

Theoretical framework used in parental involvement research: a scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical perspectives are important in framing a research model of parental involvement. Despite numerous studies examining parental involvement, their findings continue to exhibit inconsistency when viewed through a theoretical lens. A literature review conducted in 2017 examined the theoretical frameworks employed in parental involvement studies conducted between 2007 to 2011. The primary objective of this study is to analyze and offer novel insights into the theoretical perspectives that underpin parental involvement research, adhering to PRISMA guidelines. We conducted an extensive study of literature published between 2012 to 2023 that met the following inclusion criteria: research papers, reports on parental involvement, and reports on theoretical framework. Our study encompassed a systematic search of electronic databases, including Scopus, EBSCO Sciences, Emerald, and Science Direct from July to September 2023 to identify relevant articles. A total of 366 articles were obtained, and 44 articles met the criteria. Four theories frequently utilized in parental involvement research emerged from this study, namely Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory; Bourdieu, Coleman, and Lareau's social capital; Social Identity Theory; and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior. The findings of this research serve as a foundational resource for future research on parental involvement across diverse contextual settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Epstein developed research on parental involvement [1], [2]. Epstein defined parental involvement as parental participation in the form of meaningful, regular, and two-way communication between parents and teachers, involving student learning and other school activities from Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theoretical perspective [3], [4]. Hoover and Sandler created a theoretical model comprising of five sequential levels of the parental involvement process. This model was formulated by reviewing research in educational, developmental, and social psychology. However, this model has been criticized by researchers [5] who proposed an alternative model that divided involvement into two levels.

Parental involvement is defined as behaviors and practices at home and at school, including parents' aspirations, expectations, attitudes and beliefs about their children [6]. Parental involvement is described as the process of assistance by parents to their children for the achievement of positive goals [7]. Parental involvement as the activities of parents in participating in school activities, working with their children in academics, and attending meetings between parents and teachers [8]. In recent decades, parental involvement has also been

interpreted as activities that occur between parents and children at home or between parents and teachers at school that may contribute to children's educational outcomes and development [9]. Parental involvement is also a significant element in education and can also be achieved through home-based involvement such as listening to children while they read, helping them complete homework assignments as well as school-based activities, including attending parent meetings and educational workshops [10]. Parental involvement can be described as a relationship based on mutual co-operation between parents and schools [11].

Parental involvement at home is "the dedication of resources by parents to the child in specific activities," such as reading books together, listening to the child read aloud and/or playing word games [12]. Parental involvement is important in children's education as it predicts academic achievement from kindergarten to high school (i.e., 5-18 years) [13]. Therefore, understanding the impact of parental involvement on various academic outcomes across different stages of schooling is essential for informing educational policies and practices.

Research on parental involvement has developed over time, with findings showing that parental involvement also influence outcomes in mathematics, academic achievement, reading achievement, academic performance, social and cultural skills, and children's education [10]–[15]. Research on parent involvement has emerged since the last decade [16]. Most research models on parental involvement examine reading skills [17], [18], children's academic achievement [19], and language skills [12]–[20]. The research methods used also include experiments, quantitative surveys, and literature reviews [21]–[31]. However, there is still limited research on parental involvement models in early literacy development. Nevertheless, it is well-established that parental involvement is a crucial factor in early literacy development [32]–[35]. In parental involvement research, several prominent topics stand out, including achievement, community, skills, and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the field has seen emergence of early childhood as a significant topic. Tamir [36] recommends that future research on parental involvement should expand attention to school-related issues, as parents will become more actively involved in their children's education. However, there is still little research on parent involvement in preschool, which highlights the need for further research in this area.

Over the past two decades, research on parental involvement has consistently demonstrated that parenting has a positive impact on child development. Parental involvement from childhood continues to have a positive impact on children's academic performance in elementary school, middle school, and even high school [37]. Numerous studies have underscored the significance of parental involvement, consistently demonstrating that children with more engaged families in school tend to achieve at higher levels compared to those with less involved families [38]. Research also shows that the earlier parents get involved in their children's education, the better the outcomes [39], [40]. Conversely, a lack of parental involvement, especially in terms of stimulation, can lead to poor cognitive development in children, leading to problems such as learning problems or language delays [32]. Active participation from parents in their children's education brings many academic, personal, and social benefits [6], [41]–[44].

Several studies have previously undertaken research on parental involvement, yet the results remains inconsistent when assessed through theoretical perspectives. In a prior literature review, the focus was the theoretical frameworks employed in parental involvement between 2007 to 2011. According to the literature review, it was noted that commonly used theoretical and conceptual frameworks in parental involvement studies include Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, social capital theory, Epstein's overlapping spheres, Epstein's types of involvement, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model [45]. However, these theories fell short in explaining the factors influencing parents' attitudes, willingness, and motivation to actively engage and sustain their involvement [46], [47]. Recognizing this gap, the present study aimed to analyze and present novel insights into the theoretical perspectives employed in parental involvement research over the past decade. Thus, the research question is: what theoretical frameworks are utilized in parental involvement research?

2. METHOD

This study used the preferred reporting items for scoping review (PRISMA-ScR) protocol as a guideline [48]. We included studies that met the following inclusion criteria, namely i) Population: parents, fathers and mothers with children; ii) Concept: theoretical framework of parental involvement; iii) Context: family, home, and school environment. The review inclusion criteria: i) research related to parental involvement, including father involvement, mother involvement, articles on the theoretical framework of parental involvement, conference proceedings, and literature reviews; ii) Publication of original research articles and literature reviews. The exclusion criteria were applied rigorously in the selection process. We excluded papers that met the following exclusion criteria: i) Studies that did not focus on parental involvement; ii) Studies that did not incorporate theoretical perspectives; iii) Opinions pieces, letters, and other non-original research works; iv) Unpublished gray literature, such as theses and working papers. Papers categorized as exclusion criteria were excluded from the final selection to ensure a reliance on selection process.

2.1. Information sources

The scientific articles were retrieved from eight international journal sites from July to September 2023 to identify relevant articles, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, SAGE, Semantic Scholar, Emerald, and Google Scholar, utilizing the keywords ‘parental involvement and theoretical perspective’. Data screening was performed following the researcher’s predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The screening process consisted of two stages: abstract and title screening, followed by full-text screening. Articles with relevant titles and abstracts were selected for the full-text review, while articles not meeting the criteria were excluded. The search continued until a sufficient number of articles meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified, and no new articles were found. The transparency and reproducibility of the screening process were ensured by providing visual evidence as shown in Figure 1.

2.2. Search strategy

The selected articles had their data extracted using a pre-defined data charting method. Data charting was carried out by the lead author and reviewed by co-authors to ensure the thorough examination of research relevance and the extraction of pertinent research data. The extracted research data encompassed criteria considered essential and aligned with Figure 1, which could still be applied to this article’s research. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and if necessary, with a third reviewer’s input, resulting in the creation of a unified dataset containing the required information. Data charting was meticulously conducted to capture all necessary details.

2.3. Selection process

In the meticulous selection process, an extensive initial search generated 366 abstracts. The initial search yielded 366 abstracts, and relevant citations were subsequently evaluated through the use of <https://www.rayyan.ai/>. During the screening process, 38 duplicate articles were identified, and 264 others fell into the exclusion category. Ultimately, after meticulous screening, a final selection a total of 44 studies satisfied the inclusion criteria, as seen in Figure 1.

2.4. Data collection process

This research was conducted through consultation and data charting with the assistance of several individuals. Consultation was carried out after data analysis, and the results were presented to experts in parental involvement in early literacy (NF), cross sectional study (SM), and literature review (AR), providing valuable insights beyond what was captured in the literature search. The consultation input included using the rayyan.ai application, applying the PRISMA 2020 chart list and flowchart, identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on charting, examining gaps between studies, research methods, results, and limitations, and refining results and research questions.

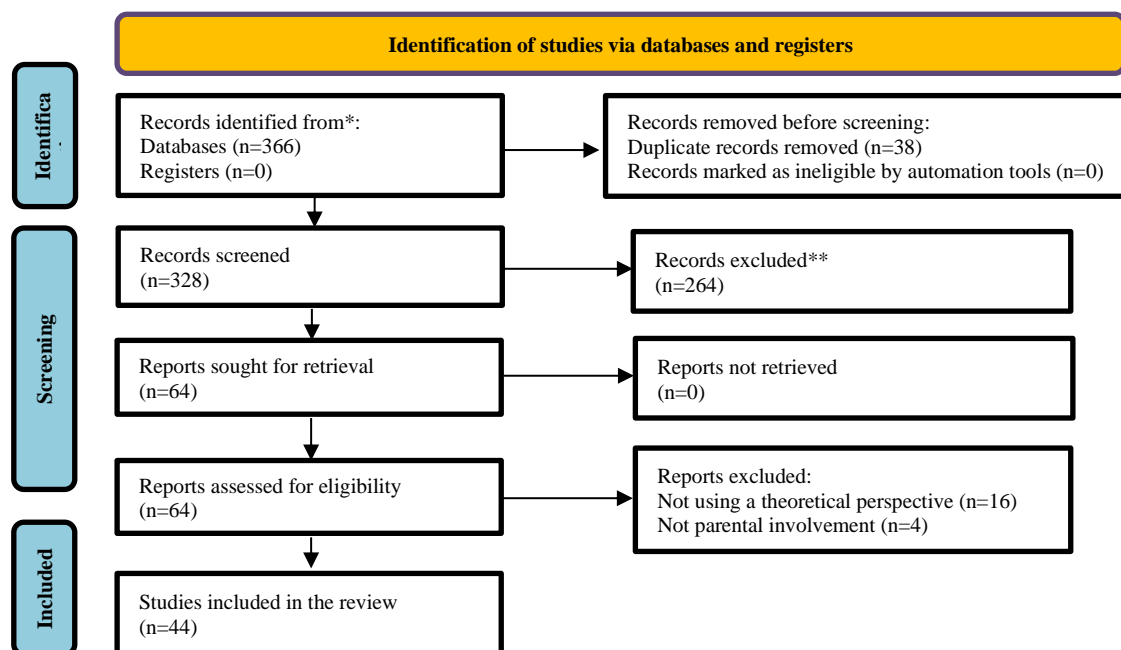


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic review

2.5. Data items

The data analysis aligned with the information previously extracted by the researchers. The results are presented through tables, diagrams, or images to facilitate rapid analysis and comparison of all identified criteria. Further descriptive and narrative analysis will be reported. The researcher will discuss the theoretical implications of the findings for future research, practice, and policy. The researcher used the PRISMA-ScR checklist as a reporting guideline that will be utilized later.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical frameworks utilized in parental involvement research over the past decade. Out of the total articles obtained from various databases, 328 articles (89%) did not incorporate a theoretical framework in their research. Notably, researchers who did employ theoretical frameworks opted for four theories to elucidate parental involvement research. Four theories were employed by researchers to explain parental involvement, namely, i) Ecological theory [49]–[53], Epstein model [1], [38], [47]–[59], Hoover-Dempsey model [5], [60]–[69]; ii) social capital theory [70]–[81]; iii) cognitive theory [82], [83]; iv) planned behavior theory [46], [84]–[88].

3.1. Bioecological theory

The model that is widely used as a reference for research on parental involvement is that of Epstein [1] and Whitaker and Hoover [89], where the model adopts Bronfenbrenner's bioecology as its theoretical perspective. From a bioecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner proposed that interactions between home, family, and peers play a critical role in children's development. He delineated five levels of relationships and contexts with a particular focus on their impact on children, particularly in terms of academic achievement. Bronfenbrenner emphasized the importance of the dynamic relationship between the child and the broader context within which the child is situated over time [45].

Bronfenbrenner ecological model [90] explains that even a small environment (microsystem) can significantly impact child development. Participants utilizing the ecological theory perspective are parents of school children, specifically at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system theory suggests that child development is influenced by various interrelated ecological systems, including microsystems (neighborhood or immediate environment), mesosystems (relationships between two or more microsystems), exosystems (environments that indirectly affect individuals), macrosystems (broader society and culture), and chronosystems (consistency or change throughout life). Bioecological theory, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner [90], was a pioneer in the field of human development, emphasizing the complex interplay between biological and environmental factors in shaping human development. A bioecological perspective allows for the examination of parental involvement in secondary school in terms of certain relationships at school and at home, while exploring how these domains influence a child's academic achievement. The central focus of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological approach is that individual children are more likely to experience academic success and achievement when there is interaction and collaboration between the school and parents.

Several studies employing a bioecological theory perspective [1], [34], [51]–[53], [69], [91]–[94]. Lavenda [77] developed the Hoover-Dempsey model, which explains why parents become involved in their children's education and how this involvement impacts student outcomes, particularly in middle and high school settings. Further, Green [68] and Whitaker [74] tested the Hoover and Sandler model of the parental involvement in children's education. Another studies [70], [71], [75], [95] focused on parental involvement in schoolwork. This collective body of research not only highlights the significance of the bioecological theory but also demonstrates its versatility in explaining parental involvement across various educational contexts.

Research centered on the development of the Epstein model includes Gu [57], who employed Epstein's six key components of parental involvement as a theoretical framework to analyze and assess the content of school websites. Gokturk and Dinckal [53] conducted a study to understand how teachers collaborate with secondary school parents to define effective parental involvement in children's education. A study [66] utilized the framework proposed by Epstein [4], which outlines six obligations of parental involvement in the education of students with disabilities. Leenders *et al.* [67] identified six types of parental involvement essential for fostering successful partnerships between schools, families and communities. Other researchers also made contributions to the field of parental involvement research [45], [49], [52], [54], [55], [89].

Epstein suggested that parental involvement in school activities is associated with improved academic achievement in adolescents. These two theoretical concepts served as the foundation by Matejevic *et al.* [54]. They employed the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, which had been developed into a theoretical model by Epstein [68], [72]. According to this model, parental involvement in homework is a choice made by parents who believe that their participation is necessary and that it will positively impact their children's learning [83].

The bioecological theory perspective is widely developed in research with the context of the interaction process between school and family. This theoretical framework, rooted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The ecological theory perspective is suitable for parental involvement research, which focuses on the influence of parental involvement on children's educational outcomes such as children's achievement at school. The application of the bioecological theory provides a nuanced lens through which researchers can analyze and comprehend the multifaceted dimensions of parental involvement in the educational journey of children.

3.2. Theory of planned behavior (TPB)

Theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits that human behavior is influenced by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control. In the context of parental involvement in child development, the TPB theory can be used to predict parental behavior in their children's development [20]. The TPB theory emerged is a new theoretical basis for parental involvement research in 2012 and continued to develop until 2022, as evidenced by previous studies [37], [77]–[81]. These investigations, rooted in the TPB framework, offer insights into how parental attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control contribute to and influence their active involvement in their children's development.

Alghazo [84] explored the TPB as a model for understanding intentional behavior, incorporating way of thinking and behaviors, subjective norms, and perceived control. Another literature review of parental involvement [81] investigated the use of TPB in social research. Bracke and Corts [85] conducted a study in which they administered a parental involvement survey to 710 parents considered "involved" by 76 local district elementary school teachers, although 153 parents did not participate. The study aimed to determine whether social norms could increase parental engagement, specifically if parents who were not actively involved were influenced by their friends and neighbors to become more engaged. This research design aimed to shed light on the role of social influence in shaping parental involvement, providing valuable insights into the dynamics that drive increased involvement in parental community.

Perry and Langley [46] tested the usefulness of the TPB in speculating fathers' engagement resolve and reported engagement. McGregor and Knoll [87] conducted a study with 13 Scottish parents who regularly assisted their primary school children with homework to understand the reasons behind parental involvement in homework. Achuthan *et al.* [86] conducted a study to comprehend the factors that influencing cyberbullying behavior in adolescents, with a specific focus on parental influence.

The theory of planned behavior perspective focuses on explaining the predictors of parental involvement, where the focus is on what makes parents want to get involved in their children's development. This theoretical perspective is suitable for use in parental involvement research where it focuses on parent-focused predictors of parental involvement. By focusing on parent-centric predictors of parental involvement, this theoretical lens allows researchers to explore and analyze the intricate interplay of attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control in shaping parental involvement behavior.

3.3. Social capital theory

The theory of social capital describes parental involvement as a form of social capital, capable of influencing student achievement. Prominent experts such as Bourdieu and Coleman have contributed to the development of this theory. Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital [81]. Social capital theory illustrates how parents with cultural capital can utilize networking opportunities to secure support for their children's development, ultimately yielding the best possible outcomes for their children [90], [96]–[98].

Social capital theory describes how social relationships can impact the well-being of individuals and communities. Within this theoretical perspective, the dynamics of social connections can be used to predict parental involvement in various social activities. The premise is that parental involvement in these social activities, subsequently affecting their capacity to provide support for their children's development and enhance their children's outcomes [98].

This study uses the theory of social capital of Coleman. According to this theory, family and community play a key role in promoting the human capital of the young generation [80], [81], [99]. Social capital theory focuses on the extent to which parents derive advantages and benefits from their social relationships that they can then pass on to their children. This approach recognizes that family and community members provide knowledge, skills and other resources that can contribute to children's development.

The social capital theory perspective focuses on predicting parental involvement in social activities which will influence parents in providing support for their children's development and how the best outcomes are for their children. The ultimate aim of this perspective is to explore how parents' active participation in social endeavors, driven by social capital, contributes to achieving the best possible outcomes for their children. By delving into the intricate connections between social engagement, parental support, and favorable outcomes

for children, the social capital theory perspective enriches our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in the realm of parental involvement and its impact on children's development.

3.4. Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory describes how individuals learn through observation, imitation, and social interaction. In the context of parental involvement in child development, parents who are involved in their children's education tend to demonstrate good social-emotional behaviors, thereby facilitating their children to improve social and emotional skills [100]. Social cognitive theory focuses on individuals learning through observation, imitation, and social interaction, where this research is suitable for use in research aimed at knowing the effect of parental involvement, teacher support, and peer support on student abilities.

3.5. Discussion

The results of this study are consistent and complementary to previous studies [36]. Based on the results of the literature review, it is clear that the theoretical and conceptual frameworks commonly used in research on parental involvement include Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, social capital theory, Epstein's areas of overlap, types of Epstein involvement, and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model [36]. However, these theories have not fully elucidated the factors that predict parents' attitudes, willingness, and desire to become and remain actively involved [37], [38]. Between 2012 to 2022, several studies on parental involvement utilized the theory of planned behavior perspective [37], [77]–[81]. In addition, social cognitive theory has also been employed in parental involvement research [75].

A theory is defined as "a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and statements that express a systematic view of a phenomenon." Theories can also identify relationships between variables to explain and predict phenomena [93]. This theory provides the researcher with a framework to understand the direction of the research by providing an overall structure for the study. By applying a theoretical framework, data that initially appears irrelevant or unrelated can be identified, interpreted, or related to other data in meaningful ways [94]. At the same time, theory helps define the phenomenon being studied, thereby explaining the data set and drawing attention to specific events or activities relevant to the study.

When researchers do not use theory to guide their research, they risk neglecting to formulate and explore theoretical questions, which can lead to results of limited value [94], [95]. Therefore, researchers must be cautious when using theory, because although it may shed light on specific areas, it may ignore other aspects [95]. This oversight can lead to missed opportunities to develop innovative approaches to shaping this phenomenon [101]. In essence, the judicious use of theory in research is essential. While it provides a valuable framework for inquiry, researchers must be mindful of its limitations and strive for a balanced approach that considers various facets of the phenomenon, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and underpin research [95], [102]. It provides a model of the relationship between variables that may or may not have a specific theoretical perspective to describe a phenomenon [96]. While theoretical frameworks rely on one or more existing theories to explain phenomena [103], conceptual frameworks function as a type of provisional theory that attempts to make connections between different aspects of research [104].

According to the American Educational Research Association Standards [98], one of the criteria for assessing the quality of educational research is the presence of a theoretical or conceptual framework. In line with this perspective, Ugwuanyi *et al.* [99] recommended establishing connections between research and relevant theory. Miles and Huberman [105] explained that a conceptual framework describes, in graphic or narrative form, the most important research questions, key people, concepts or variables, and relationships; There is purpose between them. Like a map, a conceptual framework guides empirical research and gives it coherence. The theoretical framework, as a component of problem formulation, demonstrates how the research aligns with prior research [106]–[111]. This recommendation aligns with the broader notion that a well-defined theoretical framework not only enhances the rigor and coherence of research but also fosters a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. By anchoring research in established theories or conceptual frameworks, scholars contribute to the cumulative knowledge base in their respective fields and ensure a solid foundation for building upon existing insights.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have highlighted a limited emphasis on theoretical frameworks in the parental involvement research conducted over the past decade. As previously discussed, theoretical frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the research process, bringing key constructs to the forefront, and providing guidance for data collection and analysis. A robust theoretical foundation not only contributes to the rigor of the study but also enhances the overall coherence and depth of the research findings.

Four theories frequently utilized in parental involvement research emerged from this study, namely: Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory; Bourdieu, Coleman, and Lareau's social capital; social identity theory; and Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. The findings of this research serve as a foundational resource for future research on parental involvement across diverse contextual settings. We recommend that researchers integrate theory early in the research process, ensuring that the utilization of theoretical considerations is outlined. Theory can effectively steer data collection and the interpretation of findings. In cases where theory is underutilized, its application can propel the field forward.

The absence of a solid theoretical foundation in parental involvement research can adversely impact the research's quality. Therefore, we suggest several theoretical perspectives that can serve as a valuable lens in parental involvement research. It is worth noting that this study is constrained by its focus on articles related to parental involvement from the specific decade of 2012 to 2023, relying solely on electronic resources through searches in databases such as Scopus, EBSCO Sciences, Emerald, and Science Direct. Future research endeavors could consider broadening the scope of inquiry to encompass a wider range of literature sources and timeframes, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of theoretical frameworks in parental involvement research.

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