

The Role of Parental Involvement in Shaping Psychological Adjustment Among Primary School Children: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT:

Children's psychological adjustment during the primary school years is critical for long-term mental health, social functioning, and academic success. Parental involvement has been widely associated with positive child outcomes. However, existing findings remain fragmented, conceptually diverse, and often focused on academic achievement rather than psychological adjustment. This narrative review synthesizes empirical literature published between January 2015 and July 2025 to examine the role of parental involvement in shaping psychological adjustment among primary school children, with a particular focus on identifying key forms of parental involvement, underlying mechanisms, contextual influences, and gaps in the current literature. The synthesis highlights parental involvement as a multidimensional construct encompassing home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and relational quality, which includes parental warmth, acceptance, and autonomy support. Findings consistently indicate that relational quality of involvement is a stronger predictor of children's psychological adjustment than mere quantity of time spent. Moreover, relational quality serves as a key generative mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of both home- and school-based involvement. This mechanism often mediates the impact of involvement through children's self-regulation, school engagement, and perceived parental acceptance, with evidence suggesting particularly strong effects when fathers are actively involved. The implications for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

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Keywords: parental involvement, psychological adjustment, primary school children, family-school partnership, internalizing and externalizing problems

Introduction

In the 21st century, children's ability to adjust emotionally, socially, and behaviourally is vital for their long-term mental health, social integration, and academic success, especially during the primary school years [1][2][3]. Data from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2017 reported that 18.3% of young adolescents aged 13 to 17 exhibited depressive symptoms [4]. In addition, UNICEF Malaysia estimated that approximately 424,000 Malaysian children aged 5 to 15 years suffered from mental health problems nationwide [5]. These findings indicate the urgent need for early intervention, as such symptoms are believed to begin emerging during the primary school years and may intensify over time [6].

Parents, as part of a child's immediate environment, have a significant impact on their development and mental health [7]. Recent research has expanded and been defined in various ways by different researchers, such as school-based forms' involvement, including volunteering in the classroom, communicating with teachers, and implementing home-based strategies like assisting with homework to support academic achievement [8]. Both school-based and home-based forms of involvement have been linked to children's emotional and behavioural adjustment [9]. However, despite this field of study being growing, existing evidence is fragmented, and limited attention has been given to how different forms of involvement jointly support psychological adjustment, particularly within the Malaysian context.

This narrative review aims to synthesize existing knowledge and clarify mechanisms linking parental involvement to psychological adjustment among primary school children. It will further discuss the key forms of involvement and existing gaps, offering a timely overview that supports future research and evidence-informed educational practices.

Methods

This narrative review synthesized existing

empirical literature examining the relationship between parental involvement and psychological adjustment among primary school children over the past 10 years (January 2015 – July 2025). To gather relevant sources, electronic searches were conducted using several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. Additionally, manual searches were conducted by reviewing the reference lists of key articles to identify studies that may not have appeared in the initial database searches.

The search strategy consisted of a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including “parental involvement”, “parental engagement”, “family involvement”, “psychological adjustment”, “emotional adjustment”, “behavioural adjustment”, “primary school children”, “elementary school”, and “Malaysia”. These terms were combined using operators such as AND and OR.

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English over the past decade, from January 2015 to July 2025, to capture a contemporary perspective while ensuring relevance to current educational practices.

Studies were included based on the following criteria:

- (a) Population: Studies involving primary school-aged children, approximately 7 to 12 years old.
- (b) Focus: Studies examining any form of parental involvement, such as home-based, school-based, or both, and its relationship to children's emotional, social, or behavioural adjustment.
- (c) Study Type: Empirical studies, like quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, theoretical papers, and reputable review articles relevant to the topic.
- (d) Context: Studies conducted in school or home settings that directly link parental roles to psychological outcomes.

Exclusion criteria included:

- (a) Studies focusing solely on academic achievement without psychological components.
- (b) Studies that involve preschoolers or secondary school populations.
- (c) Studies lacking a clear empirical or conceptual link to parental involvement.
- (d) Studies with mixed samples (clinical/disabled and typically developing participants), unless results for the typically developing subgroup were reported separately.
- (e) Studies written in a language other than English.

The selected studies were reviewed and synthesized narratively, focusing on conceptual insights, contextual factors, and gaps in the literature rather than performing a quantitative comparison.

Discussion

(a) *Synthesis*

1. Conceptualising Parental Involvement in Primary School Years

Children's overall development and life outcomes are known to be significantly predicted by parental involvement during primary school years. Empirical evidence from past studies consistently demonstrates its positive association with academic achievement [10][11] and social-emotional well-being [12][13][14].

According to the literature currently in publication, parental involvement is defined as parents' interactions with their child regarding their education [15], active partnership in their child's educational process [16], and their commitment of resources like time, energy, and financial support [17]. However, there is still conceptual variation in the construct across studies. This paper, therefore, provides an overview of a multidimensional framework that distinguishes parental involvement into home-based involvement, school-based involvement,

and qualitative or relational aspects of involvement.

Home-based involvement (HBI) always occurs outside of school and includes activities like monitoring homework at children's homes [18][19][15][14][20][21][17][22], providing emotional support [11], creating enriching learning environments and learning materials [23][24], and quality time spend with their children [12][25].

While school-based involvement (SBI) is the direct contact with the school [15][14], such as attending parent-teacher conferences [18][19][23][26], volunteering [18][22], and participation in governance activities [22].

Although most studies emphasize the two broad categories of home-based and school-based, there is substantial variation in how parental involvement is operationalized and measured. Some frameworks go beyond these categories to emphasize relational characteristics of involvement, such as parental warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance [10][27][28][25]. In this review, the quality of involvement can be differentiated into need-supportive, known as constructive involvement, and controlling, which is an unconstructive involvement. Need-supportive involvement is characterized by positive emotions, autonomy support, and mastery-oriented teaching [12][25], while controlling involvement is characterized by negative effects, including negative emotions, control, and performance-oriented teaching [12][25].

Anyway, the literature coverage on one point, parental involvement is not a single action but a constellation of behaviours shaped by cultural beliefs, socioeconomic status, and parental capacity.

2. Differential Effects of Home-Based and School-Based Involvement on Children's Psychological Adjustment

As previously stated, parental involvement in primary school children is commonly categorized based on its context, such as home-based involvement (HBI) and school-based

involvement (SBI), as well as its intrinsic quality, which embodies the relational aspect of involvement.

HBI serves as a strong predictor of psychological adjustment, mainly promoting a supportive learning environment outside the formal school setting. Its role as a protective function, where high parental expectations and homework support, has been found to protect children with high externalizing behaviour from experiencing reduced behavioural engagement [15]. Besides, HBI also functions as providing the necessary resources, materials, a conducive learning environment, and moral instruction, all of which were effectively and positively predicted emotional adjustment among primary school pupils [23]. In addition, a study emphasized that reading together with children has been identified as the strongest predictor of improved psychosocial outcomes, including lower emotional and peer problems, compared to merely task-oriented involvement like helping with homework at home [21].

As noted in past studies as well, a relational form of home involvement, specifically parental warmth and acceptance, is universally associated with healthier psychological adjustment. The lack of warmth and acceptance is consistently linked to a cluster of maladaptive personality dispositions, including hostility, aggression, negative self-esteem, and emotional instability [10]. Higher levels of maternal warmth consistently predict a decrease in children's emotional problems [27]. Conversely, the amount of time spent between the father and the child influences behavioural adjustment when it is fully mediated by the child's perceived paternal acceptance [25][29]. With that, a lack of these quality involvement factors is associated with antisocial-emotional behaviour in children, such as inattentiveness, yelling, bullying, fighting, and gossiping [23].

In contrast, SBI serves as an impactful agent between the home and the school, integrating the parents into the school community. The frequency of school-based interactions, such as

parent-teacher meetings, has been identified as a strong predictor of a child's ability to self-regulate in the classroom [18]. Although it often shows a weaker direct link to internalizing mental health outcomes than HBI, the meta-analytic findings from [17][30] show that SBI is significantly related to social-behavioural competence, such as prosocial skill and reduced aggression.

3. Pathway Linking Parental Involvement to Children's Psychological Adjustment

Parental involvement is a significant predictor of a school-aged child's academic achievement. However, there is less studies that emphasize its role in shaping a child's psychological adjustment, which has been increasingly recognized as a significant protective factor [15].

In this review, children's psychological adjustment is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct including behavioural problems [15], antisocial-emotional behaviours [23][31][21][17], psychosocial competence, and psychological functioning [21][11], particularly self-regulation across cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects [18][12][32][16][20][33].

Nonetheless, some past literature on psychological adjustment has focused specifically on examining externalizing and internalizing behaviours [25][30]. Externalizing behaviours are defined as disruptive behaviours like aggression and hyperactivity, while internalizing behaviours are viewed as withdrawal, anxiety, and depressive behaviours. In the study [22], children with higher levels of externalizing and internalizing problems are less likely to have their parents involved in school activities.

In the literature, the role of parental involvement is found to influence children's psychological adjustment through several generative mechanisms, such as mediation by relational quality like acceptance and warmth [27][10][28], internal psychological assets like

self-regulation [16][18], and school engagement [11]. Additionally, the reciprocal and transactional effects between parental involvement and psychological adjustment have been explored [27].

Parental involvement has been found to establish an interpersonal context of love and warmth that directly fosters psychological adjustment. According to the past study [25], the quantity of time a father spends with his child only impacts behavioural and personality outcomes when it is fully mediated by the child's perceived paternal acceptance, especially warmth and supportive level. Conversely, perceived rejection is linked to a cluster of maladaptive traits, including hostility, aggression, and emotional instability [28].

Furthermore, home-based involvement often influences a child's social-emotional development indirectly by increasing school engagement. When parents are actively engaged in learning at home, children develop a higher level of participation and interest in school, which accounts for up to 71% of the association between home involvement and reduced psychosocial difficulties [31][11]. Beyond the direct link to school-based participation, parental support also fosters internal psychological assets. Like a past study [13], children with highly involved parents may demonstrate a greater sense of self-competence, which is considered a crucial mediating mechanism that allows children to develop more effective social skills.

The relationship between parenting and adjustment is a "two-way" street. Maternal warmth can predict a decrease in children's emotional problems, while the emotional problems can hinder subsequent growth of maternal warmth and accelerate the use of power-assertive discipline [10]. Similarly, father involvement is considered to have the "spill over" effects in enhancing maternal acceptance, in turn, creating a functioning equilibrium that improves a child's behavioural problems [25][29].

4. Cultural and Contextual Influences on

Parental Involvement and Psychological Adjustment

Parental involvement is widely supported across cultures. Its impact on the children's psychological adjustment varies significantly across Western and Asian societies. The differences involved types of involvement, the barriers faced by parents, and the children's development. Therefore, understanding the contextual differences is crucial for understanding how and why parental involvement affects children's psychological adjustment.

Specific cultural norms affect how parents care for and educate their children, further resulting in the differing types of parental involvement styles. In Chinese societies, the Confucian doctrine places great value on obedience and respect for authority, leading parents to prioritize academic success as a means of honouring the family. Hence, the Chinese parents often demonstrate their care for their children through high levels of control and power assertion. For example, in Hong Kong, this high level of parental control led to the phenomenon of "helicopter parenting", in which the excessive involvement reaches a plateau and, thus, hinders the child's autonomy and intrinsic motivation for learning [11]. In another study [10], mothers in China who assert their power over their children are more likely to have children exhibit social and psychological maladjustment. Western society, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on quality involvement like parental warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance, to promote positive psychological adjustment. For example, in Germany, parental warmth promotes positive feelings among children, they feel loved and valued, subsequently decreasing the children's emotional problems [27]. Another past study [28] in Turkey also found that parental warmth was noted to be positively related to children's psychological adjustment. Nevertheless, Malaysia presents a distinctive context in which multicultural values and modernization intersect to shape children's

adjustment. Research indicates that parental involvement in Malaysia is characterized by high expectations and “trains” their children to be able to self-regulate in challenging situations [16].

Traditionally, fathers were assumed to be the primary breadwinners of a family and were less involved in parenthood. However, in this review, some past literature disproves this assumption, as evidence has shown that fathers play an equally significant role as mothers in children’s psychological adjustment. Fathers today are becoming more involved in their children’s lives creates a spillover effect by increasing paternal acceptance, which, in turn, strengthens the warmth of the relationship between mothers and children and then reduces the child’s internalizing problems [25][29].

Another factor that significantly affects parental involvement is socioeconomic status (SES) [17]. Parents living in low-SES situations, in countries such as the United States and Mexico, face many barriers that impede their participation in school-based activities [20][32][18], such as inflexibility of work schedules, financial pressures, transportation difficulties, and limited child-care support for the other children at home if they are involved in school activities. Some studies found that the school adjustment gap between high-SES and low-SES students in elementary school is mediated by parental school-based involvement [32]. A past study [16] found that the level of parental involvement is moderated by household income. The higher-income parents are more actively involved in monitoring their child’s homework and progress [16].

Lastly, large-scale crises can also change the dynamic of parental involvement. One huge example of a large-scale crisis in recent years is COVID-19, which completely changed how families raised their children and the structure of their daily lives. For instance, during the Malaysian COVID-19 shutdown, parents are encouraged to actively involve themselves in

their child’s learning activities as much as possible [16]. Conversely, in Italy, it was determined that the pandemic triggered household chaos, which then predicted an increase in parenting stress, subsequently decreased the amount of parental involvement, and hindered children’s emotional regulation [33].

5. Challenges and Controversies in Measuring Psychological Adjustment

The measurement of psychological adjustment is challenging due to its multidimensionality, encompassing indicators like emotional well-being, self-regulation, social functioning, and behavioral difficulties. There is a debate between deficit-based perspectives and strengths-based perspectives on measures of psychological adjustment. Deficit-based perspectives emphasize problem behaviours like externalizing and internalizing behaviours, while strengths-based perspectives emphasize resilience level, prosocial skills, and peer competence. Researchers have different perspectives on the indicators that best represent the concept of psychological adjustment, and therefore, the choice of measurement will determine whether the adjustment is viewed as the absence of problems or the presence of capabilities.

Besides, many studies rely on a single source of data, like parent-reported data and teacher-reported data. Both types of data are at risk of informant bias and having discrepancies between their reports. Parents often find it difficult to observe their child’s internalizing problems, such as sadness or fear. Yet, they do not know if their child is resilient enough, which may hinder the true effectiveness of parental involvement. Teacher-reported data, on the other hand, often underestimate a child’s true abilities in terms of psychological adjustment due to biases related to a student’s socioeconomic and racial background. Very few studies currently use self-reports from children regarding their psychological adjustment. Studies that have used children’s self-reports demonstrate large discrepancies

between parent and child perceptions about their emotional experiences, which may affect the true understanding of their psychological adjustment.

The accuracy of measuring complex internal states, such as self-regulation, is often hindered by young children's cognitive limitations, which may lead them to misinterpret the questions in the instrument. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is widely utilized in many studies. However, it has demonstrated low internal consistency in certain cultural contexts, such as Honduras. Therefore, it highlights a significant need for developing culturally adapted instruments for psychological adjustment.

In addition, the ability to generalize current conclusions about parental involvement on psychological adjustment is limited by the sampling specificity of existing studies, such as children from low SES families, those who are academically at-risk, populations within specific cultural contexts, like China, or unique periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this limited sample diversity, it is difficult to say whether the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences psychological adjustment are consistent across broader socioeconomic, cultural, and social contexts.

6. Key Gaps Emerge from the Existing Literature

Several key gaps in methodological and theoretical aspects limit a comprehensive adjustment of how parental involvement influences children's psychological adjustment.

First, there is a lack of longitudinal research that establishes causal relationships between the qualitative dimensions of parental involvement and children's long-term psychological adjustment during the primary school years. Many existing studies rely on cross-sectional or two-wave designs, which fail to capture long-term adjustment processes.

Second, the literature reveals a significant role-diversity gap and informant-discrepancy gap. Parental involvement is underexamined

compared to maternal involvement. Previous research has heavily depended on maternal reports, with limited consideration of the contributions of fathers, grandparents, and non-traditional family structures. This maternal-centric focus restricts understanding of how different roles, effects, and underlying mechanisms of other caregivers shape children's psychological adjustment. Besides, the true effectiveness of parental involvement may be hindered if the child's self-reports are not included, because parents encounter difficulties in detecting their child's internalizing behaviours compared to the more observable externalizing behaviours.

Third, there are still limited studies that have integrated both home-based and school-based involvement within a single analytical model, despite increasing evidence that their combined effects are meaningful. Furthermore, emerging findings indicating a "ceiling effect" further suggest that excessive home-based involvement may reach a point where it discourages learning motivation and restricts a child's autonomy, highlighting the need for research that examines how involvement quality must be adjusted to match children's changing developmental needs to avoid unintended adverse effects. However, few studies adopt quality-centered frameworks to examine the influences on psychological adjustment.

Last but not least, little focus has been placed on how parental involvement functions in various socioeconomic contexts, especially when comparing the advantaged and disadvantaged school neighbourhoods, as well as in under-researched regions such as Honduras, Malaysia, and Pakistan.

7. Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

The synthesis reveals several implications for practices, policy, and future research.

Implications for practices. The findings highlight the importance of prioritizing the quality of parental involvement rather than the quantity in interventions addressing children's

psychological maladjustment. Practitioners should prioritize interventions that focus on strengthening the affective quality of the parent-child relationships, particularly parental warmth, acceptance, and responsiveness, rather than focusing solely on the amount of time parents spend with their children. These relational qualities constitute the core mechanism influencing children's psychological adjustment. Besides, effective intervention programs, such as family- school interventions, should therefore adopt a multifaceted approach that combines relational components, including effective communication and collaboration, together with structural elements like behavioural supports and home-based activities. Evidence from the past literature also supports the need for enhanced parental participation, particularly paternal involvement, as father involvement can create a "spillover effect" that strengthens maternal acceptance and contributes to improvements in the child's psychological adjustment. The interventions should therefore guide parents away from controlling or negative practices and toward supportive, autonomy-enhancing forms of involvement.

Implications for policy. In terms of policy perspective, efforts should move beyond simply encouraging school- based parental attendance toward actively reducing the structural barriers faced by diverse families in participating in school-based activities. This includes implementing inclusive communication practices, such as offering virtual meetings, flexible meeting schedules, and the use of digital platforms like WhatsApp to maintain consistent home-school communication. At the same time, policy initiatives from governments and school authorities should support schools in providing parent-focused workshops and seminars that emphasize parents' roles as emotional models in children's development. In addition, integrating parent-led projects within school settings can foster a welcoming environment and strengthen family-school partnerships, too.

Implications for future research. The present review suggests that future research should prioritize identifying the causal mechanism underlying the relationship between parental involvement and children's psychological adjustment. Hence, there is a need for longitudinal research involving more than two waves of data to establish causal relationships and to test reciprocal processes between parental involvement and children's psychological adjustment. Additionally, future studies should adopt multi-informant approaches, incorporating reports or perspectives from parents, children, and teachers to minimize single-source bias. From the past findings as well, there is a need to further examine paternal involvement and mother-father-child interactions, which may offer a more comprehensive understanding of how combining distinct caregivers' roles in shaping children's psychological adjustment. Moreover, future research should extend beyond externalizing behaviours to more comprehensively examine internalizing behaviours, such as anxiety and self-esteem. Next, investigating the specific mediating mechanisms through which parental involvement influences these outcomes remains a critical gap, as current mediation models provide only partial explanations. Finally, research efforts should be expanded to understudied regions, including Honduras, Malaysia, and Pakistan, to assess the generalizability of existing findings and to support the development of culturally sensitive psychosocial measures.

(b) Limitations

This narrative review offers significant evidence from multiple studies published in reputable databases, demonstrating that parental involvement plays a key role in shaping the psychological adjustment among primary school-aged children. However, the absence of systematic procedures used in a systematic review or a scoping review, as well as the absence of a formal screening protocol, may have restrained certain relevant studies

from being overlooked due to the review process employed. Additionally, the review is based specifically on English-language publications, which may also limit the potential of finding important studies that were conducted in a culturally appropriate manner that have been published in local or regional languages, especially studies relevant to non-Western contexts, such as in Malaysia.

The literature relating to parental involvement and psychological adjustment is highly heterogeneous in terms of the definitions, measurement tools, and research designs. For instance, the different operationalized definitions of parental involvement or the presence of varying indicators of psychological adjustment made it difficult to make direct comparisons and synthesize the body of evidence. This heterogeneity also complicates the interpretation of the overall pattern, as differences in findings may be attributed not only to true conceptual distinctions but also to methodological inconsistencies. In addition, the process of synthesizing findings involves interpretive judgement. While this approach allows for deeper conceptual integration, it also constitutes the possibility of subjective bias.

To help address these limitations, future studies could employ systematic review methods and prioritize both longitudinal and mixed-method designs.

Conclusion

This narrative review synthesizes recent research on how parental involvement affects psychological adjustment among primary school children and aims to clarify the mechanisms underlying this relationship. High-quality parental involvement is consistently associated with children's emotional, behavioural, and social adjustment, according to the studies published over the past decade.

The synthesis also showed that school-based involvement focuses on behavioural regulation and social competence, highlighting a complementary role in the adjustment process. On the other hand, internalizing problems and

emotional well-being are strongly correlated with involvement at home. Additionally, the relational quality functions as a key generative mechanism in both forms of parental involvement, often mediating the impact of involvement through children's self-regulation, school engagement, and perceived parental acceptance, especially when fathers are involved.

The use of cross-sectional designs, maternal-centric or single-informant data, and a lack of focus on the underrepresentation of diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts are among the major gaps that the synthesis clearly validates.

To assess causal and transactional relationships between various aspects of family-school involvement, including mediators and moderators in the study, this review recommends that future research implement a multi-wave longitudinal and multi-informant approach. It also suggests adopting integrated frameworks that capture the quality of both home-based and school-based involvement. To advance theory regarding family-school involvement, informing the development of family-school partnership-based interventions, and supporting evidence-based policies to improve children's psychological adjustment during this critical developmental period, it will also be crucial to expand research in understudied regions and create culturally sensitive measures.

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Data Availability

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing does not apply to this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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