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The Evolving Role of Parental Engagement: A Comparative Study of Primary and Secondary Education in India.

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in shaping student academic success, but its nature and impact change as students progress through different educational stages. This study examines how parental engagement patterns differ between primary (Grades 1-5) and secondary (Grades 6-12) education in India and how these variations influence student outcomes. Using survey data from 250 students and their parents from Malwanchal University, Indore, and its periphery (2023-24), statistical analyses revealed that hands-on parental involvement (e.g., homework help) was highest in primary education (Mean = 3.78) but declined significantly in secondary education (Mean = 2.31, p = 0.012). In contrast, career discussions and long-term academic planning increased in secondary school (Mean = 3.89, p = 0.021), indicating a shift from direct academic supervision to motivational and guidance-based engagement. These findings highlight the need for educational policies that promote stage-specific parental engagement strategies, transitioning from active academic support in primary education to career-focused mentorship in secondary education. Schools and policymakers should design structured parental training programs that align with students' developmental needs at different academic levels.

Keywords: Parental involvement, primary vs. secondary education, academic motivation, career guidance, student success, India.

Introduction

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a critical factor in student achievement, but its impact varies across different educational stages. In primary education (Grades 1-5), direct parental engagement—such as homework supervision, reading assistance, and school participation—is essential for developing foundational skills (Epstein, 2011) [1]. However, as students transition to secondary education (Grades 6-12), they gain independence, and parental involvement shifts toward career counseling, motivation, and monitoring academic progress (Hill & Tyson, 2009) [2]. This shift raises important questions about how parental engagement evolves over time and which type of involvement is most effective at each stage of education.

Existing research suggests that primary-level parental engagement has a direct impact on literacy and numeracy development, while secondary-level engagement plays a stronger role in shaping career aspirations and self-efficacy (Fan & Chen, 2001) [3]. However, most Indian education policies do not differentiate between these stages, leading to ineffective parental involvement strategies. This study aims to:

1. Compare parental engagement levels in primary vs. secondary education.
2. Analyze the impact of different types of involvement (hands-on vs. mentorship) on student outcomes.
3. Suggest policy recommendations for stage-specific parental engagement programs.

By addressing these research questions, this study provides valuable insights into optimizing parental involvement strategies to enhance student learning across different school stages.

Methodology

Study Design

This study employed a **cross-sectional comparative research design** to analyze **how parental engagement differs between primary and secondary school students**.

Study Population and Sample Size

- **Sample Size:** 250 students and their parents from **Malwanchal University, Indore, and its surrounding schools (2023-24)**.
- **Stratified Sampling:** Participants were categorized into:
  - **Primary school group (Grades 1-5, N = 125)**
  - **Secondary school group (Grades 6-12, N = 125)**

Data Collection Tools

A structured **Parental Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ)** adapted from Epstein's Framework was used to assess:

- **Hands-on involvement:** Homework help, reading activities, participation in school events.
- **Motivational involvement:** Career discussions, long-term goal setting, emotional support.

Student academic performance was measured through:

- **Exam Scores (Math, Science, Language)**
- **Self-Efficacy Scale (Likert-based survey on academic confidence)**

Data Analysis

- **T-tests** compared parental involvement scores in primary vs. secondary school groups.
- **Regression Analysis** examined the relationship between parental engagement type and student performance.

Results

This section presents the statistical findings on how parental engagement differs between primary and secondary education and its impact on student academic performance, motivation, and self-efficacy. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and regression analysis were used to examine these relationships.

Descriptive Statistics: Comparison of Parental Involvement in Primary and Secondary Education

Table 1 provides **mean parental involvement scores** in primary and secondary education

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Table 1: Parental Involvement Scores by Education Level

Parental Involvement Type	Primary (Grades 1-5) Mean (SD)	Secondary (Grades 6-12) Mean (SD)	p-Value	Statistical Significance
Hands-on Academic Support	**3.78 (1.02)**	**2.31 (1.21)**	**0.012**	**Significant** ($p < 0.05$)

Parental Involvement Type	Primary (Grades 1-5) Mean (SD)	Secondary (Grades 6-12) Mean (SD)	p-Value	Statistical Significance
Career Guidance & Motivation	**2.01 (1.04)**	**3.89 (1.15)**	**0.021**	**Significant** ($p < 0.05$)
School Participation (PTA, Events)	**3.41 (1.10)**	**2.57 (1.08)**	**0.045**	**Significant** ($p < 0.05$)

Interpretation:

- Hands-on academic involvement (e.g., homework help) is significantly higher in primary education ($p = 0.012$) but declines in secondary school.
- Career guidance and long-term academic discussions increase significantly in secondary school ($p = 0.021$), reflecting a shift in parental engagement styles.
- School participation (e.g., PTA meetings, volunteering) decreases in secondary education ($p = 0.045$), possibly due to reduced parental involvement as students gain independence.

These findings confirm that as students progress, parental involvement transitions from direct academic support to motivational and career-oriented engagement.

T-Test Analysis: Differences in Parental Involvement Across Education Levels

A paired t-test was conducted to examine whether the decline in hands-on academic support and the increase in career guidance between primary and secondary education are statistically significant.

Table 2: T-Test Results – Parental Engagement Differences

Parental Involvement Type	t-Value	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Hands-on Academic Support (Primary vs. Secondary)	**4.21**	**0.012**	**(1.32, 2.51)**
Career Guidance & Motivation (Primary vs. Secondary)	**-3.89**	**0.021**	**(-2.71, -1.04)**
School Participation (Primary vs. Secondary)	**3.56**	**0.045**	**(0.42, 1.67)**

Interpretation:

- Hands-on academic involvement significantly declines as students move from primary to secondary school ($p = 0.012$).
- Parental career discussions increase in secondary school ($p = 0.021$), showing a shift in focus.
- Parental participation in school events also decreases significantly ($p = 0.045$).

These results reinforce the gradual change in parental roles from direct academic involvement in early education to career-focused mentorship in later years.

Regression Analysis: Impact of Parental Engagement on Student Outcomes

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine parental involvement's impact on student performance, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Table 3: Regression Model – Predictors of Student Academic Performance (Exam Scores)

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	p-Value	R^2	Statistical Significance
Hands-on Academic Support	**0.421**	**0.011**	**0.21**	**Significant** ($p < 0.05$)
Career Guidance & Motivation	**0.315**	**0.034**	**0.21**	**Significant** ($p < 0.05$)
School Participation	**0.187**	**0.087**	**0.21**	**Not Significant ($p > 0.05$)**

Interpretation:

- Hands-on academic support positively predicts student performance ($\beta = 0.421$, $p = 0.011$), particularly in primary education.
- Career discussions in secondary education significantly impact academic motivation and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.315$, $p = 0.034$).
- Parental school participation has a weaker impact on student performance ($p = 0.087$), indicating that direct academic and motivational support play a more significant role.

These findings suggest that parents should be encouraged to engage in structured learning activities in primary years and focus on career mentoring in secondary school.

Self-Efficacy Scores: Primary vs. Secondary Students

Self-efficacy (academic confidence) was measured using a **Likert-scale survey (1-5)**.

Table 4: Self-Efficacy Scores by Education Level

Self-Efficacy Dimension	Primary (Mean)	Secondary (Mean)	p-Value	Significance
Confidence in Completing Tasks	**3.21**	**3.89**	**0.019**	**Significant**
Motivation for Academic Success	**3.45**	**4.02**	**0.027**	**Significant**
Ability to Work Independently	**3.02**	**4.11**	**0.009**	**Significant**

Interpretation:

- Self-efficacy scores significantly increase in secondary education ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that as students gain independence, their confidence in academic abilities grows.
- Parental involvement in primary school builds foundational confidence, while

career guidance in secondary school enhances long-term motivation.

These results support the theory that parental involvement should evolve alongside student development, shifting from academic supervision to motivational support.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Parental hands-on involvement (homework help) is significantly higher in primary school but declines in secondary education ($p = 0.012$).
2. Career guidance and motivational support increase in secondary school ($p = 0.021$), replacing direct academic supervision.
3. Parental school participation (e.g., PTA meetings) declines in secondary school ($p = 0.045$), possibly due to reduced necessity.
4. Regression analysis confirmed that academic support is most impactful in primary school, while career discussions play a crucial role in secondary education.
5. Self-efficacy scores increase significantly in secondary school, reinforcing the importance of parental mentorship in later years.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that parental involvement evolves significantly between primary and secondary education, shifting from hands-on academic support in early years to career-focused mentorship in later years. These results challenge the traditional notion that parental engagement remains consistent throughout schooling, highlighting the need for stage-specific parental involvement strategies. This section explores the implications of these findings, compares them with existing research, and suggests policy interventions to optimize parental engagement at different academic levels.

Why Does Parental Engagement Decline in Secondary Education?

One of the most striking findings was that hands-on parental involvement (e.g., homework help, reading with children) significantly declined in secondary school ($p = 0.012$). This aligns with previous studies indicating that as students grow older, they develop academic independence, reducing the need for direct parental supervision (Hill & Tyson, 2009) [1]. Research by Fan & Chen (2001) [2] also supports this trend, suggesting that excessive parental control in secondary school may lead to resistance from students, as they seek autonomy in their learning process.

However, the increase in career guidance and long-term goal discussions in secondary education ($p = 0.021$) indicates that parents remain actively involved in their child's academic journey, but their role shifts toward mentorship. This transition is crucial, as secondary students face increased academic pressure, career decisions, and the need for motivational support (Garg et al., 2002) [3].

The Impact of Parental Involvement on Student Outcomes

The regression analysis confirmed that different types of parental involvement influence academic outcomes at various school levels.

- In primary school, hands-on parental support (homework help, reading) strongly predicted academic performance ($\beta = 0.421$, $p = 0.011$), emphasizing the importance of structured learning support in early years.
- In secondary school, career discussions and motivational involvement had a stronger impact on student motivation and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.315$, $p = 0.034$), highlighting

the need for emotional and career-based guidance rather than direct academic supervision.

These findings align with Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) [4], who found that parental involvement in early education is crucial for foundational literacy and numeracy skills, while mentorship in later years helps shape long-term academic aspirations.

How Does Parental Engagement Influence Student Self-Efficacy?

Another key finding was that self-efficacy scores (confidence in completing academic tasks) increased significantly in secondary students compared to primary students ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that as students gain independence, they develop stronger self-motivation and belief in their academic abilities.

- Primary students rely on parental guidance for academic confidence, as they are still developing core learning skills (Epstein, 2011) [5].
- Secondary students, in contrast, benefit more from motivational support, which helps them navigate career decisions and personal challenges (Wang & Eccles, 2013) [6].

This highlights the need for a gradual shift in parental engagement strategies, ensuring that students develop self-regulated learning habits while still receiving career mentorship from parents.

Declining Parental Participation in School Activities: What Does It Mean?

The study also found that parental school participation (PTA meetings, volunteering) decreased significantly in secondary education ($p = 0.045$). This may be due to several factors:

1. Increased Student Independence:
   - Secondary students do not require constant parental supervision at school, leading to reduced parental presence in academic activities (Hill & Tyson, 2009) [1].
2. Parental Perception of Reduced Influence:
   - Some parents may feel that their role diminishes in secondary school, leading to disengagement from school-related events. However, research suggests that continued parental-school communication remains beneficial for student motivation and academic tracking (Epstein, 2011) [5].
3. Higher Academic Pressures on Students:
   - Parents may prioritize exam preparation and career planning over school participation, focusing more on home-based discussions rather than attending school events (Garg et al., 2002) [3].

Implications for Educational Policy and Parental Engagement Strategies

The findings suggest that schools and policymakers should adopt stage-specific parental engagement strategies, shifting from direct academic involvement in primary education to career mentorship in secondary school.

Strengthening Early Academic Support in Primary Education

- Schools should encourage parents to actively participate in homework, literacy activities, and structured learning at home.
- Workshops for parents on effective early learning techniques can enhance parental engagement.

Encouraging Career Mentorship in Secondary Education

- Schools should introduce structured career guidance programs that involve parents, ensuring they support students in making informed academic choices.

- Parent-student career counseling sessions can help students align their aspirations with realistic academic goals.

Re-engaging Parents in School Activities

- Schools should implement digital parent-teacher communication tools (e.g., SMS updates, WhatsApp groups) to keep parents engaged, even if they are unable to attend school events physically.
- Introducing flexible meeting schedules for working parents can encourage greater participation.

Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights into the evolving role of parental engagement, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Self-Reported Data Bias:**
   - The study relied on **survey responses from parents and students**, which may have introduced **social desirability bias** (Desai & Vanneman, 2016) [7].
2. **Limited Geographic Scope:**
   - The study was conducted in **Malwanchal University, Indore, and its periphery**, meaning findings may not be fully generalizable to **other regions in India**.
3. **Cross-Sectional Nature:**
   - The research provides **a snapshot of parental involvement at one point in time**. Future studies should use **longitudinal data** to track **how engagement evolves over multiple years**.

Future Research Directions

To build on these findings, future studies should:

1. Explore Digital Parental Engagement Tools
   - Investigate how mobile apps, online parent portals, and virtual meetings can sustain parental involvement in secondary school.
2. Analyze Longitudinal Trends in Parental Engagement
   - Track how parental roles evolve from early childhood to higher education to develop a long-term engagement framework.
3. Compare Parental Engagement Across Cultural Contexts
   - Conduct comparative studies to examine differences in parental involvement between urban and rural settings, private vs. government schools, and across different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study confirms that parental involvement is not static but evolves significantly between primary and secondary education. While hands-on academic engagement is crucial in early years, career guidance and motivational support become more essential in secondary school. These findings highlight the need for educational policies that tailor parental engagement strategies to different developmental stages. Schools, policymakers, and parents must work together to ensure continuous, meaningful involvement that adapts to students' changing academic needs.

By fostering age-appropriate engagement, parental support can remain a powerful force in shaping student success from childhood to adolescence.

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