

Conceptualising Parental Involvement: Definition, Purposes, and Process

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Abstract

While numerous studies have examined the impact of parental involvement on children's educational outcomes, there is no agreed-upon or concrete definition of parental involvement. The lack of clear definitions for educational and psychological concepts hinders scientific development. It creates significant challenges for amalgamating the results of previous studies because different writers use the same term to refer to different things. Therefore, this conceptual review systematically selected and analysed 40 peer-reviewed journal articles using thematic content analysis to define parental involvement. From the review, a new definition of PI emerged: "Parental involvement is a multidimensional construct encompassing collaboration among home, school and community to promote positive educational outcomes for children". A typology of nine purposes of parental involvement and the Partnership-driven, Agile, Cyclical, and Tech-enabled (PACT) process model to guide the implementation of parental involvement interventions or programmes were also developed. This study offers practical guidelines for effectively engaging with this critical component of successful education.

Keywords: parental involvement, conceptual review, family engagement, early childhood education, academic achievement, PACT model

Introduction

Background

It is generally accepted that parental involvement or family engagement positively impacts students' academic performance and learning. Research on parental involvement is not new, and numerous studies currently focus on its importance, effects, types, and processes (Wilder, 2023). Many researchers have found that a strong, positive bond between home and school is crucial for children's holistic development and education (Oranga et al., 2023). This is especially important in the sensitive and critical

early childhood years (Dighe & Seiden, 2020). Therefore, researchers theorise that cooperation between the home, school, and community can lead to academic achievement for students (Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

Studies conducted internationally have shown that parental involvement in a child's early education is positively associated with their academic performance (see, for example, Dighe & Seiden, 2020). Specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their education achieve higher academic performance than those whose parents are less involved

(Wilder, 2023). Regionally, the influence of parental involvement on academic success has been noted by researchers and policymakers who have integrated efforts to increase parent involvement into broader educational policy initiatives (Parey, 2021). For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, according to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (2017), a 2004 report by the Cabinet Appointed Committee to examine the status of the family concluded that “poor parenting skills and practices” were adversely affecting family life. The National Parenting Policy was then established to provide a plan for adopting a needs-driven approach to support parenting roles that would contribute to children’s positive development (Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, 2017).

The government of Jamaica has also attempted to improve parental involvement. In 2012, the National Parenting Commission Act was passed to develop a stronger and more sustainable partnership between home and school (Stewart et al., 2022). This Act mandated the establishment of the National Parenting Support Commission to develop, deliver, and maintain public awareness programmes for developing effective parenting skills. Additionally, the Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (JETC) was launched in 2020 to comprehensively review and assess Jamaica’s education system, including its structure, operation, and processes, and recommend an action plan for change (Murphy, 2024). In commenting on the 2021 JETC report, Dr. Faith Alexander, Chief Transformation Officer in the Ministry of Education and Youth, said that parental involvement would be crucial in implementing the recommendations outlined by the Commission (Murphy, 2023); indicating that parental involvement is considered a solution to many of the challenges facing Jamaica’s education system.

Defining Parental Involvement

Despite its importance and the attention given to parental involvement, there is no consensus on the definition of the concept

(Fiskerstrand, 2022; Lewis-Fokum & Morgan, 2022). Fiskerstrand (2022) highlighted that this was a longstanding issue. There is also no agreement on whether the terms “parental involvement”, “parental engagement”, or “family engagement” should be used. For example, Purtell et al. (2022) prefer the term *parental engagement* because they argue that involvement is limited to parent-initiated activities while engagement is bidirectional. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) also posit that involvement is the first step towards engagement and encompasses participation in school activities, whereas engagement includes a collaborative relationship between the home and school. Finally, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) conceptualise parental involvement as including parental engagement and partnership. However, Gross et al. (2020) noted that those designing, implementing, evaluating, or participating in parent engagement initiatives did not conceptualise parent engagement in the same way. Therefore, both parental involvement and parental engagement are not clearly defined.

While there is a noted shift toward using the term “family engagement” instead of “parental involvement” (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), a closer examination reveals little difference between the two concepts. The use of the expression “family” appears to be broader and may encompass other family members being actively engaged in the child’s education, as opposed to “parental” which appears to be limited to the child’s parents only. However, other relatives and caregivers have been included in the definition of parents (see, for example, Saeed et al., 2024). The terms “parental involvement”, “parental engagement”, and “family engagement” are often used interchangeably. Therefore, there is a need to clarify the inconsistency surrounding the use of the terms.

Rationale and Purpose

The absence of a unified definition of parental involvement is a notable gap in the research literature (Sarsale et al., 2024). This lack of definition of education and psychological

concepts stifles scientific development (Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021). In particular, it creates significant challenges for amalgamating the results of previous studies, because authors may use the same term to refer to different things (Amin & Jalani, 2021; Jinnah & Walters, 2008; Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017). As Jaiswal and Choudhuri (2017) highlighted in their review study on the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic performance, the varying definitions and conceptualisations of parental involvement made it difficult to conclude which conceptualisation or combinations positively impacted student outcomes. For the construct of "parental involvement" or "family engagement", there is clear need for a concrete definition highlighting "its purpose, elements, dimensions, and discrete processes" (Sarsale et al., 2024, p. 253). This definition can build consensus among researchers and "shape teachers' and parents' practices" (Sarsale et al., 2024, p. 253). Consequently, this paper attempts to synthesise the existing definitions of parental involvement, categorise its purposes, and identify effective processes for effective parental involvement in education.

For this review, the term parental involvement is used as an umbrella concept, encompassing studies that use related expressions; for example, parental engagement, family involvement, or other terms that indicate parents' role in their children's education. This approach is justified since there is no agreed definition of the term (Sarsale et al., 2024); the terms are used interchangeably in the literature (Callie-Silver & Coba-Rodriguez, 2022; Cole, 2024; Lewis-Fokum & Morgan, 2022); and the focus on the involvement/engagement dichotomy oversimplifies the many ways parents support children's learning (O'Toole et al., 2019).

Research Objectives

This review of the current literature related to parental involvement at the early childhood level was conducted to achieve the following specific research objectives:

1. To produce an integrated definition of parental involvement.
2. To create a typology of the purposes of parental involvement.

3. To develop a process model for engaging parents in their children's education.

Research Questions

1. How is parental involvement conceptualised in the current literature on early childhood education?
2. How can the purposes of parental involvement during the early years be categorised?
3. Based on current empirical studies, how can parents be effectively engaged in their children's early education?

Significance of the Study

This study may benefit teachers and school administrators interested in integrating parents and families into their children's learning, as it will help them better understand what parental involvement is, its purposes, and the processes involved. By helping to clarify the conceptualisation of the term parental involvement, this review will also benefit other researchers and contribute to greater synthesis and consensus in the literature. Policymakers may also benefit from this conceptual review, as the paper can assist them in developing new frameworks, improving existing entities, or establishing policies to enhance home-school collaborations. The identification of a process for implementing parental involvement will also assist researchers, teachers, school administrators, and governments interested in implementing parental involvement interventions by providing a process framework that may be used to guide the planning and implementation of interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a grounded theory approach, which required a literature review that emphasised methodological rather than substantive theory. As Punch (2014) explains, methodological theory concerns the logic and procedures of research, while substantive theory addresses the phenomenon itself. As the objectives of this study were to produce an integrated definition, create a typology of the purposes, and develop a process model, we

required a generative framework. This type of literature review must remain open and avoid imposing pre-existing substantive frameworks. Instead, it drew on methodological theory to justify the research design and analytical strategies (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) also recommend a Grounded Theory Literature Review (GTLR) as the theoretical framework for generating new insights and conceptualisations.

Grounded theory uses an inductive approach, a “bottom-up” method, beginning with specific observations and then moving to more general theories (Thomas, 2006). Delve et al. (2023) noted that the inductive approach is most commonly employed when little prior research has been conducted on a topic. This is therefore an appropriate approach since there is no concrete definition of parental involvement and few researchers have attempted to conceptualise the term (see, for example, Fiskerstrand, 2022). Similar research that focused on creating definitions also used an inductive approach (see, for example, Brijlall & Maharaj, 2009).

Methodology

This paper reviewed existing literature on parental involvement or family engagement to produce an integrated definition of the term, create a typology of the purposes of parental involvement, and identify effective processes for engaging parents in their children’s education.

Research Design

A conceptual review design was employed in this study, as its primary goal was to enhance understanding of a concept (i.e., parental involvement) (Kirillova & Yang, 2022). According to Hulland (2020), a conceptual review enriches theory by reviewing extant knowledge, noting tensions and inconsistencies, identifying important gaps, and proposing agendas for future research. Hulland further noted that a conceptual review results in a theoretical contribution that refines, reconceptualises, or even replaces existing ways of viewing a phenomenon. Wallerstein (2009) also noted that conceptual reviews focus on concepts and elucidate their meanings, evolu-

tion, and uses. This conceptual review focused on parental involvement and reviewed the existing literature to redefine the phenomenon, given the current inconsistencies surrounding its definition and conceptualisation. It also investigated the purposes and process of parental involvement. In line with its inductive approach, the study is a Grounded Theory Literature Review which follows the systematic five-step process established by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013): define, search, select, analyse, and present.

Define

At the definition stage, we clearly articulated the research aims and scope: to generate an integrated definition of parental involvement at the early childhood education (ECE) level, create a typology of its purposes, and develop a process model for engaging parents in their children’s education in the early years. This stage also included identifying research fields, determining sources and databases, defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, and deciding on search terms. To that end, we identified ProQuest Central, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect as credible databases for finding scholarly journals on early childhood education and parental involvement. We also identified the researchers’ personal libraries and the reference lists of selected studies as other sources for finding relevant scholarly journals and defined the inclusion and exclusion criteria presented in Table 1. The ECE level extends from birth to age eight (CARICOM Secretariat, 2008). Global statistics indicate that the entry age for most primary school students is 5-7 years (OECD, 2023; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2025; World Bank, 2024). This means that for countries with a starting school entry age of 7 years, 8-year-olds may also be in Grade 1 or first grade. Therefore, studies were included if they were conducted with students from kindergarten to Grade 1. Otherwise, they were excluded. Additionally, academic achievement at the ECE level refers to the successful preparation of the child for school readiness, attained through growth in foundational literacy and numeracy skills and executive function (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, studies were included if they focused on parental involvement to improve these skills, school readiness, or cognitive development in early childhood.

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, i.e., foundational skills in language, literacy, numeracy, etc., school readiness, or activities to improve cognitive development	If not focused on academic achievement (e.g., weight status, teacher preparation, school attendance, HIV/AIDS, social-emotional outcomes only)
Report Status	Peer-reviewed journal articles	All other types (e.g., review studies, reports, unpublished manuscripts, conference proceedings, etc.)
Publication date	Published from 2019–2024	All other years
Language	English	All other languages
Full-text	Full-text available	Full-text not available

Search

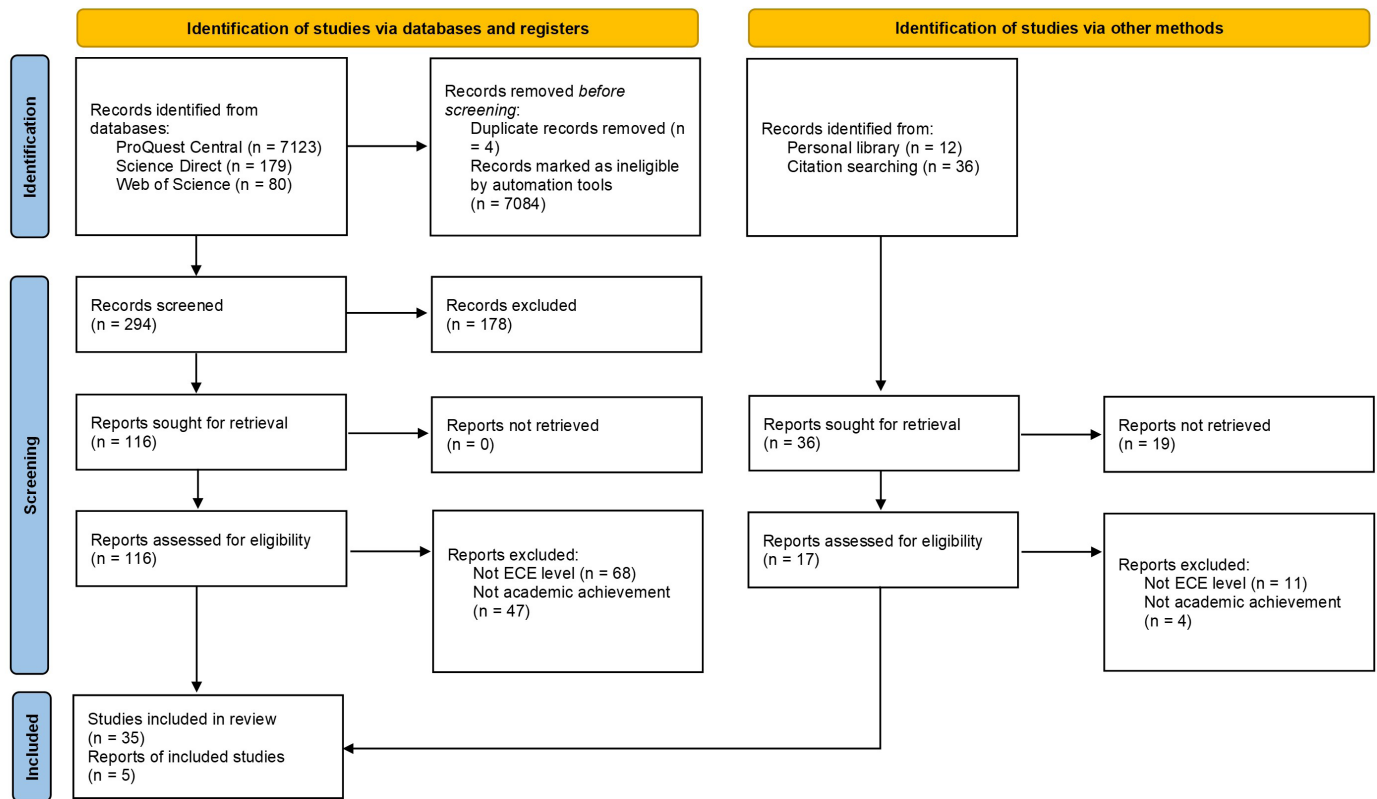
The search stage requires us to identify relevant literature in databases using the keywords and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria. This process was done in three phases: identification, screening, and disclosure of review samples (inclusion), as recommended by Hiebl (2023). The identification phase involves searching for research articles that are potentially relevant to the research questions (Hiebl, 2023). This process began by searching the three databases using the key terms “parental involvement in education” or “family engagement in education” AND “early childhood education”. Over 7,000 articles were identified through these database searches. Before moving to the next phase, ineligible articles were automatically removed using the following filters: peer-reviewed articles, those published from 2019–2024, in English, and those with full text available. Duplicates were also removed. Therefore, 294 articles remained for screening.

Select

Wolfswinkel et al.’s (2013) third stage is selection, in which the criteria are applied to filter and retain only the most relevant studies.

It is similar to Hiebl’s (2023) second phase (screening), in which potentially relevant research items should be analysed for content that matches the research questions or objectives. We conducted title and abstract screenings using the exclusion and inclusion criteria presented in Table 1. Articles were included if they focused on parental involvement or family engagement, at the early childhood level, and academic achievement. The exclusion criteria included articles published outside the years 2019–2024 and articles on parental involvement that were not conducted at the early childhood level.

After the screening, 116 full-text articles were assessed for inclusion. Sixty-six were removed because they were not at the ECE level, and 47 because they did not focus on students’ academic achievement. Therefore, 35 articles from the database search were included in this review. Five additional reports were included from the researchers’ personal libraries and searches of the reference lists of selected studies (see Figure 1 for the complete literature selection process). This presentation of the selection process in the PRISMA diagram demonstrates Hiebl’s (2023) third phase: disclosure to enhance transparency, replicability, and credibility.

Figure 1*PRISMA Diagram of Database Searches and other Sources*

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data was collected by downloading the selected articles from the databases. For print articles, we contacted the authors to inform them of the purpose of the research and to request an electronic version of their papers for ease of analysis. All the PDF files were then uploaded to QDA Miner for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the fourth stage in Wolfswinkel et al.'s (2013) framework. In this stage, we also utilised the principles of thematic content analysis and five of the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). While GTLR provided the macro-structure for the literature review, Braun and Clarke (2006) provided the micro-steps for the data analysis. Furthermore, the Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) framework focused on coding, whereas Braun and Clarke (2006)

included the data analysis steps necessary prior to coding. Both frameworks provide theoretical freedom (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Christou, 2023; Wolfswinkel et al., 2013) and allow researchers to go beyond the primary studies to generate new interpretive constructs and explanations (Christou, 2023; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Using both frameworks also enabled a more robust, transparent, and systematic account of the data that generated the findings of the study.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic content analysis includes transcription, reading, and re-reading to become familiar with the data, coding, theme identification, and writing up of the findings. The first step was irrelevant in this review because the articles were already in print. Therefore, we began by reading and rereading the articles. We completed the coding process using open and axial coding as recommended by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013). At

the open coding level, we focused on phrases and sentences in the selected articles that explicitly stated definitions and purposes of parental involvement and described the processes used to effect parental involvement interventions. Then we used *in vivo*, descriptive, and process codes to label relevant sections. For example, the term “multidimensional” served as an *in vivo* code arising from its explicit use in the definition of parental involvement in 15 articles.

Then we proceeded to the axial coding phase, where we identified interrelationships and dependencies among the codes. This is what Braun and Clarke (2006) referred to as theming, i.e., categorising patterns in the codes. For example, we identified that the purposes of parental involvement could be classified by beneficiary: school, teachers, students, and families. The final step in analysing the data, as presented by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), is the selective coding phase. Here, we engaged in constant comparative analysis – relating, comparing, integrating, and refining the axial codes to identify and develop relations among them. Therefore, while we were able to categorise different purposes of parental involvement according to different stakeholders at the axial coding stage, in the selective coding stages we identified how these categories interrelated: the school, family, and teacher purposes all aimed at improving students’ outcomes. We also generated an integrated definition grounded in the existing ECE literature, rather than a single existing theory and used this process to meet other research objectives.

Thereafter, we reviewed the themes to ensure authenticity and alignment with the research objectives. Three themes were identified:

- 1. Parental involvement: A unified multidimensional construct.** This theme integrates the varied characteristics of parental involvement identified in the literature into a single, cohesive construct that reflects the complexity of the concept.
- 2. The convergent purposes of parental involvement.** The second theme emphasises that while parental involvement purposes can be classified

by the different stakeholders, these categories are not isolated. All stakeholder purposes ultimately converge around the common goal of enhancing student outcomes.

- 3. The Partnership-driven, agile, cyclical, and tech-enabled (PACT) model.** This name reflects the commitment needed, cyclical nature, collaboration, inclusivity, flexibility, and tech-enabled adaptability of the emergent conceptual and procedural framework that can translate parental involvement into a logical sequence of actions.

By defining and naming the themes, we ensured they would be easily understood.

Present

This is the final step, in which we highlight the integrated definition, typology of purposes, and process model generated inductively from the data. The findings are presented according to each research objective. The reviewers used subheadings that were logically identified during the thematic content analysis. Suitable figures and tables were presented to augment and organise the findings according to each research objective. Lastly, we authenticated the findings through verbatim quotations.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must be credited for their contributions to research. This ensures that researchers can be held accountable to the public and builds public support for research as organisations are more likely to fund research projects if they can trust the quality and integrity of the research (Kabir, 2016). To that end, the contributions of each author have been listed at the end of this article. Additionally, the researchers demonstrated respect for intellectual property by avoiding plagiarism (Wager & Wiffen, 2011). Finally, objectivity and honesty were prioritised in this review. Objectivity, which refers to the absence of selection and reporting bias, is critical to review studies (Page et al., 2021). Objectivity was enhanced in this review by adhering, as much as practicable, to the PRISMA protocols

for selecting the included articles. Furthermore, as Siddaway et al. (2019) explain, the primary ethical aim of a systematic approach to literature reviews is to produce an unbiased summary through a rigorous, replicable process. Therefore, we also ensured that the findings were not cherry-picked to suit a preconceived narrative, but emerged from a systematic, inductive analysis of the literature. Tables and diagrams were also used to summarise and convey key results (Siddaway et al., 2019). Honesty refers to intellectual integrity regarding the state of the literature (Suri, 2020). This was achieved by reporting the full scope of the literature, for example, indicating that 14 of the selected articles did not define parental involvement.

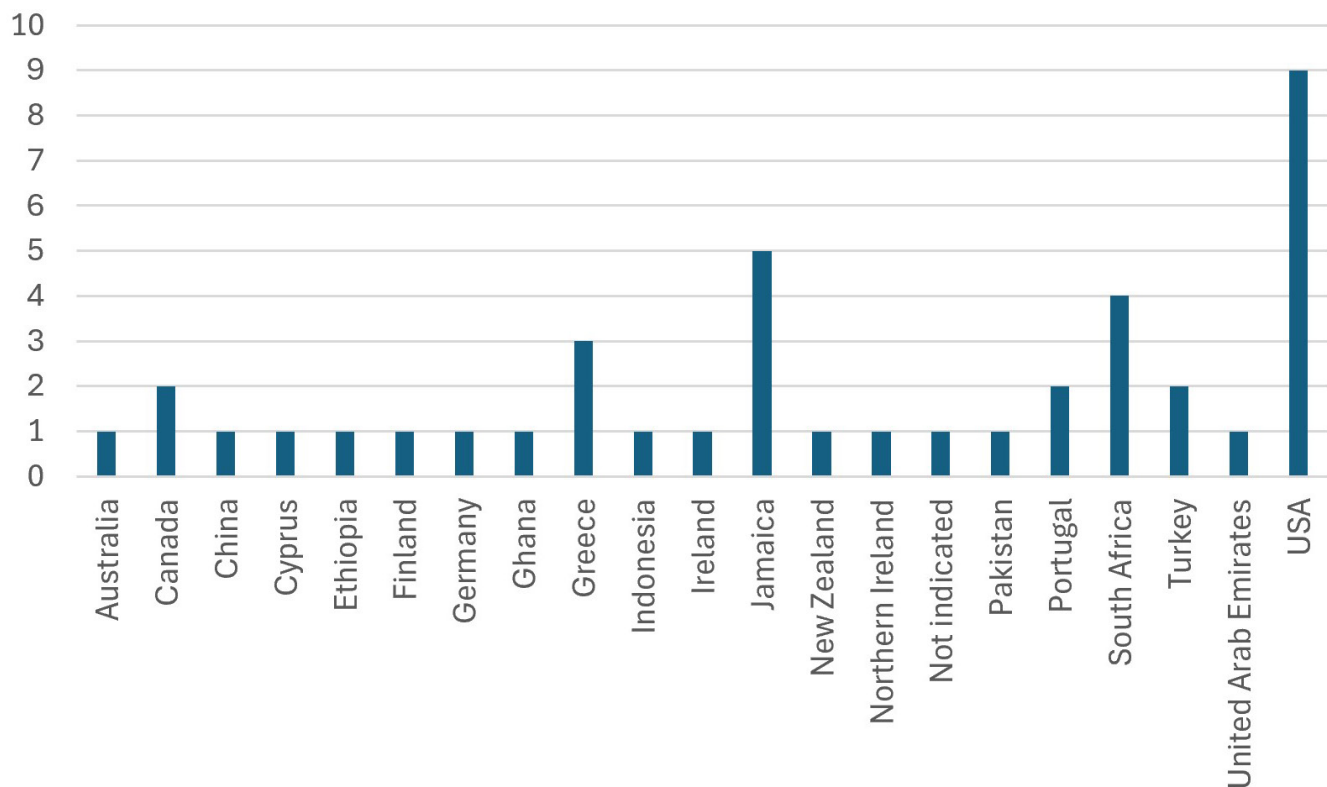
Therefore, we prioritised honesty and objectivity at all stages of the research by ensuring there was no falsification and by checking and verifying data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Presentation of the Findings

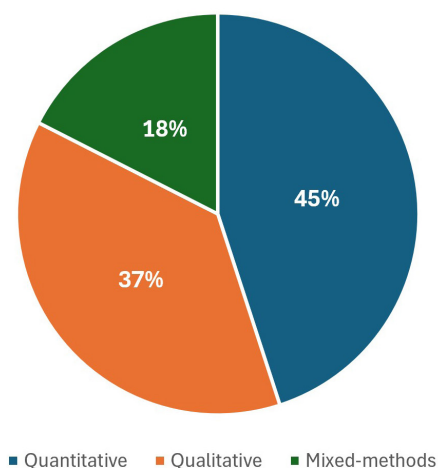
Forty articles met the criteria for selection in this review. The sample comprises research from 22 countries, with most studies conducted in the United States of America (USA) ($n = 9$) and a notable number from Jamaica ($n = 5$) (see Figure 2). Additionally, as shown in Figure 3, most of the studies (45%) included in this review used a quantitative approach.

Figure 2

Countries from which the research in the articles selected were conducted



Note. One article is a comparative analysis between Canada and the USA.

Figure 3*Research approaches used in the articles selected*

Parental Involvement: A Unified Multidimensional Construct

One of the objectives of this review was to synthesise the literature to produce an integrated definition of parental involvement. In the reviewed studies, researchers defined parental involvement according to its types (Amin & Jalani, 2021; Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Penderi et al., 2023); purpose (Kim & Riley, 2021; Ogg et al., 2020); parents' beliefs and behaviours (Boyle & Benner, 2020; Malchar et al., 2020; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023); characteristics (Hu et al., 2021; Rousoulioti et al., 2022; Shaik, 2023); and location (Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2019). Some researchers used more than one feature to define parental involvement (e.g., Boyle & Benner, 2020), and other studies (n = 14) did not include a definition.

Definitions were classified by type if the researchers defined parental involvement using Epstein's types of parental involvement framework, either directly or indirectly. For example, "parental involvement is multidimensional and has been defined by many researchers. Epstein (2001) asserted that parental involvement embodies six types: parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community" (Cole, 2022, p. 117). Another example is the definition used by Kim and Riley (2021), where, although the authors did not

specifically state that they were using Epstein's framework, they defined parental involvement by the types identified in the framework:

Earlier research has defined parental involvement in several ways, for example, as communication between parents/caregivers and early childhood teachers (Owen et al., 2000), and volunteering in the classroom (Castro et al., 2004). In the current intervention, parental involvement took the form of homework for parents/caregivers of preschoolers (Kim and Riley, 2021, p. 902).

A definition was classified by its purpose if it focused on or included an intended outcome of parental involvement. For example, "Parental educational involvement is a nuanced construct that includes the many parenting behaviors aimed at promoting and enhancing children's educational outcomes" (Boyle & Benner, 2020, p. 201). This definition includes the descriptive terms "nuanced", "parental behaviours", and the purpose: "promoting and enhancing children's educational outcomes". Defining parental involvement by its characteristics involves using descriptive terms such as "multidimensional", "partnership", and "active participation". Fifteen studies described parental involvement as multidimensional (see, for example, Bonanati & Rubach, 2022; Purtell et al., 2022; Shaik, 2023). This term was the most frequently used to describe parental involvement. Therefore, we sought to identify the dimensions of parental involvement. Three dimensions were identified: psychological, practical, and location (see Table 1).

Nine studies identified the psychological dimension, which included parents' involvement & self-efficacy, perceptions of their children's competence, and beliefs about parental involvement. In defining parental involvement as a psychological construct, researchers frequently mention Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model (see, for example, Boyle & Benner, 2020; Cole, 2024; Wendel et al., 2020). This model suggests that parents' beliefs about parental involvement, self-efficacy, and perceptions of whether their involvement is welcomed influence their level of involvement. The psychological dimension determines whether parents become involved and remain engaged in their children's learning. It is the "why" dimension of parental involvement.

Table 2*Dimensions of parental involvement identified in the included studies*

Dimensions	Example and Number Of Studies	Sample Articles
Psychological	• Parent's beliefs about students' competence (1) • Parents' aspirations for their children (3) • Parents' perceived receptiveness of the school to their involvement (Invitation) (4) • Parents' beliefs about their role (5) • Parents' involvement self-efficacy (5)	Boyle & Benner (2020); Cole (2020, 2024); Malchar et al. (2020); Ogg et al. (2020); Panaoura & Nitsiou (2023); Penderi et al. (2023); Wendel et al. (2020)
Practical	• Activities emphasizing reading (2) • Learning through discussions (2) • Contracts between teacher and parent (1) • Parenting (6) • Communicating (11) • Learning at home (10) • Volunteering (7) • Decision-making (6) • Collaborating with the community (5)	Campbell & Kinkead-Clark (2022); Cole (2022); (Hu et al., 2021); Kim & Riley (2021); Ogg et al. (2020); Penderi et al. (2023); Rousoulioti et al. (2022); Saeed et al. (2024); Shaik (2023)
Location	• Home (5) • School (5) • Community (2)	Coba-Rodriguez et al. (2020); Lin et al. (2019); Mncanca et al. (2021); Penderi et al. (2023); Purtell et al. (2022)

Another dimension identified is the practical dimension, in which researchers define parental involvement in terms of the types, strategies, and practices that school, parents, and teachers use to enact it. Fifteen studies defined parental involvement in terms of the activities parents and school personnel could engage in for this purpose. For this dimension, Epstein's six types of parental involvement featured prominently (see, for example, Amin & Jalani, 2021; Cole, 2020; Ogg et al., 2020; Penderi et al., 2023). Epstein et al. (2019) identified six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. These types were also identified in studies that did not indicate they were using Epstein's model. These types of parental involvement reflect activities that parents, teachers, schools, and community members can engage in to impact

students' educational outcomes positively. This is the "how" dimension.

Finally, the locational dimension identifies where parents get involved: at home, school, or in the community. Five studies defined parental involvement based on location. Again, Epstein's (2019) model and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model have influenced this conception of parental involvement. They outline that parental involvement requires collaboration between and among the home, school, and community. This has led other researchers to define parental involvement as home or school-based (see, for example, Lin et al., 2019; Mncanca et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development was also used to identify the home (microsystem) and school (mesosystem and exosystem) locations of parental involvement (Penderi et al., 2023). Penderi et al. (2023) identified school-based

involvement as belonging to the mesosystem and exosystem. However, they differentiated them by describing mesosystem school-based involvement as “parents’ participation in the school activities and communication with teachers”. In contrast, exosystem school-based involvement:

incorporates social structures that do not involve the child but exert their influence on children’s development and learning through their effect on the microsystem (parents’ efforts to promote children’s literacy outcomes indirectly, for example, through their participation in parent-teacher organizations). (p. 5)

This dimension identifies where parents get involved in their children’s education.

Other recurring terms in the definitions of parental involvement in the selected study are “active participation/engagement,” (Hu et al., 2021; Shaik, 2023); “children’s educational outcomes,” (Cole, 2022; Esterhuizen et al., 2023); and agents (school, families, parents, teachers, communities), which were included in all the definitions. The educational outcomes include social, emotional, and academic outcomes. These will be discussed in detail when the findings on the

purposes of parental involvement are presented. Notably, the word parents is not limited to a child’s biological parents, but also extends to guardians and other relatives who fulfill that role (see, for example, Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Malchar et al., 2020; Penderi et al., 2023). Using the key dimensions and recurring words and phrases from the literature, an integrated definition emerged:

Parental involvement is a multidimensional construct encompassing collaboration among home, school and community to promote positive educational outcomes (social, emotional, academic) for children. It includes parents’ psychological foundations (beliefs, values and attitudes) (the why), practical behaviours and active participation (the what and how), across diverse educational locations (school, home, community) (the where) to promote their children’s learning.

The Convergent Purposes of Parental Involvement

The second objective was to develop a typology of parental involvement purposes by synthesising the relevant literature. This was done by first identifying the individual purposes in the selected studies (see Table 2).

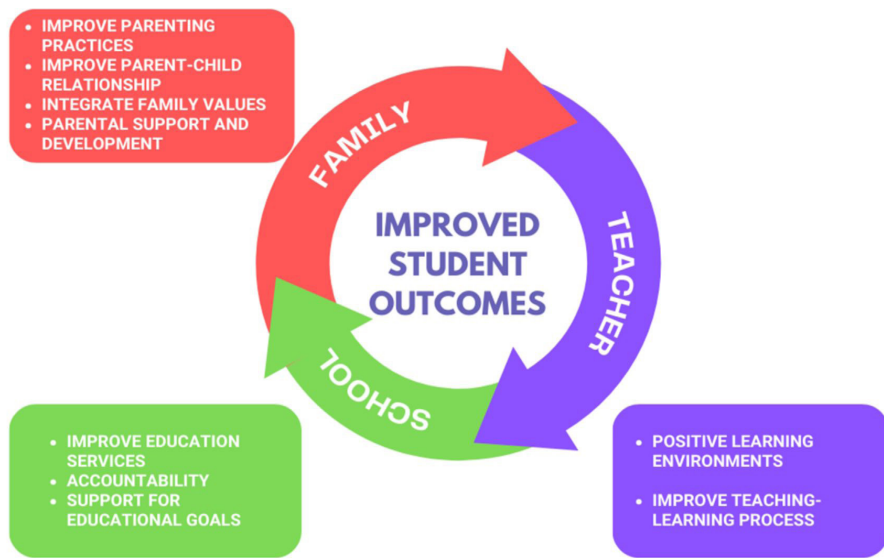
Table 3

The purposes of parental involvement identified in the selected articles

Actors	Purposes	No. of articles	Sample articles
Child	Promote educational outcomes (i.e., cognitive, social and emotional development)	29	Cole (2022); Campbell & Kinkead-Clark (2022); Lin et al. (2019); Saeed et al. (2024)
Family	Better parenting practices	7	Abdul-Jaleel et al. (2021); Shaik (2023); Simsar et al. (2024)
	Improved parent-child relationship	3	Cole (2020); Esterhuizen et al. (2023)
	Integrate family values and priorities	4	Dighe & Seiden (2020); Delouche et al. (2024); Tatineni & Belford (2020)
School	Improved education services	8	Kim & Riley (2021); Malchar et al. (2020); Seabra-Santos et al. (2022)
	Accountability (i.e., meet legal responsibility)	2	Malchar et al. (2020); Varshney et al. (2020)
	Support educational goals	2	Seabra-Santos et al. (2022); Yıldırım (2021)
Teacher	Create positive learning environments	2	Mathwasa & Sibanda (2020); Panaoura & Nitsiou (2023)
	Improve the teaching-learning process	5	Amin & Jalani (2021); Hu et al. (2021); Pliogou et al. (2024)

Table 2 identifies nine purposes of parental involvement as evidenced in the selected articles. Most studies (n = 29) reported that the primary purpose of parental involvement was to promote children’s educational outcomes (see, for example, Cole, 2022; Campbell & Kinkead-Clarke, 2022; Lin et al., 2019; Saeed et al., 2024). Additionally, 11 articles identified purposes related to the family, including better parenting practices (Abdul-Jaleel et al., 2021; Shaik, 2023; Simsar et al., 2024); improved parent-child relationships (Esterhuizen et al., 2023; Cole, 2020); and integrating family values and priorities (Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Tatineni & Belford, 2020; Delouche et al., 2024). Ten articles also identified school-related purposes: improved services (Kim & Riley, 2021; Malchar et al., 2020; Seabra-Santos et al., 2022); greater accountability (Malchar et al., 2020; Varshney et al., 2020); and parental support for educational goals (Seabra-Santos et al., 2022; Yildirim, 2021). Finally, seven articles highlighted teacher-related purposes: improving the teaching-learning process (Amin & Jalani, 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Pliogou et al., 2024) and creating positive learning environments (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2020; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023).

Figure 4
A Typology of the Purposes of Parental Involvement Identified in the Selected Articles



A typology emerged from the individual purposes (see Figure 4). The selected literature highlighted that parental involvement was carried out and supported for various purposes related to the student, family, teacher, and school. However, as shown in Figure 4, the ultimate purpose of parental involvement was to improve student outcomes (i.e., academic, social, and emotional development). Therefore, it is at the centre of the diagram. Figure 4 also shows that the purposes for each stakeholder were interrelated. For example, Malchar et al. (2020) posited that effective parental involvement improves the quality and quantity of services provided by the school, which leads to improved student outcomes, mutual respect, communication, and shared goals. Therefore, parental involvement benefits families, teachers, schools, and children. Similarly, Delouche et al. (2024) opine that effective parental involvement creates a dynamic ecosystem, where the success of one stakeholder reinforces the others. In the early years, these partnerships function as a reciprocal feedback loop: when schools integrate a family’s cultural values and histories into their pedagogy, teachers gain a deeper understanding of a child’s unique needs, while parents feel empowered to mirror the school’s educational priorities at home. The authors also explain that the collaboration transforms the learning environment into a “family-like school” and a “school-like home” where the boundaries between educators and caregivers blur to create a unified support system for children. For the child, this interrelatedness is the primary driver of social and emotional resilience and long-term academic achievement. This is especially vital for immigrant families, as alignment between the home and school helps bridge cultural gaps, ensuring that the high aspirations of parents are successfully translated into tangible success for students.

The Partnership-driven, Agile, Cyclical, Tech-enabled (PACT) Model for Parental Involvement

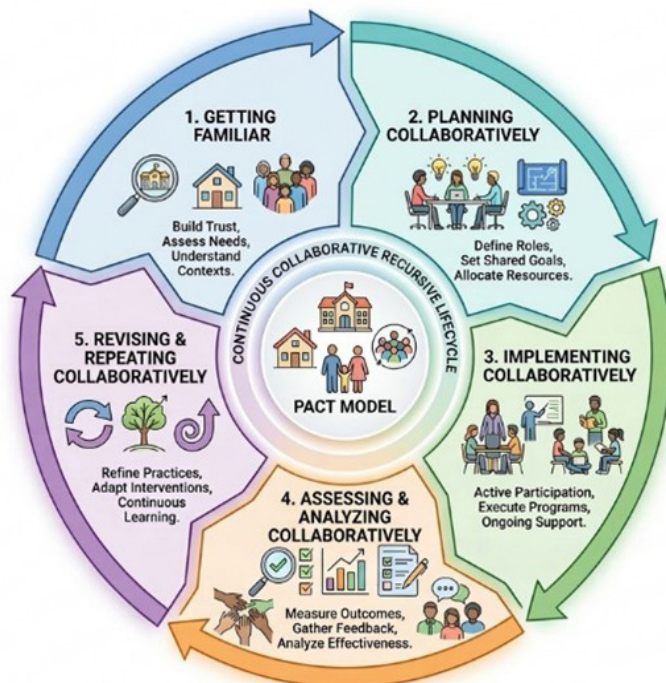
The third research objective was to review the literature to develop a process model to guide the implementation of parental involvement interventions and programmes. While the findings presented in relation to this objective generally emerged from all the articles included, we paid particular attention to the successful and unsuccessful processes reported in the 10 studies that included an intervention (see, for example, Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Merideth et al., 2022; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). We identified practices that sustained parental engagement and improved parental involvement beliefs, values, attitudes, or behaviour and improved children's outcomes, as well as those that detracted from the data quality and research validity. Well-designed interventions yield more robust causal results. Therefore, these studies are particularly beneficial in generating a process that can effectively increase parental involvement in children's education.

The review of the related literature highlighted 17 practices in 25 articles, including the 10 with interventions, which were condensed into five steps: getting familiar with families, teachers, school, and communities; planning collaboratively; implementing the parental involvement intervention collaboratively; assessing the programme or intervention collaboratively; and, revising and repeating the process (see Figure 5). The data analysis process led to the development of the Partnership-driven, Agile, Cyclical, Tech-enabled (PACT) model for parental involvement.

The PACT Model is a process model for parental involvement interventions that emphasises sustained, iterative collaboration among families, schools, teachers, and communities. It is a cyclical process because improved student outcomes are more likely to result from continuous parental involvement rather than one-off interventions. Flexibility, inclusiveness, and technological integration are embedded throughout, enabling responsive, accessible, and adaptive practices that strengthen partnerships and improve student outcomes.

Figure 5

A PACT Model for Implementing Parental Involvement



Getting Familiar with Families, Teachers, and Communities

The first step in the process was for those interested in implementing parental involvement interventions (coordinators) to get familiar with the families, teachers, schools, and communities involved. Fourteen studies, including three with interventions, recommended this step (for example, Malchar et al., 2020; Merideth et al., 2022; Rousoulioti et al., 2022). Getting familiar with the families involved required coordinators to understand the families' needs, beliefs, values, and culture, as these may be barriers or enablers to parental involvement interventions. For example, Hu et al. (2021) noted that Chinese parents with traditional child-rearing beliefs are less likely to be actively involved in school-based activities without invitations

from teachers because of their deep respect for teachers rooted in traditional Confucian doctrine. Additionally, low-income and single-parent families often face time and resource constraints that prevent them from participating in school activities (Abdul-Jaleel et al., 2021; Sihvonen et al., 2024). In contrast, parents support interventions that consider and include their beliefs, values, and culture (Abdul-Jaleel et al., 2021). Purtell et al. (2022) also began their home visits intervention with sessions dedicated to building rapport and conducting a strength and needs assessment to develop a family plan for support. These authors reported that the individualised nature of the home visiting approach was a vital ingredient for success. They increased parent engagement at the school, particularly among Hispanic families, even when participation in classroom-based events was inconsistent due to barriers such as work schedules. This step also enabled coordinators to identify skills, talents, and family resources that could be leveraged to enhance the intervention's effectiveness (Delouche et al., 2024).

Since teachers are also involved in the process, coordinators should understand teachers' values and beliefs regarding parental involvement, as well as their skill level in implementing various involvement activities. As Shaik (2023) noted, teachers may have cultural beliefs that value traditional school-based involvement activities, such as attending parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, which lead them to marginalise families who are involved at home. Finally, familiarity with schools and communities allows coordinators to leverage existing school and community resources and practices to minimise the disruption of the intervention (Delouche et al., 2024; Purtell et al., 2022). It also mitigates the school and community barriers to parental involvement.

This first step is partnership-driven as it recognises and builds foundational relationships with families, teachers, schools, and communities. It is inclusive because diverse voices are recognised and respected from the outset. Additionally, it can be tech-enabled by

employing digital tools (e.g., surveys, apps, and virtual meetings) to help gather insights and reach all stakeholders. The participants' strengths, needs, values, etc. may change over time, so coordinators should be attuned throughout the intervention.

Collaborative Planning for Parental Involvement

The second step is to plan collaboratively. The top-down approach, in which only coordinators and experts plan interventions before inviting parents and teachers to implement them, hinders the effective implementation of parental involvement interventions (Mncanca et al., 2021). However, when parents are involved in the planning process, they exhibit greater ownership and commitment (Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). In an intervention to improve their children's mathematical thinking through parental involvement, Panaoura and Nitsiou (2023) included parents in the planning of play-based activities, which improved parents' understanding of the importance of planning these activities. This also empowered parents to make decisions about their children's learning, though additional training was needed to increase parents' self-efficacy for planning parental involvement activities (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). Other activities included in the planning phase were developing engagement opportunities (reported in 10 articles) (see, for example, Malchar et al., 2020; Penderi et al., 2023) and establishing home, school, and community networks (reported in six articles) (see, for example, Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2020; Merideth et al., 2022; Purtell et al., 2022).

Collaborative planning highlights the partnership-driven approach. It also enables agility by ensuring that plans are flexible and responsive to evolving needs (Sihvonen et al., 2024). Collaborative planning also fosters greater inclusiveness. Planning can be tech-enabled through online platforms that support shared and asynchronous access to planning at different times and transparent communication (Sihvonen et al., 2024; Woodhouse et al., 2024).

Collaboratively Implementing the Parental Involvement Intervention

Effectively implementing a parental involvement intervention requires collaboration among the home, school, and community. While coordinators may opt to facilitate parental involvement at home or at school, research shows that including both settings is most efficacious (Purtell et al., 2022). This result necessitates cross-context collaboration.

The implementation should begin with training for stakeholders to enable them to play their roles in the process. Nineteen studies (six with interventions) recommended training for teachers and parents. Some studies highlighted the need for training among parents (see, for example, Merideth et al., 2022; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023; Pliogou et al., 2024), especially fathers (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2020). Some focused on teacher training, noting that teachers were not adequately prepared to facilitate parental involvement (Mncanca et al., 2021; Oke et al., 2021; Shaik, 2023). Panaoura and Nitsiou (2023) found that training boosted parents' parental involvement self-efficacy, and Purtell et al. (2022) purported that teacher training may reduce teacher bias and improve their attitudes towards parental involvement. Seabra-Santos et al. (2022) attributed the overall positive outcomes of their intervention to improve children's readiness to the training provided to teachers, which included training on fostering parental involvement. Therefore, training may also be necessary for teachers. This necessity would be made clear during the familiarisation process. On the other hand, Merideth et al. (2022) outlined that if training lacks useful content, it will reduce enthusiasm and engagement. The familiarisation process can also help to unearth what content to include in the training to ensure its effectiveness. Importantly, since time constraints and distance prevent some parents from attending on-site training, coordinators can use Zoom and videos accessible on demand to ensure that low-income families are included (Oke et al., 2021; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023).

Following training, teachers should initiate and maintain communication with parents (recommended in 22 studies, including five of the

intervention studies). Although communication should be two-way and ongoing (Hu et al., 2021; Malchar et al., 2020), many studies recommended that teachers should make the first move (see, for example, Ogg et al., 2020; Saani et al., 2021; Shaik, 2023) as early as in the first few days of school (Purtell et al., 2022). Many parents are interested in becoming involved in their children's learning, but they are unsure how to start and fear that their unsolicited attempts will not be well received (Rousoulioti et al., 2022). Shaik (2023) explained that personal invitations from teachers foster a sense of being valued among parents, thereby increasing the likelihood of their active participation in educational activities. Teachers should therefore initiate and maintain communication. Traditional communication methods (such as letters and notes) can be used. However, technological tools such as email, text messaging, WhatsApp, and digital teaching platforms can also be useful (Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). Whatever strategies and channels are selected, they should be agreed upon by the parents. Initiating communication is one way that teachers and schools can create a welcoming environment which encourages parental involvement, as recommended in six of the selected articles (see, for example, Hu et al., 2021; Mncanca et al., 2021; Oke et al., 2021). Open-door policies and being accessible to parents also create this environment (Oke et al., 2021).

During the implementation phase, coordinators should provide and maintain support for teachers and parents (reported in 19 studies) (see, for example, Kim & Riley, 2021; Penderi et al., 2023; Simsar et al., 2024); establish procedures for monitoring fidelity (reported in three studies) (Mncanca et al., 2021; Woodhouse et al., 2024); and collect data to assess the programme's effectiveness (reported in two studies) (Purtell et al., 2022; Sihvonen et al., 2024). The training provided at the beginning of the implementation phase may not adequately prepare teachers and parents to be involved in their children's learning (Kim & Riley, 2021). Therefore, they should be provided with coaching and additional training as needed. Support can also satisfy foundational functional needs (e.g., food, transportation, and

shelter) and psychosocial needs (e.g., reducing anxiety and boosting confidence) (Malchar et al., 2020; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023). Support can come from the school, other parents, or the wider community. However, coordinators are responsible for activating and informing parents about available support. Teachers also have a critical role to play in implementation. Without active leadership from teachers, including regularly posting or sending new material, actively prompting parents to engage instead of observe, responding to comments and queries to create a two-way dialogue which builds trust and rapport, and planning new ways to keep involvement interesting over time, parental participation or engagement is likely to be minimal or non-existent (Laranjeiro et al., 2023).

Assessing the Programme or Intervention Collaboratively

Every intervention needs measures to assess its efficacy (Lin et al., 2019). Although assessment is the fourth step in the process, effective assessment is conceptualised as an ongoing process. Coordinators should assess participants' concepts of interest (e.g., student academic achievement, parental involvement, learning at home, etc.) before, during, and at the end of the intervention (Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023; Purtell et al., 2022; Woodhouse et al., 2024). Assessment before the intervention establishes baseline measurements, which can be compared with those collected at the end of the intervention to gauge its overall effectiveness. During the intervention, coordinators should assess participants so that they can respond flexibly to their changing needs and monitor implementation fidelity (Purtell et al., 2022). For example, in the KTP intervention, the coordinators used teacher self-reporting and monthly collaborative review sessions to evaluate the implementation of intervention activities, discuss the challenges and successes of recent activities, and identify specific resources or guidance needed for successful program execution. Assessing the intervention's efficacy can be done using diverse quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure the findings are credible and complete (Laranjeiro et al., 2023). Home-based interventions can be assessed for improvement purposes through

home visits (Mncanca et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022; Varshney et al., 2020).

Importantly, assessment is collaborative because it is not done to participants but done with them. Woodhouse et al. (2024) recommend inclusion of parent feedback when monitoring ongoing progress and exploring new opportunities. It is also done by and with the participants. During the implementation, participants should be actively involved in the assessment process. They should be encouraged and facilitated to conduct self- and peer assessments.

Revising and Repeating the Process

As previously stated, successful parental involvement interventions are cyclical. They should be implemented in cycles, in which the assessment results of one cycle inform revisions to the intervention before it is implemented in the next cycle. Data-driven revisions are more likely to lead to improvement (Laranjeiro et al., 2023; Panaoura & Nitsiou, 2023; Woodhouse et al., 2024). For example, Laranjeiro et al. (2023) used a design-based research methodology to improve parental involvement in their children's learning using technology. The methodology focused on solving practical problems through a collaborative, iterative process that bridges the gap between theoretical research and classroom reality. The process required a partnership among researchers, teachers, users, and experts to ensure that the research and innovation were responsive to and aligned with participants' needs. The iterative process began with the design of the tool, which was then tested, formatively assessed, and redesigned in three cycles until it worked satisfactorily. The result was an increase in school-family communication and content sharing about children's learning.

The review of the related literature led to the development of the PACT model for parental involvement — a recursive framework that prioritises persistent, repeated collaboration between families, educators, and the broader community. It operates on the principle that sustainable student achievement stems from continuous engagement, rather than isolated events. By embedding flexibility, inclusiveness, and digital integration into its core, the model provides a responsive and accessible framework

for building the partnerships necessary to enhance students' educational outcomes. The model's cyclical and adaptive nature enables specific applications at all levels of the educational ecosystem.

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

This conceptual review study focused on defining parental involvement, categorising its purposes, and developing a process model for improving parental involvement at the early childhood level. From the articles that were included in this review, a new definition of parental involvement emerged.

Parental involvement is a multidimensional construct encompassing collaboration among home, school and community to promote positive educational outcomes (social, emotional, academic) for children. It includes parents' psychological foundations (beliefs, values, and attitudes) (the why), practical behaviours and active participation (the what and how), across diverse educational locations (school, home, community) (the where) to promote their children's learning.

Despite our attempt to create a comprehensive definition of parental involvement, researchers can choose to investigate a single dimension (psychological, practical, or location) or a single outcome (academic, social, or emotional).

The purposes of parental involvement were also examined, and nine distinct purposes were identified at the early childhood level. This review study found that the most significant purpose of parental involvement was to improve students' outcomes. Other purposes surrounded the benefits accrued to other stakeholders such as the school, teachers, and the family. The convergent purposes of parental involvement emerged as an integrated perspective that highlighted parental involvement as a collective endeavour where diverse motivations aligned toward supporting children's academic, social,

and emotional success. This finding supports Epstein et al.'s (2019) framework of six types of parental involvement and Hoover-Dempsey and Sadler's (1997) model of parental involvement. The core principle of the Epstein et al. (2019) framework is that student learning is shaped by overlapping spheres of family, school, and community. As with the purposes identified in this study, the spheres are integrated toward the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes. Students are at the center of the three spheres. The study confirms the internal model of Epstein's (2019) theory, which suggests that when stakeholders interact, they create school-like families and family-like schools. However, no community purposes were identified in this review. This coincides with limited strategies for involving the community compared with other types of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, and decision-making) (Williams-McBean et al., 2026). It also highlights a gap in the literature.

The convergence of these purposes is not surprising, as numerous studies on parental involvement have concluded that it yields a win-win outcome for the student and all other parties involved (Pamungkas et al., 2025; Parents International, 2026). Many parental involvement studies focus on its impact on, or relationship with, improving student outcomes (for example, Cole, 2022; Saani et al., 2021). Despite this intent, parental involvement does not always lead to student improvement (Boonk et al., 2018; Fan & Chen, 2001; Musengamana, 2023). Boonk et al.'s (2018) review highlighted that some forms of parental involvement negatively affect student outcomes, and others have differential effects based on ethnicity and socio-economic status. Musengamana (2023) also highlighted that strict parenting and high expectations negatively impact children's studies. Furthermore, although the other purposes are mentioned, they were not directly studied. Therefore, future studies could also focus on the family, school, and teacher-related purposes of parental involvement.

The third research objective investigated the process of parental involvement. Seventeen

practices were highlighted that enabled the development of the PACT process model for integrating parental involvement interventions. This process includes five steps: familiarisation with family, teachers, school, and community; collaborative planning; the collaborative implementation of the parental involvement intervention; collaborative assessment of the program or intervention; and collaboratively revising and repeating the process. Recognising that parental involvement is not a one-off initiative, the process must be sustained by repeating this cyclical process. Our investigation into the parental involvement process highlighted the need for collaborative partnerships between schools and parents. Teachers should take the first step to forge that collaborative bond. Parents should be invited to participate in the intervention planning, and open communication should be encouraged. As found in the studies, these recommendations are practical and relevant for teachers and parents in diverse contexts.

Limitations of the Study

Since this study focused on research conducted at the early childhood level, other studies could investigate the purposes and processes of parental involvement at the primary and secondary levels. Future researchers could also apply the process model at different levels to empirically assess its application. As noted in the background, there has also been a shift from using the term “parental involvement” to the term “family engagement”. This shift has not been investigated and remains largely untapped. Future research could explore differences in terminology and the reasons for the shift toward using family engagement instead of parental involvement.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have implications for other researchers interested in investigating any aspect of parental involvement. While many studies examined parental involvement, there was a significant definition gap. Future researchers could use the definition provided here to unify the field. Identifying theoretical models related

to each dimension of parental involvement, such as Epstein’s (2019) model, should also help operationalise parental involvement more uniformly. The paper also included studies conducted in Jamaica. Therefore, the findings are applicable. Future studies could use the process model to enhance the design and effectiveness of parental involvement interventions in Jamaica.

The findings also indicate that teachers require training to fulfill their parental involvement responsibilities. Therefore, teacher training institutions should review existing programmes to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared. The definition, purposes, and processes identified here could be incorporated into these programmes. It is also recommended that school administrators use the processes outlined in this study to improve the professional development training provided to in-service teachers.

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