recommended using library services along with tutorial classes and continuous communication between schools and

parents. All the above recommendations show that the participants considered the library not only as a place where books are stored but also as an essential part of the educational process that develops independent learning skills, critical thinking, and exam readiness.

Theme 8: Leadership and School Management

The last theme addressed the significance of good educational leadership and proper school management in enhancing the involvement of parents in improving school performance. It was the belief of participants that dedicated school leaders set the stage for cooperation, responsibility, and constant improvement of the school. Some respondents suggested enhanced accountability of school leaders. P64 indicated the need for competent and trustworthy school leaders who can generate community support and organise fundraising activities. In the same way, P76 advised ensuring accountability of school leaders through supervision and institutional assistance. P98 also stressed the need for schools to concentrate on learning outcomes through good management.

Systematic planning and monitoring were also suggested by the participants. Participant P72 suggested that there should be quarterly planning and evaluation of the progress of the students in education within the school community. Meanwhile, the participant P106 suggested conducting systematic experience-sharing programmes along with the feedback system, where the exemplary parents could be rewarded. It means that the participants see leadership as a precondition for implementing any other strategies for improving education. Effective school leadership is believed to be a prerequisite for organising participation of stakeholders in the process, controlling the educational resources, promoting accountability of teachers, and parental engagement in the process.

The results have shown that the participants recommended holistic and cooperative solutions for promoting the involvement of parents and enhancing the performance of secondary schools. Instead of suggesting isolated solutions, the respondents stressed holistic and cooperative solutions that can strengthen parent-school collaborations, develop tutorial services, make teachers accountable, offer guidance and counselling services, offer learning resources, involve the community, enhance library services, and promote educational leadership. It is clear from these suggestions that the participants recognised that it is impossible to enhance students' academic performances without the cooperation of parents, teachers, school management, the community, and government institutions.

8. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions of the study have been presented based on the research questions that have guided this study. The first one is concerned with how demographic and socio-economic variables of parents, such as their age, gender, education, and occupation, affect parental engagement, parent-school relationships and academic performance of the children. The second question refers to the identification of perceptions of the participants regarding the types of parental engagement which are important for achieving better academic results by the students, as well as their successful participation in the Grade 12 entrance examination. The third issue has to do with the contextual factors which may

contribute to or prevent effective parental engagement in secondary schools of the Wolaita Zone. The fourth one is about the suggestions participants forwarded to improve the relationship between the schools, the parents and the wider community to enhance students' academic achievements.

Parental Socio-Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics and Their Influences on Parents' Engagement Patterns

These results confirm the impact of socio-demographic and socio-economic status of the parents on the form and intensity of parental engagement, cooperation between parents and the school, as well as students' academic performance. Younger and better educated parents showed a higher level of participation in school-related activities like attending meetings, contacting teachers, checking students' academic progress and engaging in school decision-making processes. This result confirms previous research findings according to which the education level of parents increases their confidence, communication skills and ability to engage in the learning process of their children [21, 13]. Better-educated parents understand school requirements better and actively take part in activities aimed at improving educational results [11].

In fact, the role of more mature parents was associated with providing encouragement and moral guidance to their children, along with fostering discipline and perseverance. While their contribution was not within the bounds of the classroom, participants noted the significance of such guidance for the growth of students' resilience and motivation to learn. This result is consistent with [13]'s theory that highlights parenting efforts and the creation of supportive environments at home as crucial components of family-school collaboration.

In addition to that, it has been found that there is an imbalance of gender in the involvement of parents, whereby mothers are seen to be more involved in school activities than fathers. The findings indicate that fathers are less present in school-related activities such as follow-up on children's academics and communication with teachers. This trend has been seen not only in Africa but internationally as well, whereby mothers are more involved in educating children, whereas fathers are less involved because of cultural and professional reasons [40, 30].

Parents' occupations were also related to the type of help they gave. Those parents who had jobs in professions and formal sectors were in a position to offer guidance in academics, learning materials, and constant communication with the school, but those who practised agriculture, labour, and informal jobs found it difficult to be involved because of the time factor, even though they showed willingness towards helping in the education of their children. This is in line with ecological approaches which suggest that parents' involvement is a function of family resources and occupation and not simply willingness [6, 21].

These findings have significant consequences for educational leadership and management practices within schools. In accordance with Epstein's Model of School-Family-Community Partnerships [13], school administrators must not use a blanket approach to parent participation. Instead, they must

develop differentiated strategies to meet the diverse demographic and socio-economic characteristics of parents. For instance, young and educated parents can be involved in school administration, academic supervision and volunteering, while senior parents can be acknowledged for their invaluable contribution in offering emotional and moral support to children at home.

Moreover, school leaders need to adopt specific efforts that would help fathers increase their engagement via meeting times, specific programs for fathers within schools, and strategic communication efforts. Likewise, the communication and collaboration methods must consider the diversity in the jobs parents do by providing flexible meeting times, different means of communication, and engaging them actively. These context-specific leadership efforts align well with collaborative and participatory educational leadership approaches that emphasise collective responsibility among schools, families, and communities to enhance educational outcomes of students [31, 13]. Specifically, in an Ethiopian secondary school setting, such differentiated and inclusive engagement efforts of parents can help build a stronger partnership between schools and families as well as boost the educational success of the learners.

Forms of Parental Engagement for Improving Students' Academic Achievement

Results suggest that the concept of parental involvement is multidimensional and collaborative in nature and goes beyond financial assistance to include not only home-based but also school-based education efforts. Five different types of parental involvement have been revealed based on the qualitative and quantitative results of this research: home-based educational involvement, school-based activities, parent-teacher interaction, provision of educational resources, and constant supervision over the academic performance and behaviour of children. One thing that was stated by the participants clearly is that parental involvement is a collaborative effort which includes parents, teachers, school administrators, and the whole community. In their families, parents stressed the need for the creation of an appropriate studying atmosphere, monitoring of the homework, motivation for positive studying practices, etc.

Similarly, the quantitative findings indicated that the parents in the Wolaita Zone offer motivation and instrumental support as well as supervise their children's studies, but more focus is needed to improve academic socialisation by regularly talking about learning goals, career expectations, and future education. Further, the quantitative findings confirm the School-Family-Community Partnership Framework proposed by Epstein (2018), who acknowledged that parenting and learning at home were important aspects of parental involvement, as well as the model developed by [22]. According to this model, parents' educational expectations and educational support help motivate the students and increase their academic achievements. Similarly, the synthesis of educational research done by [19] indicates that parental expectations and educational home environment have a very strong impact on students' educational success.

In addition, these findings clearly show that parental involvement goes beyond their homes and includes participation in school affairs and collaborative relations with teachers and school administrators.

Parents were perceived not only as supporters of their children but also as educational partners who were involved in enhancing teaching and learning processes, along with the school. According to the qualitative data collected, good collaboration relies on mutual trust, frequent communication, shared ownership of education results, and active participation in school programs and discussions.

In line with these perceptions, the quantitative findings prove that there are relatively high levels of parental involvement in the development of the school environment and educational process, which can be explained by the collectivist cultures of communities from the Wolaita Zone. Nevertheless, both qualitative and quantitative data show low levels of parent involvement in pedagogical issues and school management due to less developed communication systems. Clearly, these findings support Epstein's [13] partnership theory, according to which good educational results can be achieved only through systematic collaboration between schools, families, and communities via communication, decision-making, volunteering, etc.

In general, the results imply that parental engagement needs to be conceptualised as a system of interrelated practices at home and in schools rather than isolated activities of parents. Students obtain higher levels of academic achievement if parents simultaneously offer educational assistance at home, communicate regularly with their teachers, attend school programs, provide necessary resources for studying, and control their academic and behavioural performance.

Both qualitative and quantitative data converge in the conclusion that it is not the quantity but the quality of parental involvement which matters more. The study provides additional empirical confirmation of the ecological and partnership approaches to education that consider students' educational achievements as the result of continual cooperation between families, schools, and communities [6, 13]. It also suggests that educational administrators need to enhance structured family-school partnerships by considering parents as equal participants in education, building effective communication systems and offering various ways for parents to participate in the educational process.

Contextual Factors Facilitating or Hindering Effective Parental Engagement

The study results show that the involvement of parents in secondary schools of Wolaita Zone is affected by several factors, which include family factors, school factors, community factors, and institutional factors that help or impede the level of parental involvement in the education of their children. Among the factors facilitating parental involvement cited by participants are supportive school management, frequent parent and teacher communication, favourable school environment, awareness of educational responsibility among parents, supportive communities, and availability of education-related materials.

The main factors limiting the level of parental involvement identified by participants include poverty, unemployment, low educational background of parents, busy occupational life, lack of communication between schools and families, insufficient dedication of teachers, scarcity of teaching and learning materials, and lack of government support.

Additionally, it was established that higher levels of graduate unemployment and decreasing public trust in the economic benefits of education have made some parents refrain from investing in the education of their children. The results above are consistent with [6] Ecological Systems Theory, in which the development of children's education is influenced by the interaction between different environmental systems and not only the features of the family. These results also coincide with the ideas raised by [40], where it is stated that socioeconomic inequalities, institutional constraints, and lack of educational resources are ongoing obstacles to parental involvement and better academic performance.

Strategies for Strengthening Parental Involvement and Improving Secondary School Performance

Several related strategies have been suggested by the participants to boost parental involvement and improve the academic performance of the students. The strategies which were mentioned the most include developing collaboration between schools and parents, improving teacher accountability and dedication, developing guidance and counselling services, increasing the availability of educational resources, getting the support of the community in improving schools, improving library services, and developing educational leadership and management of schools.

The participants always stressed that any sustainable improvement in education cannot take place independently but rather depends on the coordination of efforts from the side of parents, teachers, school administrators, communities, and government bodies. These results coincide with the principles of the School-Family-Community Partnership Framework suggested by [13], which calls for cooperation between schools, families, and communities to help students learn better, and [6] Ecological Theory, according to which positive results in the field of education can only happen through the cooperation of multiple social systems.

In summary, the findings show that the involvement of parents is most productive if seen as a dynamic partnership that fits into a larger educational ecosystem as opposed to a set of discrete parental actions. In all cases, it was agreed that increased academic performance is a consequence of a process of constant interaction defined by efficient communication, trust, responsibility, accountability, and support from families, schools, communities, and policymakers. This approach emphasises current views on the nature of family-school partnerships, which state that education requires the efforts of several different agents together and not just of parents and schools independently [13, 21]. Adding the evidence of an actual case of the Wolaita Zone to the body of research into parental engagement in developing countries, this study contributes to the development of this field by showing how the economic, cultural, and institutional conditions of the area influence the partnership.

9. Conclusions

In this study, parent perceptions towards the role of parental involvement in enhancing the academic performance of the students have been assessed through qualitative thematic analysis in the Wolaita Zone. The results indicate that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct involving educational inputs within the household environment, participation in school activities, constant

interaction with teachers, provision of educational materials and careful monitoring of students' academic performance and behaviour. Education was perceived to be a joint effort which requires cooperative effort from the family, school, community and educational authorities.

In addition, the study has identified several contextual factors affecting parental involvement, including poverty in households, unemployment, lack of educational materials, inefficient school leadership, low level of teacher dedication, problems with students and weaknesses in educational governance. While recognising the positive impact of the cultural values of the local people about education, participants pointed out the impact of socioeconomic changes on the weakening of the trust of parents in the educational payoff. Thus, the willingness of parents is not enough without addressing the structural barriers to it.

Lastly, this study reveals that there is a high degree of support for an improvement strategy that encompasses integration of strategies such as school-parent partnership, tutorial programs, greater teacher accountability, counselling programs, educational resource provision, community involvement, library improvement, and educational leadership. In essence, the results clearly indicate that any form of sustainable improvement in students' academic performance will have to involve all educational stakeholders.

10. Recommendations

Recommendations based on the results of this study include the following.

To Schools

Parent engagement programs should be encouraged by parent-teacher meetings, student academic progress reporting, and school-based parenting programs. Effective communication should be ensured to give information to parents about their children's academic progress, attendance, behaviour, and learning problems. Moreover, secondary schools should increase the number of tutorial and remedial programs for students having problems in academics, along with better guidance and counselling facilities.

To Teachers

Collaboration with parents is recommended by means of communication, constructive feedback, and joint academic planning for students. Monitoring students' academic progress and learning problems should be conducted on a regular basis to develop appropriate intervention strategies with parents. Professional development should improve teachers' skills in family engagement and collaboration in education.

To Parents

Parents must establish conducive home environments for learning through creating learning timetables, checking homework, minimising unnecessary domestic chores, offering motivational support, and maintaining effective communication with teachers. Parents must be active in all school meetings, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and school improvement programmes, all the while constantly evaluating the academic performance and behaviour of students.

To Communities

Community organisations, churches, civil societies, local authorities, and other community groups must encourage positive attitudes towards education by conducting awareness campaigns, holding educational forums, and setting up educational programs in the community. Community partners must mobilise community resources in terms of strengthening school structures, libraries, tutoring programs, and educational support for students.

To Educational Administrators

Educational administrators, school principals, and other educational administrators must build systems that will enhance instructional quality, teacher commitment, stakeholder engagement, and school improvement based on evidence. Educational administrators must set up clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for parental involvement programs.

For the Government

The government should ensure that secondary schools get fair funding by ensuring access to books, laboratories, libraries, ICT facilities, and other educational resources. The government should also come up with strategies to combat graduate unemployment and enhance the school-to-work transition to restore trust in the education sector. Programs aimed at capacity building for heads of schools, teachers, and PTA members are essential.

11. Policy Implications

Several policy recommendations can be made from this study in relation to parental engagement to improve the educational situation, specifically, in Woliata Zone secondary schooling and generally for Ethiopia.

First, parent engagement must be incorporated into national, regional and zonal education policies as an important part of school improvement rather than leaving it up to each school to decide whether to engage parents or not. National educational policies must set the standards, indicators, and measures for parent engagement programs.

Second, ministries of education and regional education departments must design the frameworks for parent engagement programs to define roles and responsibilities of schools, parents, teachers,

community organisations, and local authorities regarding such programs, and to lay down the criteria for measuring their effectiveness.

Third, educational financing policies should ensure more resources are devoted to disadvantaged secondary schools in terms of access to learning materials, ICT, libraries, laboratories, and counselling.

Fourth, policies on teacher training and professional development should include family-school partnerships as a core component of teachers' professionalism. Teachers need training in effective communication with parents, collaborative problem-solving, and community work.

Fifth, policies on education governance need to enhance decentralisation of school management, whereby school principals and Parent-Teacher Associations can plan parental involvement activities in line with their unique needs yet remain accountable for educational achievement.

Lastly, cross-cutting policy cooperation between education, the labour market, social protection, and community development is crucial in tackling wider socioeconomic challenges uncovered by this study. Policies of reducing poverty, increasing employment opportunities for graduates, and advancing community development indirectly improve parental involvement by regaining their belief in education as a means of social mobility. All in all, these policies constitute a good foundation for boosting parental involvement, improving secondary school attainment, and fostering sustainable educational development in the study area and in the wider nation.

12. Limitations of the Study

This research is restricted to selected secondary schools in Wolaita Zone, and it is based on the participation of parents and the academic achievement of students. Therefore, the study cannot be boldly generalised because of its geographical limitation. Further, there could also be a response bias when self-reporting is used.

Declarations

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Data availability: The data used to analyse, discuss and conclude on the findings of this research are available in the OSF repository link:

https://osf.io/368pz/overview?view_only=6dd710e017154219878fc70f36e11756

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The Institutional Review Board of Wolaita Sodo University provided ethical clearance (Reference Number: WSU-217/47/165). In accordance with the ethical requirements of conducting research, the ethical clearance covered the timeframe from 1st December 2024 to 1st December 2025, including the protocol for conducting the study, the informed consent process, and the information sheet.

Consent for publication: For the anonymised use of the data for scholarly publication, each participant gave their informed consent. The manuscript contains no personally identifiable information.

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Figures

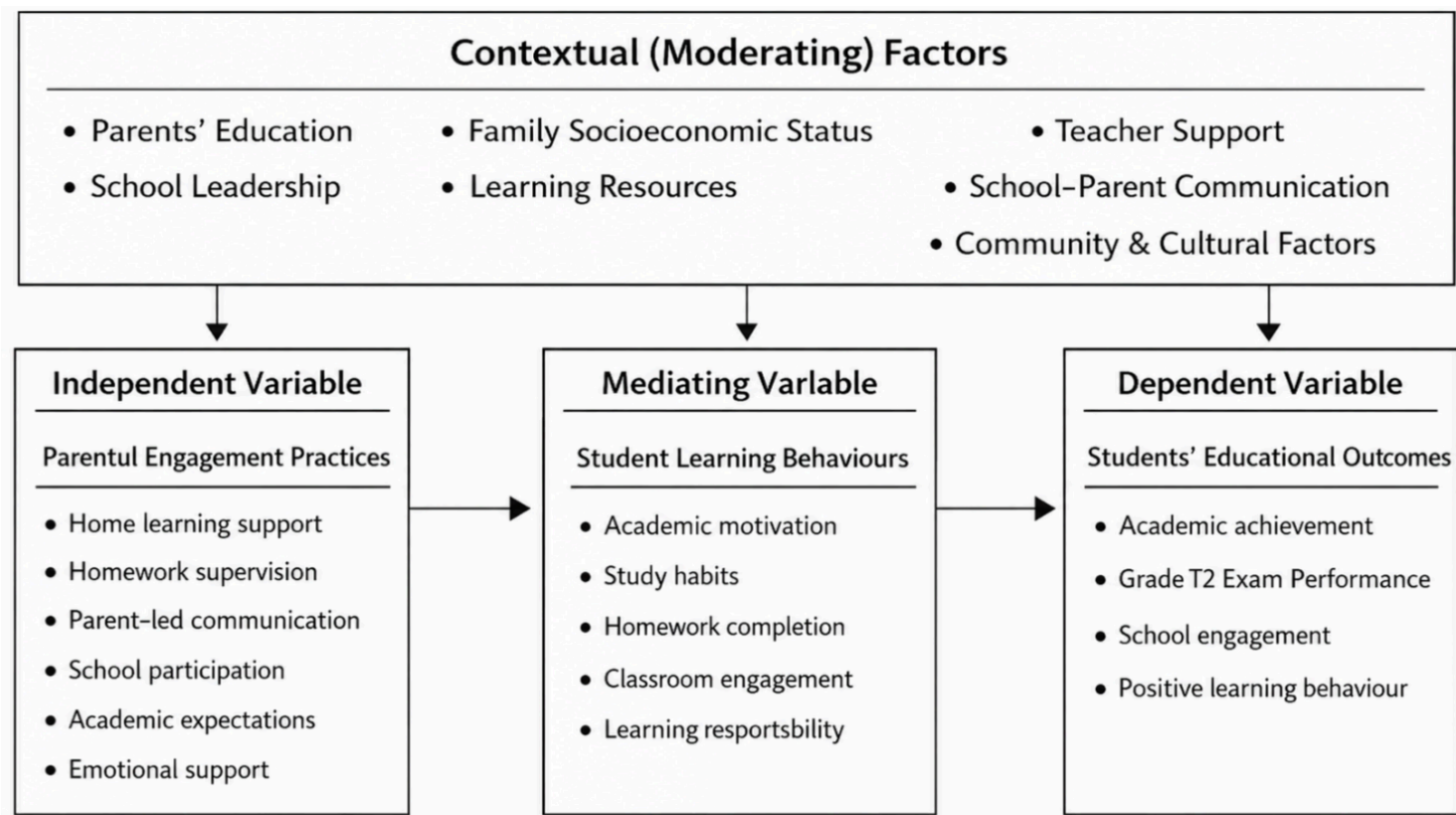


Figure 1

Legend not included with this version.