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Effective Strategies and Formats to Increase Parental Involvement at the Early Childhood Level: A Systematised Review

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Abstract

Parental involvement makes a critical contribution to children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, especially at the early childhood level, because success or failure at that level impacts achievement at subsequent levels of education. However, many parents, especially those from low–income and single–parent households, are not as involved as they should be, and some schools struggle to find effective ways to engage them. This systematised review focused on parents' involvement in their children's academic achievement at the early childhood education level, to identify strategies and formats that could effectively improve Epstein et al.'s (2019) six types of parental involvement. Using QDA Miner, qualitative content analysis of 28 peer–reviewed journal articles revealed 81 strategies, the majority relating to communicating and learning at home. The findings also indicated that school–based parental involvement formats ostracised low–income and single–parent families; implying that countries with a high percentage of single–parent, migrant or immigrant, and working families should prioritise home–based involvement and use technology for greater flexibility in school–based offerings.

Keywords: parental involvement, systematised review, early childhood education, family engagement, Epstein's typology, content analysis, PRISMA checklist, Jamaica

Introduction

Parental involvement is a key component of a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023; Stewart et al., 2022). It also determines how well children function in academic contexts. Consequently, policymakers and researchers consistently recommend parental involvement in their children's education at all system levels: early childhood (Alves et al., 2017), primary or elementary (Guo et al., 2024); secondary (Shutao et al., 2024); and tertiary (Chiang, 2025). However, this involvement is particularly critical at the early childhood level because academic success or failure at that level often predicts what happens at subsequent levels (Campbell et al., 2017; Cole, 2020a). Cole (2020b) also indicates that parents who are not involved in their children's education in the early years often find it challenging to get involved later on. Strong research evidence also indicates that parental involvement at the early childhood level contributes to student success in later years (Campbell et al., 2017; Cole, 2022; Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017; Sagar, 2024). Campbell et al.

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(2017) conducted a longitudinal study on parents' interest in their child's education and children's outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. They found that children with highly interested parents were significantly more likely to attain university qualifications. The reverse was also true. Jaiswal and Choudhuri (2017), who conducted a review of parental involvement studies, also noted that parental involvement at the preschool level was significantly related to academic achievement and a lower rate of grade retention at the high school level. In contrast, inadequate parental involvement is related to increased difficulty transitioning to other levels, higher dropout rates, and lower academic achievement (Cole, 2020b; Sagar, 2024). Therefore, parental involvement at the ECE is often critical for educational and lifelong success.

At the ECE level, parental involvement contributes to children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. It has been linked to higher academic achievement generally, as well as in specific areas such as literacy (De, 2024; Kim & Riley, 2021) and mathematics or numeracy (Cole, 2022; Saani et al., 2021; Sabrina & Adam, 2023). It is also related to higher student motivation to exert greater academic effort (Deutcher & Ibe, 2004), and academic self–efficacy and social skills (Jeannite, 2024; Xia, 2024; Xiangyu et al., 2024). Parental involvement at the ECE level is also critical for children's effective transition to the primary level because a parent's active interest in engaging their child's teacher and, by extension, working with the vision and policy of the school ultimately creates the proper foundation for academic success (Seabra-Santos et al., 2021). It is this engagement that shapes attitudes towards education and learning and maximises educational outcomes.

Despite its importance to academic success, some parents are not as involved as they should be or want to be. This is truer for low–income and single–parent families (Cole, 2020a; De, 2024; Koivuhovi et al., 2025; Oke et al., 2021). Various factors prevent single parents from being involved, including employment obligations, low socioeconomic status and negative perceptions about the usefulness of their participation (Jeannite, 2024; Oke et al., 2021). Notwithstanding, the critical importance of parental involvement makes it imperative for policymakers, school administrators, and teachers to find effective formats and strategies for improving parental involvement in their children's education.

Focus on Parental Involvement at the Early Childhood Education Level

Early childhood theorists, including Piaget and Erikson, posited that parents and educators are integral in supporting and encouraging a child's success at every psychosocial stage of development (Wong et al., 2015). Providing appropriate support for each stage results in a positive learning experience (Wong et al., 2015). The purpose of ECE is mainly to provide children with strategies that help them develop the emotional, social, and cognitive skills needed to become lifelong learners (Murray, 2023). Because of the importance of ECE and parental involvement at that level, international research, interventions, and policies have focused on improving parental involvement in ECE. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have deliberately promoted, supported, and utilised policy development and initiatives globally to improve the quality of education facilitated at the ECE level. UNESCO believes that inclusive ECE is much more than just preparation for primary school. It can be the foundation for emotional well–being and learning throughout life and one of the best investments a country can make as it promotes holistic development, gender equality, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2024). There has also been increased international research interest in parental involvement (Parween & Malik, 2023; Şengönül, 2022).

Caribbean countries also recognise the importance of investing in early childhood education. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat (2008), in its Regional Guidelines for Developing Policy, Regulation and Standards in Early Childhood Development Services, identified early childhood education, care, and development as necessary for developing the Caribbean Single Market Economy and the national development of individual countries. These guidelines also list parental involvement

as one of 12 critical requirements for meeting the minimum standard for early childhood care. Importantly, these guidelines were supported by UNESCO and UNICEF (CARICOM Secretariat, 2008). Individual Caribbean countries have also implemented parental involvement initiatives. For example, in 2023, the Barbadian Education Minister announced the building of a new science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) lab exclusively for ECE through play–based learning, which deliberately engages parents in the learning process. Similarly, in 2023, Guyana's Ministry of Education in Guyana launched a mass media campaign to motivate parental involvement. This campaign responded to a report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 2022), which indicated that policymakers at the ECE level face structural and systemic challenges in providing high-quality education to all children. These challenges caused educators and healthcare professionals to wonder if young children, especially those under the age of five, were on track developmentally. In sum, Caribbean governments recognise the importance of early childhood education and support parental involvement as a key component of success at this level.

Similarly, Jamaica has implemented laws, policies, and initiatives to improve parental involvement at the early childhood level. The Early Childhood Commission Act (2003) established the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), which has effective parenting education and support as one of five key areas in which the Commission supports student success at the ECE level. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with the ECC, has developed policies and systems, including the Parent Place initiative, the Brain Builder Centre Programme, and the National Parenting Support Policy. These equip parents with the strategies needed to understand that the formal structure of ECE requires their involvement in effective communication, volunteerism, sustained value, and reinforcement in the home (Early Childhood Commission, 2021; World Bank Group, 2013). Additionally, the 2012 National Parenting Support Commission Act allowed for the establishment of the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC), which operates on the principle that parental involvement is critical to student's success. In 2023, the NPSC trained over 100,000 parents islandwide to reduce school violence by shifting from reactive, punitive parenting habits to proactive, structured guidance. Notwithstanding, the Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (2021) recommended developing "a coordinated strategy to engage and support parents of young children" (p. 31). This strategy should include training for parents in basic literacy and numeracy at the ECE schools, thereby increasing parents' presence and ability to engage with schools. The Commission also recommended a change in the teacher–directed philosophy of education to one with parents mediating the relationship between learners and content and learners and educators.

Therefore, at the international, regional, and local level, there is consensus that early childhood education is critical to individual, community, and national development, and that parents should be involved in their children's education. However, there is a need to identify effective strategies for involving or engaging parents in their children's learning.

Rationale and Purpose

While the positive impact of parental involvement on children's academic achievement has been confirmed by many studies (see, for example, Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Şengönül, 2022; Wilder, 2014), research focussing on the early childhood level is limited (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Sarsale et al., 2024). Furthermore, the field of ECE needs more research to identify effective parental involvement formats and strategies that can be applied across different contexts (Hilado et al., 2013; Liu & Gao, 2022; Nobis & Caparroso, 2024). Identifying parental involvement strategies is necessary because parental involvement is critical to student success (Nobis & Caparroso, 2024) and because inadequate parental involvement contributes to teacher attrition (Liu & Gao, 2022). The primary goal of this systematised review study is to identify effective parental involvement strategies and formats that can enhance the academic achievement of early childhood students, thereby providing practical guidance for educators and policymakers. The study also aims to categorise these strategies based on Epstein et al. (2019) six types of parental involvement. While there is an ongoing debate about which terminology to use:

"parental involvement", "parental engagement", or "family engagement"; the terms are often used interchangeably (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Cole, 2024; Lewis–Fokum & Morgan, 2022). Furthermore, there is no consensus on the conceptualisation of parental involvement (Lewis–Fokum & Morgan, 2022) or parental engagement (Gross et al., 2020). O'Toole et al. (2019) also highlight that the focus on the involvement–engagement dichotomy is simplistic because it does not adequately reflect the diverse ways in which parents participate in and support their children's learning. Therefore, the term parental involvement was used in this research to encompass studies that focused on parental involvement, engagement, family involvement, or any other term indicating that the studies were focused on parents contributing to their children's education. Additionally, strategies refer to the specific techniques or tools used for parental involvement (e.g., attending parent–teacher association (PTA) meetings). In contrast, formats refer to the overall structure in which the strategies are used (e.g., school–based or home–based involvement).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the review:

1. What strategies related to Epstein's six types of parental involvement are reported as effectively improving academic achievement at the ECE level?
2. What formats of parental involvement have been identified in the existing research literature for effectively improving academic achievement at the ECE level?

Significance of the Study

This study can benefit several education stakeholders: policymakers, teacher training institutions, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Parental involvement's ultimate goal is to improve students' educational outcomes, and all stakeholders are responsible for successful schooling. Therefore, identifying effective strategies and formats of parental involvement can assist stakeholders in playing their role. Specifically, policymakers can develop policies that incorporate the effective strategies and formats identified in this review. Teacher training institutions can enhance teacher preparation by equipping teachers with these strategies and formats. Additionally, teachers and parents can utilise these strategies to improve student achievement with the support of school administrators. Furthermore, Watson–Williams et al. (2011) highlight that Jamaican parents want to get involved in their children's education, but they do not know how. This review can benefit parents such as these. Researchers interested in implementing strategies to improve children's learning through parental involvement may also gain greater clarity on the most suitable format of parental involvement to implement for different types of students and the most effective strategies to use in increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Epstein's (1990) School–Family–Community Partnership Model guided this study. The framework highlights the collaborative importance of school, family, and community partnership in ensuring children's educational success as they are overlapping spheres of influence. This framework identifies six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision–making, and collaborating with the community. According to Epstein et al. (2019), parenting as a type of parental involvement includes activities that help parents establish a home environment that supports formal education, for example, when the school facilitates parenting workshops for parents or provides education–rich resources for their homes. Communicating includes two–way, three–way, and many–way (including the community) communication about children's progress in school and the programmes offered at and by their school.

Volunteerism includes recruiting and organising parents' help and support at the school, classroom, and individual student levels, for example, parents volunteering to be chaperones on school trips. The fourth type of parental involvement is learning in the home, which refers to the extension of learning within the home. This extension is best demonstrated by parents' assistance with homework and other curriculum–related activities.

Decision–making parental involvement occurs when parents are included in the school's decision–making and when the school develops parents' leadership skills. Examples include participation in PTA meetings or when parents are members of the school's advisory committees or boards. Finally, collaborating with the community includes integrating community resources (human and material) into school programmes.

Epstein's typology of parental involvement is the most widely used framework (Saani et al., 2021). It has also been used in research conducted in Jamaica (see, for example, Brooks & Roofe, 2022; Cole, 2022). Campbell & Kinkead–Clark (2022) also highlighted that Jamaican parents wanted information on strategies they could use to assist their children's learning at home — one type of parental involvement in Epstein's typology. We used the typology in this study to categorise the various individual strategies identified in the literature. Therefore, this study highlights various strategies that can be used to facilitate the six types of parental involvement.

Methodology

Research Design

We conducted a systematised review to identify effective strategies and formats for improving parental involvement at the ECE level. Samnani et al. (2017) define a review study as one that summarises the existing knowledge while highlighting the existing gaps in the current literature. Grant and Booth (2009) clarify that a systematised review does not include all the elements of a systematic review, for example, using two reviewers or searching all available databases. In line with those descriptions, this study included features of a systematic review: a systematic literature search and selection process to identify studies on effective strategies and formats for facilitating parental involvement at the ECE level and recommendations for practice, policy, and research. However, only three databases were searched instead of all available databases. Grant and Booth (2009) outline that a systematised literature review usually includes a search of at least two databases.

Literature Selection

The literature selection was guided by the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta–Analyses (PRISMA) Checklist where appropriate. The Checklist indicates that researchers should specify the eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, and selection process when describing the literature selection (Page et al., 2021).

Eligibility Criteria

We included primary research conducted at the early childhood education level (kindergarten or preschool to Grade 1), which focussed on parental involvement in their children's academics, and were published from 2014–2024. We also selected studies published in English with the full text available. We excluded all other studies (see Table 1). Selecting studies that included students up to Grade 1 was critical, since the CARICOM Secretariat (2008) indicates that early childhood extends from birth to 8 years old.

Table 1

Eligibility Criteria for the Selected Studies

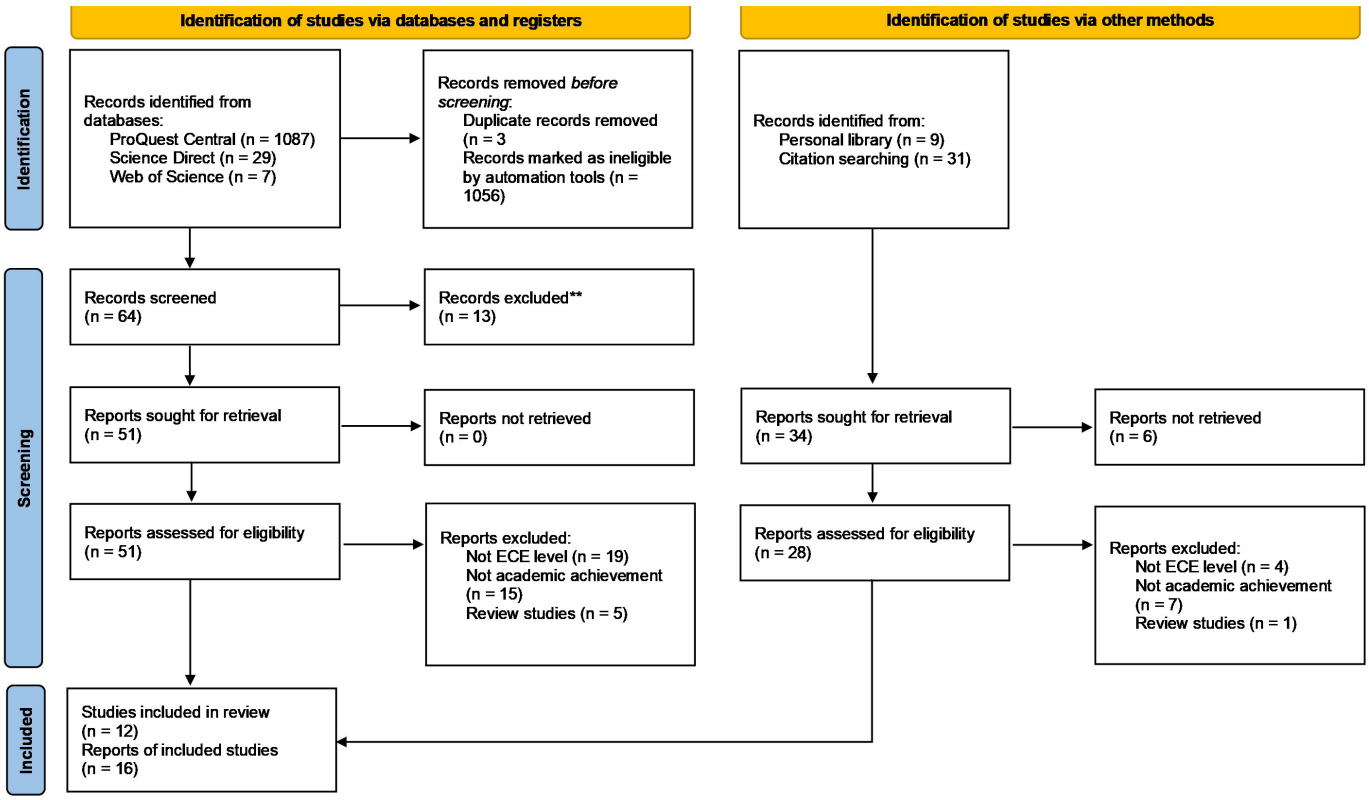
Criteria	Included	Excluded
Education Level	Conducted at the early childhood education level	Conducted at any other level of the education system (e.g., primary or elementary, secondary, tertiary)
Content	Parental involvement in academic achievement	if not focused on academic achievement (e.g., standardised weight status, teacher preparation, school attendance, HIV/AIDS, social–emotional outcomes).
Report Status	Peer–reviewed journal articles	All other types (e.g., review studies, reports, unpublished manuscripts, conference proceedings, etc.).
Publication date	Published 2014–2024	All other years.
Language	English	All other languages.
Full–text	Full–text available	Full–text not available.

Information Sources, Search Strategy, and Selection Process

We selected articles from three databases: ProQuest Central (https://www.proquest.com), Web of Science (https://clarivate.com), and Science Direct (https://www.sciencedirect.com), on July 24, 2024. We entered the search term "parental involvement strategies" OR "family engagement strategies" OR "parental involvement formats" OR "family engagement formats" AND "early childhood education" into each database, and then applied the inclusion criteria. For example, entering the search term in ProQuest Central generated 1,087 records. However, we excluded 976 because they were not peer–reviewed. We excluded another 42 because they were published more than 10 years ago, and nine because the full texts were unavailable. That resulted in 60 articles being identified for screening. The first and third authors independently screened the articles as recommended by Stoll et al. (2019), to increase the likelihood of identifying relevant studies and to reduce bias and errors. We screened the identified articles by their titles, abstracts, and then full text (Stoll et al., 2019). During the screening, we excluded 28 articles because they were not at the early childhood education level, and 17 because they did not focus on academic achievement. For example, they focused on standardised weight status, teacher preparation, school attendance, HIV/AIDS and/or social–emotional outcomes. We also excluded six review studies. This resulted in 9 articles being selected for inclusion from this database. The same strategy was used to identify and select articles from the other databases. We also identified articles from the reference lists of the selected articles and the recommendations of two Jamaican researchers investigating parental involvement at the early childhood level. The process resulted in 28 articles being selected for analysis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

PRISMA Flowchart for Literature Selection



Data Extraction Methods and Procedures

We extracted data from the selected studies using a literature matrix in Microsoft Excel. From each article, we extracted the author(s) and title; year of publication; country of publication; research approach; research design; research methods, parental involvement strategies (parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision–making, and collaborating with the community); the format of parental involvement and the effectiveness of and relationship among the formats; and placed the data in the Excel spreadsheet. We categorised the strategies according to Epstein's (2019) types of parental involvement to identify suitable strategies for each type. The third author first extracted the information independently, then the first author verified the data. Disagreements were discussed, and consensus was reached (Zawacki–Richter et al., 2020). Despite attempts to ensure all studies that fit the inclusion criteria were selected, the data are limited to only studies identified in the three selected databases and open–access journal articles published in English. However, as Musengamana (2023) explained, each review study "is limited by its search procedures and scope" (p. 15). Inclusion criteria invariably exclude data sources that may be pertinent. In this case, open access articles in English published before 2014 were excluded.

Method of Data Analysis

Shaheen et al. (2023) recommend content analysis when analysing textual data in systematic literature reviews. Therefore, we analysed the data using qualitative content analysis (QCA). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), content analysis uses a systematic coding, categorising, and theming process to interpret the textual data subjectively. The goal is to identify patterns in the text content. According to McEwen (2004), QCA involves seven steps: formulating research questions; selecting an appropriate sample of texts to be analysed; defining the categories to be applied; outlining the coding process and the coder training; implementing the coding process; determining the trustworthiness and analysing the results of the coding process (see Shava et al., 2021). Therefore, having formulated the research questions and selected the 28 articles, we defined the categories for the strategies and formats of parental involvement deductively and inductively. We generated deductive categories from the framework of Epstein et al. (2019). However, the categories for the formats emerged from the articles. The coding process coincided with data collection, as each coder had to extract the strategies related to each type of parental involvement and the formats, and place them in their appropriate column in Microsoft Excel. The coders were trained using a sample of the articles, and the first author verified the coding. Epstein et al. (2019) identified strategies for supporting each type of parental involvement that were also used as deductive codes. For example, *helping with homework* was a deductive code under the deductive category, *learning at home*. However, we were also keen to identify strategies not included in Epstein's typology.

We used coding frequency in QDA Miner to identify the strategies and formats reported in the literature for effectively increasing the six types of parental involvement to improve academic achievement at the ECE level. We also identified patterns in the data qualitatively. The data will be presented as answers to the research question in numerical order, in tables and text, with supporting quotations as appropriate.

Ethical Considerations

Wager and Wiffen (2011) identified avoiding ghost or guest authorship, plagiarism, duplication, inaccuracies, and being transparent about funding as ethical considerations for systematic reviews. In this review, ghost or guest editing was avoided by listing the specific contributions of each author. The second author contributed to the conceptualisation and writing of the paper, and the third contributed to the methodology. The first author completed all other aspects of the paper and assisted with the introduction and methodology. This paper has not been published before, so there is no duplication, and no funding was provided for this research. Finally, accuracy was ensured by independent coding that was verified and discussed to reach an agreement. The trustworthiness of the results was also

improved by using peer–reviewed journal articles and being rigorous in data analysis to prevent inconsistencies (Bhandari, 2024).

Presentation of the Findings

Twenty–eight articles met the inclusion criteria for selection for this review. The sample represents research from 13 countries, with most of the studies being conducted in the United States of America (n = 11) and Jamaica (n = 5) (see Figure 2). Therefore, they covered diverse educational contexts. Most studies (n = 13) also utilised a quantitative approach (see Figure 3). However, the quantitative studies were predominantly cross–sectional studies that relied on teachers' and parents' self–reports (see, for example, Cole, 2024; Seabra–Santos et al., 2022).

Figure 2

Countries Represented in the Selected Articles

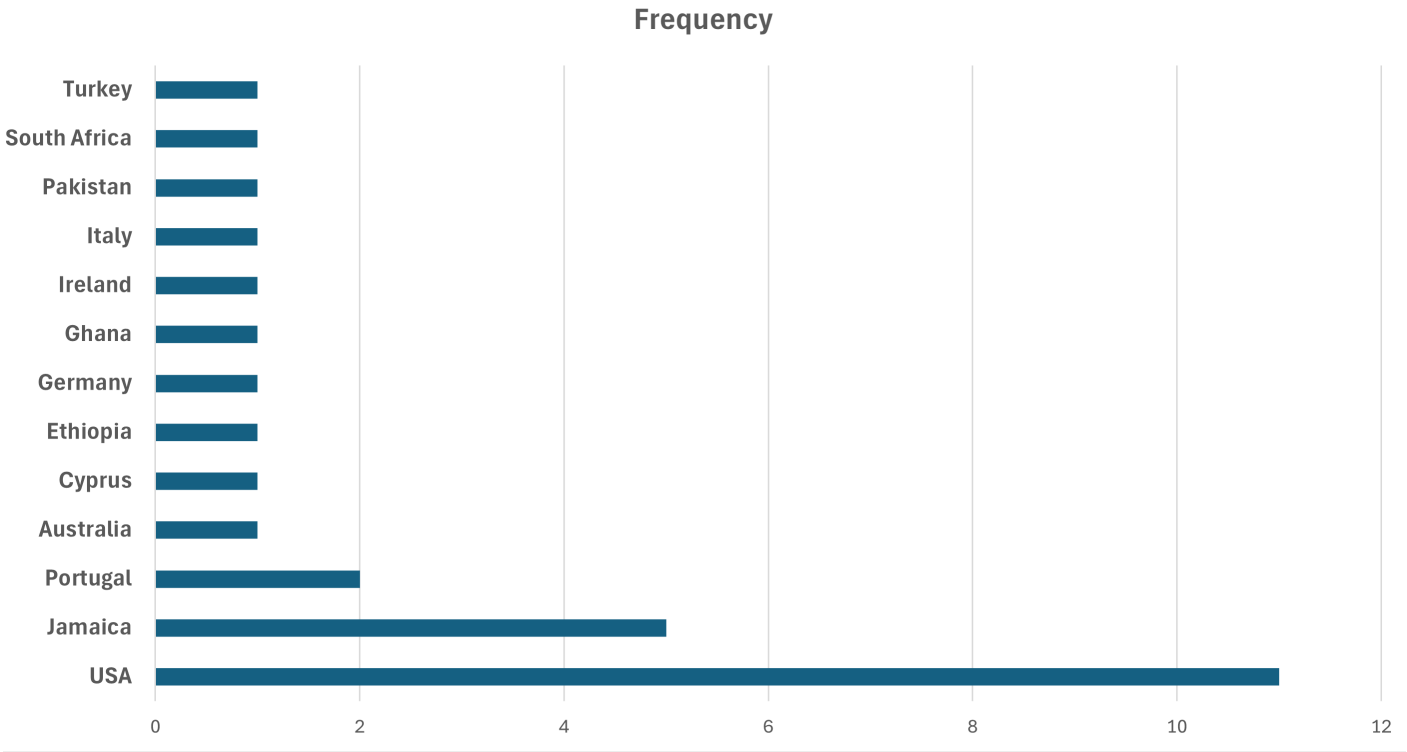
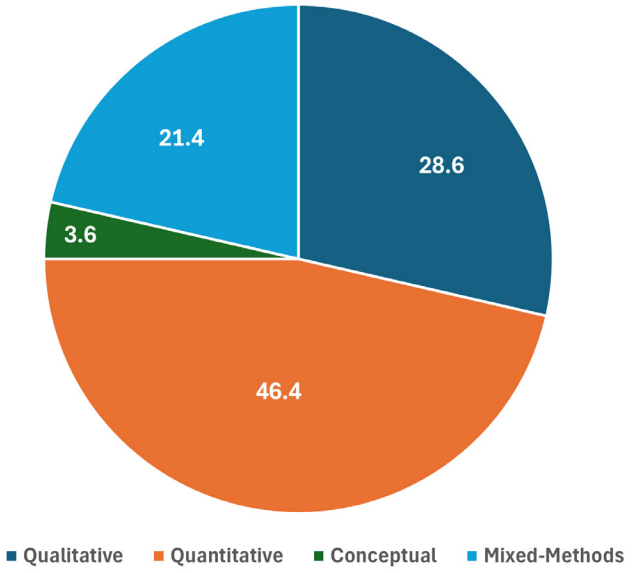


Figure 3

Research Approaches Utilised in the Selected Articles



Strategies Related to Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement that Improve Academic Achievement at the ECE Level

We ran coding frequencies in QDA Miner and identified 78 strategies for improving Epstein's six types of parental involvement and three strategies that did not fit into Epstein's framework (see Table 2). Most of the identified strategies were related to communicating (28 strategies) and learning at home (19 strategies), while only five strategies were identified for decision–making and community collaboration. This is also true for the Jamaican context, where ten communication strategies and nine learning at home strategies were identified.

Table 2

Strategies for Improving Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement

Type of Parental Involvement	Strategies	Overall Number of Articles	Number of Jamaican Articles
Parenting	Coaching	3	1
	Home visits	4	
	Individual meetings	2	
	On–task support	4	
	Parent education	12	4
	Parent tutoring	2	
	Resource centers	7	
	Sending resources & activities	10	3
	Teacher education	7	1
	Workshop/interventions	17	4

Type of Parental Involvement	Strategies	Overall Number of Articles	Number of Jamaican Articles
Communicating	Apps	1	
	Avoid school jargon	2	1
	Bulletin boards	2	
	Classroom blogs	1	
	Cloud service	1	
	Daily report cards	1	
	Diaries and notebooks	5	1
	Digital grade portals	2	
	Email	3	1
	e–portfolios	1	
	Face–to–face–meetings	11	3
	Grade–level point person	2	
	Greet parents by name	2	
	Parents communicate high expectations for children	6	2
	Letters	3	1
	Messenger	5	1
	Monthly events calendar	2	
	Newsletter	4	
	Online groups	3	
	Open–door policy	5	2
	Parent–teacher conference	8	
	Pick–up and drop–off talks	4	1
	Progress reports	2	
	Provide language translators	1	
	School home notes	3	
	Skype or Zoom	3	
	Social media	1	
	Telephone calls	8	1
	Weekly sharing of children's work for review and feedback	3	
Volunteering	Attending PTA meetings	4	1
	Attending special events	5	1
	Chaperones	3	
	Open houses	2	
	Publish volunteering jobs	1	
	Reading in class	1	
	Parent classroom observation	1	
	Help with school routines	1	
	Help with teacher work	2	
	Volunteer in the school library	2	1

Type of Parental Involvement	Strategies	Overall Number of Articles	Number of Jamaican Articles
Learning at Home	Checking grades or work	1	
	Discussions about school	7	
	Embedding learning in daily activities	4	2
	Establish a reward system	3	
	Family games and challenges	7	
	Formal agreements	1	
	Formal school activities	7	1
	Helping with homework	13	4
	Interactive screen time	4	2
	Modelling	3	1
	Provide encouragement	6	
	Provide enriching materials and experiences	5	
	Reading	14	3
	Revision	1	
	Send homework and projects	5	
	Sharing activities or content	10	2
	Singing	2	1
	Storytelling	2	
	Structuring children's activities	6	
Decision–Making	Collaborative planning	6	
	Feedback system	1	
	PTA meetings	2	1
	Publish leadership roles	1	
	Take leadership roles	1	
Community Collaboration	Grants and sponsorship	1	
	List of supportive community organisations	1	
	Reading community posters	1	
	Service integration	3	
	Visiting the community library	3	
Other	Activities at different times of day	4	
	Financial support	2	1
	Providing tutoring	1	3

Parenting

Epstein et al. (2019) define parenting as "helping families establish home environments to support children as students" (p. 5). They also identified workshops, home visits, parent education, and family support programmes as strategies or activities that could be used to implement this type of parental involvement. The selected articles also included these activities, with workshops being the most frequently identified strategy (see Table 2). Seventeen

studies recommended workshops (see, for example, Bierman et al., 2017; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). Four of the five studies conducted in Jamaica also recommended workshops (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a, 2020b, & 2022). Parent education was the second most frequently reported parenting strategy — reported in 12 studies, which included four studies conducted in Jamaica (see, for example, Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2024; Dighe & Seiden, 2020). In highlighting the importance of parenting education in the Jamaican context, Cole (2024) explained that some parents were reluctant to get involved because they had low involvement efficacy. They believed they were not equipped to contribute meaningfully and were embarrassed by their low academic achievement. Improving this efficacy through parent education could increase their involvement. Campbell and Kinkead–Clark (2022) also highlighted Jamaican parents' willingness to learn how to handle children at the early childhood level and support their education. The authors noted that this parental interest could be fostered and improved through targeted school-organised workshops and PTA meetings.

Other parenting strategies include coaching (Bierman et al., 2017; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Murray et al., 2024; Young et al., 2023); on–task support (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023; Purtell et al., 2022; Seabra–Santos et al., 2022); and setting up resource centres where parents can access educational and physiological support (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Kurtulmuş, 2016; Murray et al., 2024; Young et al., 2023). A common theme identified was that workshops alone are not sufficient. Parents need ongoing support to implement workshop recommendations. This can be facilitated by parenting coaches who visit parents in their homes as they try to implement various parental involvement strategies. Therefore, the strategies are not mutually exclusive. Another important theme was that teachers need to be educated about how they can facilitate parental involvement. This was identified in six selected studies (see, for example, Oke et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022; Young et al., 2023). As Oke et al. (2021) noted, parental involvement interventions and government initiatives are less likely to succeed if teachers are not trained for their roles. Therefore, to help families establish home environments to support children, teachers and parents should be trained before implementation and supported as they engage in the process.

Communicating

Most of the strategies identified in the selected studies related to the communication types of parental involvement (n = 28). According to Epstein et al. (2019), communication refers to effective forms and channels of two–way (home–to–school and school–to–home); three–way; and many–way (including the community) communication about children's progress in school and the programmes offered at and by the school. Communicating strategies identified by Epstein et al. (2019) include conferences, report cards, notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, weekly or monthly folders with students' work for review or comments from family members, and providing language translators for non–English speakers. All these strategies were identified in at least one of the selected studies (see Table 2). Parent–teacher conferences were the second most reported communication strategy, identified in eight studies (see, for example, Amin & Jalani, 2023; Boyle & Benner, 2020; Gerzel–Short, 2018; Gilic, 2016), and face–to–face meetings were the only strategy reported more frequently (n = 11) (Bierman et al., 2017; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a, & 2022; Laranjeiro et al., 2023). The strategies include traditional methods such as telephone calls (Lin et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2024); letters (Cole, 2020a; Gerzel–Short, 2018); notes and report cards (Amin & Jalani, 2023); and modern technological strategies or channels like e–portfolios (Oke et al., 2021), communication apps (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022), using a cloud service to store and share students' work with parents (Laranjeiro et al., 2023), social media and online groups (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023), and video–conferencing apps

such as Zoom and Skype (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Murray et al., 2024). Social media and closed online groups allow for communication among parents and between teachers and parents. They are also efficient and cost–effective strategies (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023).

Cole (2020b) highlighted teachers' negative attitudes and intimidating school policies and protocols as deterrents to parental involvement. Therefore, parental involvement may be improved by creating a welcoming school environment. Eleven articles also highlighted creating a welcoming environment that makes parents feel comfortable communicating with the school as a communication practice for improving parental involvement (see, for example, Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2024). Strategies for creating a welcoming environment include avoiding the use of academic jargon (Cole, 2020a; Gerzel–Short, 2018); open–door policies (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Oke et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022); and greeting parents by their names (Gilic, 2016; Oke et al., 2021). The latter makes communication more personalised and conveys the importance of each parent. In contrast, Gerzel–Short (2018) reported that using academic jargon

> alienates families and creates a culture that is not collaborative or inclusive. Academic jargon places teachers in the role of expert and parents in the role of apprentice. The participants reported feeling that they did not belong because they were less knowledgeable than the teachers, and even though participants desired involvement, these families believed that they had "nothing to offer" to their child's learning. (p. 108)

Using jargon also negatively impacts parents' motivation and efficacy for involvement. Furthermore, communication requires understanding, and if parents do not understand teachers, the message delivered will not be effective, making it harder for schools and families to collaborate. Cole (2020b) also explains that when schools collaborate with parents to create parental involvement policies that articulate clear expectations for parents, parents may feel more welcome to participate. Lin et al. (2019) also recommend language translators to improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of communication.

Volunteering

Volunteerism involves recruiting and organising parents' help and support at the school, classroom, and individual student levels. Examples include: parent patrols to aid the safety and security of the school; annual surveys of volunteers' location, skills, and availability; class parent and parent or family room for volunteers (Epstein et al., 2019). The volunteering strategies identified in the literature can be classified as classroom–level and school–level. The school–level strategies include attending PTA meetings and other special events organised by the school (e.g., Sports Day, Science Fair, and Family Night) (Boyle & Benner, 2020; Cole, 2022; Gerzel–Short, 2018); open houses (Boyle & Benner, 2020; Coba–Rodriguez et al., 2020); and being chaperones (Coba–Rodriguez et al., 2020). The classroom–level strategies include reading in the classroom (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022); parents' classroom observation (Amin & Jalani, 2023); and assisting teachers with classroom activities (Bonanati & Rubach, 2022). Three volunteering strategies were identified in the Jamaican studies: attending special events (such as sports day, Jamaica Day, and Culture Day (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022); volunteering in the school library; and attending PTA meetings (Cole, 2020b).

Learning at Home

This type of parental involvement refers to the extension of learning within the home. This extension can be facilitated with homework schedules; policies, guidelines and assistance information; home and community activities calendars; summer learning packets; goal setting and college planning; and math, science, and reading activities for families to engage in at home (Epstein et al., 2019). The top three learning at home strategies were reading (14 articles) (see Bonanati & Rubach, 2022; Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Lin et al., 2019); helping with homework (13 articles) (see Bierman et al., 2017; Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Saani et al., 2021);

and sharing activities or content (10 articles) (see Amin & Jalani, 2023; Boyle & Benner, 2020; Laranjeiro et al., 2023). Reading involves parents reading to their children and children reading to their parents. Additionally, helping with homework includes providing explanations, monitoring homework completion, and checking the accuracy of the homework. However, for parents to effectively help their children with their homework, teachers need to provide explanations and support to parents. Researchers highlighted that parents sometimes shy away from helping with homework because of their low self–efficacy and academic achievement (Cole, 2024; Gerzel–Short, 2018). This can be facilitated by teachers sharing activities and content with parents and being available for discussions about homework. Sharing activities also includes parents sharing useful activities with one another. Again, this can be facilitated through online class groups or cloud sharing.

Formal and informal learning at home activities were evident in the wider literature and in publications focusing on Jamaica. Formal activities intentionally focus on teaching the curriculum (i.e., parents taking time off to teach specific curriculum content directly). However, informal activities are reflected in parents' infusion of educational content in daily routines, for example, teaching colours and shapes while driving or doing housework (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Coba–Rodriguez et al., 2020; Cole, 2022; Dighe & Seiden, 2020). There are also fun and technological strategies, for example, family games (Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2019) and interactive screen time, where parents watch YouTube videos with their children and pause to ask or answer questions related to the videos (Annarumma et al., 2018; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022). In this way, parents mediate digital content. Annarumma et al. (2018) identify four mediator attitudes parents can assume during screen time: active, inactive, restrictive, and absent. They explain that the active mediator "explains the contents and the modalities of action, supporting and guiding the child in his/her game activities" (p. 25). In contrast, the inactive mediator explains on request. The restrictive mediator schedules screen time and directs their children's behaviours, while the absent mediator does not participate in the child's playtime with technology. Ideally, parents should be active mediators of digital content during screen time.

Decision–Making

Decision–making parental involvement occurs when parents are included in the school's decision–making and when the school develops parents' leadership skills. Epstein et al. (2019) suggest active parent–teacher associations, independent advocacy groups, advisory committees, providing information on school elections, creating connections between families and parent representatives, and facilitating leadership training for parents as effective strategies for facilitating decision–making parental involvement. In this review, five decision–making strategies were identified: collaborative planning (Bierman et al., 2017; Gerzel–Short, 2018); providing a feedback system for parents to comment on the academic environment (Abdul–Jaleel et al., 2021); PTA meetings (Oke et al., 2021); publishing possible leadership roles for parents; and taking leadership roles in school organisations. Collaborative planning was the most frequently identified decision–making strategy (n = 6). It can occur at the school and classroom levels. Gerzel–Short (2018) explains that collaborative planning empowers parents to advocate for their children. Furthermore, while attending PTA meetings is also a volunteering strategy, it can be a decision–making strategy if schools use the association not just for helping the school but also include it in decision–making (Oke et al., 2021). Cole (2022), the only study from Jamaica that highlighted a decision–making strategy (PTA meetings), explained that involving parents in the schools' decision–making is more likely to increase their active involvement. She also commented that parental support for school policies and vision is more likely when parents are involved in the decision–making process (Cole, 2020b).

Collaborating with the Community

The sixth type of parental involvement is collaborating with the community, which includes integrating community resources

(human and material) into school programmes. Epstein et al. (2019) recommend service integration, community service, alumni participation, and providing information on community activities (e.g., summer programmes) and services that support children's learning. From the reviewed studies, service integration (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Murray et al., 2024) and visiting community libraries (Coba–Rodriguez et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2019) were the two most frequently identified strategies (n = 3). Grants and sponsorship (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022), providing a list of supportive community organisations (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022), and reading community posters (Amin & Jalani, 2023) were each identified once. Callie Silver and Coba–Rodriguez (2022) reported that having a list of supportive community organisations was particularly beneficial during the COVID–19 pandemic when parents required additional physiological support. They also explained that if physiological needs are not met, parents are less likely to fulfill their parental responsibilities. No community collaboration strategy was identified in the Jamaican studies.

Other Strategies Identified

The selected articles included three strategies that do not fit with the Epstein et al. (2019) model: activities at different times of day (four articles) (see Boyle & Benner, 2020; Gerzel–Short, 2018); financial support (two articles) (Cole, 2024; Shaik, 2023); and providing third–party tutoring for children (one article) (Cole, 2024).

Formats for Improving Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement to Improve Academic Achievement at the ECE Level

The formats for improving parental involvement can be differentiated by their location (school, classroom, or home); direction (parent–initiated or teacher/school–initiated); and child elicitation. However, the most frequently identified and researched formats overall and among the Jamaican articles are school- and home–based parental involvement (see Table 3).

Table 3

Formats of Parental Involvement for Improving Academic Achievement

Formats	Overall Frequency	Frequency in Jamaica	Examples of Articles
Location			
School–based	18	5	Amin & Jalani (2023); Bonanati & Rubach (2022); Gerzel–Short (2018); Lin et al. (2019)
Classroom–based	4	0	Boyle & Benner (2020); Kurtulmuş (2016)
Home–based	21	5	Amin & Jalani (2023); Bonanati & Rubach (2022); Gerzel–Short (2018); Lin et al. (2019); Kim & Riley (2021)
Direction			
School–Initiated	9	4	Cole, (2022 & 2024); Laranjeiro et al. (2023); Cole (2020b, 2022); Purtell et al. (2022)
Parent–Initiated	8	2	
Children's Elicitation			
Compensatory	4	2	Bonanati & Rubach (2022); Boyle & Benner, (2020); Cole (2020b)
Enrichment	1	0	Boyle & Benner (2020)

Parental Involvement Formats Classified by Location

School–based, classroom–based, and home–based parental involvement were categorised as location formats because they indicate where parents get involved. Boyle and Benner (2020) noted that home–based involvement occurs at home, classroom–based involvement occurs in the children's classroom or with their specific classroom teacher, and school–based involvement occurs at the school level. However, other researchers do not distinguish school and classroom–based involvement (see Amin & Jalani, 2023; Bonanati & Rubach, 2022; Gerzel–Short, 2018). Nevertheless, Boyle and Bonner's definition allowed us to refine the codes and categories under the formats of parental involvement. School–based parental involvement is also considered a traditional format of parental involvement. Despite the location, the activities parents engage in are aimed at supporting their children's educational outcomes. Examples of strategies associated with home–based involvement include helping with homework, reading, and storytelling. Classroom–based involvement strategies include reading to the class and monitoring, while school–based involvement strategies include attending PTA meetings. School–based and home–based formats were the most frequently identified formats of parental involvement, identified in 17 and 21 of the 28 selected studies, respectively. They were also identified in the five articles published about the Jamaican context.

Parental Involvement Formats Classified by Their Direction

The literature also classifies parental involvement as parent–initiated or teacher/school–initiated. This means that the parents became involved at the teacher's or school's invitation (teacher/school initiated) or on their own initiative (parent–initiated). Laranjeiro et al. (2023) also describe parent–initiated involvement as proactive and parental involvement that results from the teacher's invitation as reactive. Cole (2022) noted that strategies used by schools or teachers to initiate parental involvement include creating a welcoming environment, facilitating parent workshops or seminars, and inviting parents to participate in the school's decision–making. On the other hand, Purtel et al. (2022) identify attending open houses or calling the teacher as parent–initiated activities.

School–initiated parental involvement was reported in four of the five Jamaican articles (Cole, 2020a, 2020b, 2022, & 2024), while parent–initiated involvement was reported in two (Cole, 2020b, & 2022). While some Jamaican parents get involved without an invitation from the school, they are more likely to be involved upon invitation (Cole, 2020b). Parents with lower education qualifications (up to high school) are more likely to be invited. However, they may not accept the invitation because they are afraid of showing their perceived inadequacies and limited reading capabilities (Cole, 2020b). Some are unable to accept the invitation because of work demands (Cole, 2020a). On the other hand, some Jamaican parents participate upon invitation as the invitation makes them feel that their involvement is appreciated and beneficial to their children's academic success (Cole, 2020b, & 2024).

Parental Involvement Formats Classified by Child Elicitation

Child elicitation has two subcategories: compensatory and enrichment. Both formats occur in response to children's achievement or development in school. Boyle and Benner (2020) explain that compensatory parental involvement is elicited in response to children's poor school performance or delayed socio–emotional development as parents get involved to help their children overcome challenges. The reverse is true for enrichment involvement, where children's greater socioemotional and academic skills elicit greater parental involvement (Boyle & Benner, 2020). Compensatory parental involvement was highlighted in four of the selected studies (Bonanati & Rubach, 2022; Boyle & Benner, 2020; Cole, 2020b, 2022), while enrichment was mentioned in one (Boyle & Benner, 2020).

In the Jamaican context, Cole (2020b) explained that parents of students who are

performing poorly or who are not well–adjusted are more likely to be invited by the school to get involved to support academic and behavioural improvement. Cole (2022) also noted that compensatory parental involvement is more evident for boys at the early childhood level because they have lower self–regulation and academic achievement.

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

This sytematised review focused on parental involvement in the academic achievement of their children at the early childhood education level. It aimed to identify strategies and formats that could effectively improve Epstein et al.'s (2019) six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision–making, and collaborating with the community. Strategies related to all six types of parental involvement were identified, with most of the identified strategies relating to communicating (28 strategies) and learning at home (19 strategies). This finding is unsurprising, since Epstein's model is one of the most widely used frameworks in parental involvement research (Saani et al., 2021). However, fewer strategies were identified for decision–making and community collaboration.

Five articles that were conducted in the Jamaican context were included in this review (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a, 2020b, 2022, 2024). They identified strategies related to communicating (nine strategies); learning at home (nine strategies); parenting (five strategies); and volunteering (three strategies). The communication strategies include traditional methods (face–to–face meetings, sending notes and letters, and talks at drop–off or pick–up) (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a, 2022); technology enabled methods (telephone calls, emails, and text or WhatsApp messaging) (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020b); and attitudinal strategies (avoiding jargons and an open door policy) (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a). Attitudinal strategies are critical because the studies also highlight that school administrators and teachers' negative attitudes to parental involvement may dissuade parents from getting involved. Therefore, schools and teachers are generally encouraged to create a welcoming environment for parents (Callie Silver & Coba–Rodriguez, 2022; Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2024). This strategy is advantageous in the Jamaican context, since Jamaican parents often perceive school as uninviting and unwelcoming of their participation (Munroe, 2009; Watson–Williams et al., 2011). As Watson–Williams et al. (2011) noted, schools' use of the "shame and blame approach to motivate parents to become involved" and the uninviting attitudes of the school administrators and teachers were barriers to Jamaican parents' involvement (p. 5). Cole (2024) found that ECE teachers were more likely to have unwelcoming attitudes to parents from inner–city and rural communities because of their lower cultural capital. She also noted that teachers' non–judgmental approach was more likely to improve parental involvement.

Among the learning at home strategies, helping with homework (four articles) (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a, 2020b, & 2022) and reading (three articles) (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020b, & 2022) were the two most frequently reported. However, only one strategy (PTA meetings) was identified for supporting parental involvement in decision–making. Cole (2022) recommends involvement in school governance through active participation in PTA meetings. No strategy was identified related to community collaboration. Cole (2020b) explains that many early childhood institutions are in inner–city and rural communities that are disadvantaged by, for example, high crime rates, unemployment, parents' low educational levels, and working–class families. Therefore, community collaboration is difficult.

Additionally, the review identified three strategies that were not aligned with Epstein et al.'s (2019) types of parental involvement: scheduling activities at different times of day, providing financial support, and providing tutoring for children. Epstein's model may not have

included two of these activities because it focuses on how schools can help parents get involved in their children's learning. These activities are not school–based activities, which researchers contend hold a hegemonic place of value because they are visible to teachers and schools. They occur outside the school and are ways in which fathers, single–parent, and low–income families are usually engaged in their children's learning. As Oke et al. (2021) explained, traditional, face–to–face involvement activities, such as parent–teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and open houses, are structural barriers to involvement from low–income or working families because they occur when parents are at work and cannot get time off to attend. Therefore, flexibility in scheduling and using technological tools such as Zoom may allow these parents to participate more frequently (Abdul–Jaleel et al., 2021; Gerzel–Short, 2018; Oke et al., 2021). The need for scheduling flexibility was also highlighted by Jamaican educators (Watson–Williams et al., 2011). Parents in Cole's (2020b) study also explained that though work commitments prevented them from visiting the school, being able to call the teachers kept them involved.

Three types of parental involvement formats were identified in the literature: location formats (school–based, classroom–based or home–based); direction formats (parent–initiated or teacher/school–initiated); and child elicitation (compensation and enrichment). However, the most frequently identified and researched formats overall and in the Jamaican literature were school- and home–based parental involvement. Researchers have noted that school–based parental involvement is the traditional involvement format that can ostracise low–income and single–parent families and is the cultural capital of middle–income nuclear families. However, research outlined that home–based parental involvement was more effective, especially for low–income families, migrant or immigrant families, working families, and parents with low educational achievement (Coba–Rodriguez et al., 2020; Cole, 2022; Kim & Riley, 2021; Lin et al., 2019). Cole (2020a) contended that because schooling was done in the culture of the middle and upper classes, the culture dissuades lower–class and working–class families from participating in school–based activities. Furthermore, Saani et al. (2021) reported that only two of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (collaborating with the community and learning at home) significantly influenced ECE children's academic achievement in Mathematics, English Language, and Natural Science. This shows that focusing on home–based parental involvement may improve the effectiveness of parental involvement.

Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

The findings of this systematised review were limited to the articles identified in the three databases used. Despite deliberate attempts to find articles published about Jamaica at the ECE level, the paucity of such articles limited the extent to which the findings could apply to Jamaica. Only five articles were identified, and these came from two researchers. Our focus on the ECE level also limited the extent to which the findings reflected the realities at other levels of the education system.

Notwithstanding, the findings have implications for countries with a high percentage of single–parent, migrant, immigrant, low–income, and working families. Particularly for Jamaica, single–parent families are dominant (Campbell & Kinkead–Clark, 2022; Cole, 2020a; Oshi et al., 2019; #PNPConference, 2022). Therefore, the government, school administrators, and teachers could place greater effort on improving these parents' home–based involvement in addition to, or instead of, school–based involvement. Technological tools could also be used to facilitate flexible and inclusive parental involvement interventions. These interventions could include the myriad of strategies identified in this study. Cole (2024) also recommended extended family involvement when parents are unavoidably absent. Therefore, parental involvement policies can focus on engaging families in children's education.

The findings also revealed that decision–making and collaborating with community

types of parental involvement were under–researched. This was also true in the Jamaican context, where only one decision–making and no community collaboration strategy was identified. Therefore, future researchers could give more attention to these types, identifying additional strategies and processes for including parents in schools' decision–making and leveraging the community for greater student outcomes. Furthermore, while PTA meetings are versatile, concerns have been raised that they are primarily used for fundraising (Watson–Williams et al., 2011) rather than for decision–making. Therefore, school administrators could use this well–established facility to enhance parents' inclusion in schools' decision–making so that they can be more supportive of school policies (Cole, 2020b). While the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) of Jamaica has implemented Parent Places to provide community–based education and support for parents, more of these places are needed. Community businesses therefore are encouraged to help meet parents' needs, thereby better enabling them to play their role in their children's education.

Finally, future research could also focus on utilising technology to improve parental involvement. Since the impact of parental involvement on student outcomes varies based on the format, strategies, and outcomes measured, future researchers could investigate the formats and strategies that are effective in their local settings. There is also a need for more studies outside the US context and more experimental studies to measure the impact of parental involvement in general, as well as with specific strategies.

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