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Revisiting Literature on Parental Investment and Academic Achievement: Trends, Evidence, and Implications

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Abstract

This review synthesizes empirical research from 2000 to 2024 on the influence of parental investment on students' academic achievement across diverse cultural and socioeconomic settings. Integrating evidence from quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and experimental studies, it analyses core dimensions of parental investment—emotional support, time-based involvement, home learning activities, financial inputs, and parental beliefs—and their differential contributions to academic performance. The evidence consistently shows that non-material investments, particularly emotional and home-based engagement, exert stronger positive effects on achievement than financial expenditure alone. Socioeconomic conditions significantly mediate families' capacity to invest, producing persistent disparities, while gendered patterns of underinvestment—often disadvantaging girls—reflect entrenched sociocultural norms. Emerging work underscores the role of parental mindsets and psychosocial factors, with belief-focused interventions yielding measurable academic gains. Notwithstanding substantial scholarship, gaps remain regarding the interaction among investment domains, the mechanisms sustaining gender bias, and contextual influences in low-income and rural environments. The review concludes that parental investment is multidimensional and structurally embedded, necessitating more integrated, context-sensitive research to inform policies aimed at reducing educational inequities and improving academic achievement.

Keywords : Parental investment; Parental involvement in schooling; Child Rearing Practices; Scholastic/Academic achievement at secondary stage; Socioeconomic status and education; Gender disparities in education; Home-school partnership; Parental beliefs and aspirations; Educational inequality in India; Child learning outcomes

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a foundational driver of individual capability formation and national development, a proposition that assumes particular significance in India's socioeconomically and culturally heterogeneous context. Wide disparities in income, social stratification, regional development, and access to quality schooling continue to shape educational participation and achievement in uneven ways. Within this complex landscape, parental investment has

increasingly been identified as a decisive determinant of students' academic achievement, extending beyond material provision to include psychosocial, cognitive, and aspirational dimensions of support (Cunha & Heckman, 2018; Kim & Hill, 2020; Singh & Mukherjee, 2021). Recent scholarship underscores that parental investment is not merely an auxiliary factor but a core mechanism through which educational inequalities are reproduced or mitigated across generations.

Conceptually, parental investment encompasses a multidimensional set of inputs, including financial expenditure, time-based involvement, emotional support, cognitive stimulation, and parental beliefs regarding education and future returns (Becker & Tomes, 1986; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Contemporary studies have expanded this framework by emphasising parental expectations, digital mediation of learning, and home learning environments as critical components of effective investment (Lareau, 2021; Park & Holloway, 2022). In India, where education is widely perceived as a primary pathway to social mobility and economic security, parental investments are deeply embedded in intergenerational aspirations, social status considerations, and culturally shaped notions of success (Desai & Kulkarni, 2020; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2022).

Structural inequalities continue to mediate both the capacity and form of parental investment. Recent evidence confirms that socioeconomic status remains a strong predictor of differential access to private schooling, digital learning resources, and supplementary academic support, particularly in urban and peri-urban settings (Azam & Bhatt, 2020; ASER, 2023). Conversely, families from economically marginalised backgrounds—especially in rural and tribal regions—often face constraints that limit sustained academic support at home (Tilak & Kumar, 2021). Gendered patterns of investment also persist, though their manifestations are becoming more nuanced. While enrolment gaps have narrowed, studies indicate continuing disparities in expenditure on tutoring, technology access, and parental expectations, often disadvantaging girls in STEM-related pathways (Jayachandran, 2019; Kundu & Biswal, 2023). These patterns reflect the enduring influence of patriarchal norms, perceived labour market returns, and opportunity costs associated with girls' education.

Beyond financial inputs, recent research places increasing emphasis on non-monetary forms of parental involvement, including academic monitoring, motivational support, and engagement with schools through both physical and digital platforms. Studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the expanded role of parents as co-educators, particularly in facilitating online learning, structuring home routines, and supporting socio-emotional well-being (Andrew et al., 2020; Borah & Dutta, 2022). Indian evidence suggests that students whose parents demonstrate consistent academic engagement and positive learning-oriented beliefs exhibit higher levels of achievement, self-regulation, and resilience (Sahoo & Klasen, 2021; NCERT, 2022). These findings

align with international work emphasising parental mindset and expectations as powerful predictors of children's academic motivation and performance (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2021).

Policy discourse in India has increasingly recognised the importance of parental involvement in strengthening educational outcomes. The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) explicitly foregrounds family-school partnerships, parental awareness, and community engagement as essential components of systemic reform, particularly at the foundational and secondary levels. Recent policy-oriented studies argue that effective parental engagement, when supported by institutional mechanisms and inclusive outreach strategies, can play a transformative role in addressing learning gaps and promoting equity (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2023).

Given India's cultural plurality, socioeconomic stratification, and evolving educational policy landscape, a nuanced understanding of parental investment is essential for addressing persistent inequities in academic achievement. This review synthesises national and international literature to examine emerging trends, empirical evidence, and policy implications related to parental investment and academic outcomes, with particular reference to the Indian context. By integrating theoretical perspectives with recent empirical findings, the review seeks to elucidate the mechanisms through which parental investment shapes achievement and to inform research and policy directions aimed at fostering more equitable and inclusive educational outcomes.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for analysing parental investment and academic achievement is grounded in the premise that parents allocate multiple forms of resources—financial, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and aspirational—that jointly shape children's learning processes and academic outcomes. Drawing from human capital perspectives, parental investment includes financial expenditures on schooling, tutoring, books, digital resources, and other educational materials that expand access to quality learning environments and opportunities (Becker, 1964; Becker & Tomes, 1986). Complementing these material inputs, time-based and behavioural investments—such as assisting with homework, monitoring academic progress, and engaging with schools—have been shown to enhance students' academic engagement and achievement by reinforcing learning routines and accountability (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2012).

Beyond tangible and time-related inputs, emotional and psychological support constitutes a critical dimension of parental investment. Practices such as encouragement, positive reinforcement, and the communication of high academic expectations contribute to students' motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence, thereby indirectly influencing academic performance (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002;

Kim & Hill, 2020). Cognitive and cultural inputs further shape the home learning environment. Parents' educational attainment, language practices, literacy engagement, and exposure to intellectually stimulating activities generate forms of cultural capital that align with school expectations and are systematically rewarded within formal education systems (Bourdieu, 1977; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Lareau, 2011).

Parental beliefs and mindsets regarding intelligence, effort, and the perceived returns to education play an additional mediating role by shaping both the nature and intensity of parental involvement. Research grounded in expectancy–value theory suggests that parents' aspirations and educational expectations influence children's academic motivation, goal orientation, and achievement trajectories (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Importantly, these dimensions of parental investment do not operate uniformly across contexts. Socioeconomic status conditions families' capacity to invest, while gender norms, institutional structures, and rural–urban disparities mediate how resources are allocated and translated into academic gains (Coleman, 1988; Kingdon, 2007; Jayachandran, 2019). Taken together, this framework conceptualises parental investment as a multidimensional and contextually embedded process, operating at the intersection of family resources, sociocultural norms, and educational structures to shape academic

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that draws upon multiple complementary perspectives to explain why parents invest in their children's education, how such investments influence academic achievement, and why educational inequalities persist across social groups. Central to this framework is **Human Capital Theory**, which conceptualises education as an investment that enhances individual productivity and long-term economic returns (Becker, 1964). From this perspective, parents allocate financial, temporal, and cognitive resources to maximise their children's future outcomes, with variations in investment reflecting differences in socioeconomic status and perceived returns to education (Becker & Tomes, 1986; Heckman, 2011). This theory provides a foundational explanation for SES-based disparities in educational investment and achievement.

Complementing this economic rationale, **Social Capital Theory** emphasises the relational and normative dimensions of parental investment. Coleman (1988) argues that social capital embedded within family relationships—such as trust, communication, supervision, and parental engagement with schools—facilitates the effective transmission of educational values and supports academic success. Empirical research has further demonstrated that strong home–school linkages and consistent parental involvement enhance students' academic engagement and

learning outcomes, independent of material resources (Dika & Singh, 2002; Jeynes, 2012).

The framework is further informed by **Cultural Capital Theory**, which highlights how families transmit culturally valued skills, dispositions, and forms of knowledge that align with school expectations (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Parents with higher educational attainment and cultural resources are better positioned to cultivate language proficiency, academic habits, and learning-oriented environments that are implicitly rewarded within formal education systems. Contemporary interpretations of this theory emphasise how cultural capital operates through everyday parenting practices and differential exposure to enrichment activities, thereby reinforcing intergenerational educational inequalities (Lareau, 2011; Lareau, 2021).

To situate parental investment within broader contextual influences, **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory** provides a multilevel lens for understanding how family practices are shaped by nested environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Parental investment is influenced not only by immediate family dynamics (microsystem) but also by school quality, community resources, labour markets, cultural norms, and education policies (meso-, exo-, and macrosystems). This ecological perspective is particularly relevant in heterogeneous contexts such as India, where regional, rural-urban, and institutional variations significantly mediate educational opportunities.

The motivational mechanisms linking parental investment to academic outcomes are explained through **Expectancy-Value Theory**, which posits that parents' expectations for success and the value they attach to education shape both their level of involvement and their children's academic motivation and achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield et al., 2015). Parental beliefs regarding ability, effort, and future returns influence children's self-concept, persistence, and goal orientation, thereby affecting academic performance over time (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Additionally, **Gender Socialization Theory** contributes critical insights into how culturally constructed gender norms shape parental expectations and investment patterns, often resulting in differential educational support for boys and girls (Eccles, 2011; Jayachandran, 2019). These gendered practices interact with socioeconomic constraints and labour market perceptions to influence educational trajectories, particularly in patriarchal contexts. The **Family Stress Model** further explains how economic hardship undermines parental psychological well-being, reducing emotional availability and constraining effective involvement in children's learning (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Masarik & Conger, 2017).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives offer a robust and multidimensional lens for analysing parental investment as a socially embedded process shaped by economic resources, relational dynamics, cultural practices, motivational beliefs, and structural conditions. Their integration enables a nuanced understanding of how parental investment operates across contexts and why its effects on academic achievement vary systematically across socioeconomic, gendered, and cultural lines.

2. Rationale

Despite sustained expansion of educational access in India, substantial disparities in academic achievement persist across socioeconomic groups, genders, and regions. While school-level factors and systemic reforms have received considerable scholarly and policy attention, the role of families—and specifically parental investment—has often been examined in a fragmented or partial manner. Existing research frequently isolates single dimensions of parental involvement, such as financial expenditure or homework supervision, without sufficiently accounting for the multidimensional, context-dependent, and evolving nature of parental investment. This limits a comprehensive understanding of how parental actions interact with broader structural and cultural forces to shape students' academic outcomes.

The present study is significant in that it revisits and synthesises two decades of national and international literature to provide an integrated, theoretically grounded account of parental investment and academic achievement. By conceptualising parental investment as a multidimensional construct encompassing financial, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and aspirational components, the study moves beyond reductionist interpretations and reflects contemporary developments in educational and developmental research. The inclusion of emerging dimensions—such as parental mindset, digital mediation of learning, and intensified parental roles during periods of educational disruption—addresses critical gaps in earlier scholarship and responds to changing educational realities in the post-pandemic era.

From an Indian perspective, the study holds particular relevance given the country's pronounced socioeconomic stratification, cultural diversity, and persistent gender and rural–urban inequalities. While enrolment gaps have narrowed, differential parental investment continues to influence learning trajectories and academic achievement in ways that are insufficiently understood. By systematically examining how socioeconomic status, gender norms, cultural expectations, and locational contexts mediate parental investment, the study contributes to a more nuanced explanation of educational inequality in India. This context-sensitive synthesis is especially valuable in informing equity-oriented interventions and avoiding one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions.

The study also carries strong policy significance in light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which explicitly foregrounds family–school partnerships, parental awareness, and community engagement as central to improving learning outcomes. However, policy discourse often lacks a consolidated evidence base detailing *how* different forms of parental investment operate, *for whom* they are most effective, and *under what conditions* they can reduce rather than reproduce inequality. By aligning empirical trends with established theoretical frameworks, this review provides an evidence-informed foundation to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of parental engagement strategies envisioned under NEP 2020.

Academically, the study contributes to the literature by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives—human capital, social capital, cultural capital, ecological systems, expectancy–value, gender socialisation, and family stress frameworks—into a unified analytical lens. This theoretical integration enhances explanatory depth and supports a more comprehensive interpretation of empirical findings across diverse contexts. Methodologically, the use of a systematic narrative review combined with qualitative content analysis strengthens the rigour of synthesis and allows for the identification of patterns, contradictions, and research gaps that may not be visible through meta-analytic approaches alone.

Finally, the study's significance extends to future research and practice. By identifying underexplored populations, contextual blind spots, and emerging dimensions of parental investment, it sets a clear agenda for subsequent empirical inquiry. For practitioners and educators, the findings underscore the importance of recognising diverse family capacities and promoting inclusive, supportive home–school relationships. Overall, the study positions parental investment not merely as a private family matter but as a critical lever for advancing educational equity, academic achievement, and inclusive development in India.

3. Objectives

The present piece of research is guided by the following objectives:

3.1 To systematically synthesise national and international literature on parental investment and its relationship with students' academic achievement, with attention to evolving trends over time.

3.2 To examine the multidimensional nature of parental investment—including financial inputs, time-based involvement, emotional support, cognitive stimulation, and parental beliefs—and their differential effects on academic outcomes.

3.3 To analyse the mediating role of socioeconomic status, cultural norms, gender dynamics, and rural–urban contexts in shaping patterns of parental investment in India.

3.4 To explore emerging dimensions of parental investment, such as digital engagement, parental mindset, and home–school partnerships, particularly in light of recent educational reforms and disruptions.

3.5 To identify gaps in existing research and derive implications for educational policy and practice, with specific reference to equity, inclusion, and the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

4. Research Questions

In the light of above objectives, following research questions are formulated.

4.1 What are the dominant trends, patterns, and empirical findings in national and international research on parental investment and academic achievement over time?

4.2 How do different dimensions of parental investment differentially influence students' academic achievement?

4.3 How do socioeconomic, cultural, gender-based, and locational factors mediate parental investment and its impact on academic achievement in the Indian context?

4.4 What emerging forms of parental investment have been identified in recent literature, and how do they influence academic achievement in contemporary educational contexts?

4.5 What gaps exist in the current literature on parental investment, and what are the implications for educational policy, practice, and future research in alignment with NEP 2020?

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic review design to synthesize existing research on the role of parental investment in shaping students' academic achievement, with a particular emphasis on the Indian context. The review approach was chosen to integrate findings from diverse empirical, theoretical, and policy-based studies to identify patterns, trends, and research gaps.

5.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a **systematic narrative review design**, complemented by **qualitative content analysis**, to synthesise national and international literature on parental investment and academic achievement. This combined approach is well suited to examining research trends, conceptual developments, empirical evidence, and policy implications across diverse contexts and methodological traditions. While meta-analytic approaches primarily focus on quantifying effect sizes, the systematic narrative review enables an integrative synthesis of heterogeneous evidence, and content analysis facilitates the systematic coding, categorisation, and interpretation of recurring concepts, themes, and patterns within the literature. Together, these methods allow for a rigorous thematic

examination of both quantitative and qualitative studies, ensuring close alignment with the study's objectives and research questions and enabling a nuanced understanding of emerging dimensions of parental investment.

2 5.2 Sources of Data and Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases to ensure breadth and depth of coverage. Key databases included **Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and UGC-CARE-listed Indian journals**. In addition, reports and policy documents from authoritative bodies such as **NCERT, ASER, NITI Aayog, UNESCO, OECD, and the Ministry of Education, Government of India** were consulted to incorporate policy-relevant evidence. Attempt was made to physically visit to libraries where Dissertation Abstract Internationals, Encyclopaedias, and journals were consulted

Search strings were developed using Boolean operators and combinations of keywords aligned with the study objectives, such as *parental investment, parental involvement, academic achievement, socioeconomic status, gender disparities, home learning environment, digital parental engagement, and India*. Reference lists of selected articles were also manually screened to identify additional relevant studies.

1 5.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

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7 To ensure relevance and quality, studies were selected based on predefined criteria. Included studies were peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, and policy reports published primarily between **2000 and 2024**, with greater emphasis on literature from **2015 onwards** to capture emerging trends. Studies focusing on school-aged children and adolescents, examining at least one dimension of parental investment in relation to academic outcomes, were included. Both Indian and international studies were considered to allow for comparative insights.

Excluded from the review were opinion pieces, unpublished theses, studies lacking empirical or theoretical grounding, and research focusing exclusively on early childhood care or higher education without relevance to school-level academic achievement.

5.4 Data Extraction and Analytical Framework

Relevant data were systematically extracted from selected studies using a structured review matrix capturing authorship, year, country context, research design, sample characteristics, dimensions of parental investment examined, key findings, and policy implications. The extracted data were analysed thematically using an analytical framework derived from the study's objectives and research questions.

The analysis was organised around five major review themes:

- (1) trends and evolution of research on parental investment and academic achievement;
- (2) multidimensional forms of parental investment and their differential effects;
- (3) socioeconomic, cultural, gendered, and locational mediators in the Indian context;
- (4) emerging dimensions such as digital engagement, parental mindset, and pandemic-related involvement; and
- (5) research gaps and policy implications aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

5.5 Theoretical Orientation

5 As discussed earlier, the review is theoretically informed by **Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, Cultural Capital Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory**. These frameworks guided both the selection of literature and the interpretation of findings by explaining how parental resources, relationships, beliefs, and contextual factors interact to shape academic outcomes. Gender Socialization Theory and the Family Stress Model were additionally employed to interpret gendered and socioeconomic variations in parental investment.

5.6 Limitations of the Methodology

The review is limited by its reliance on published literature, which may introduce publication bias. Variations in methodological approaches across studies also constrain direct comparability of findings. Additionally, despite efforts to include diverse contexts, some regional and marginalised populations may remain underrepresented in existing research.

6. Synthesis of Literature and Thematic Findings

6.1 Synthesis of Existing Literature

6.1.1 Early Foundations of Research

Ho (2000) examined parental investment in Hong Kong, demonstrating that emotional support and home-based involvement had stronger effects on children's self-esteem than material investment or socioeconomic status.

Pasqua (2005) provided a theoretical analysis of gender bias in educational investment, showing that parents often invest less in girls due to perceived lower returns, and highlighting the importance of women's bargaining power.

Hango (2005), using U.S. longitudinal data, found that parental involvement mediated the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, leading to better adult outcomes in education, health, and life satisfaction.

Loughran, Datar, & Kilburn (2008) revealed compensatory parental behavior, where families invested more in children with biological disadvantages such as low birth weight.

Mistry et al. (2008) emphasized the mediating role of parental supportiveness in shaping cognitive and behavioral outcomes among low-income immigrant and native families in the U.S.

6.1.2 Gendered Dimensions of Parental Investment

Barcellos, Carvalho, & Lleras-Muney (2012) documented son preference in India, showing boys received greater investments in childcare, breastfeeding, and vaccination.

-Begum, Grossman, & Islam (2014) in Bangladesh confirmed boy-biased parental spending on education and healthcare.

Pacáková & Ježek (2017) compared parental investment across the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, finding Western parents more supportive of daughters, while patriarchal societies favored sons.

Kuranchie & Addo (2017) in Ghana highlighted stronger involvement by biological parents and urban households compared to pseudo parents and rural families.

6.1.3 Socioeconomic and Cultural Determinants

Chi & Qian (2015) showed that free education policies in China reduced in-school costs but increased out-of-school expenses, widening inequality.

Hedges et al. (2016) in Tanzania found that household livelihood patterns influenced school attendance, with pastoralist families investing less due to child labor demands.

Gupta (2020) in India revealed disparities within the middle class, where maternal involvement and cultural capital shaped unequal educational advantages.

Cheung & Wong (2020) in Hong Kong demonstrated that family income indirectly affected children's intellectual development through parental stress and reduced financial investment.

6.1.4 Psychological and Behavioral Perspectives

Byrne (2013) found that parental expectations strongly predicted academic achievement among ethnically diverse, low-income U.S. families.

Attanasio, Boneva, & Rauh (2019) in England showed that parental beliefs about returns to time investment shaped behavior more than material expenditure.

Hedges (2019) in Tanzania highlighted that fostered children and girls often received lower investments due to household responsibilities.

6.1.5 Indian Context – Recent Evidences

Kumar (2020) demonstrated that income uncertainty in rural Bihar reduced educational spending, particularly for girls, suggesting the need for microfinance and social insurance.

Pradhan (2024), using a mixed-method approach, concluded that socioeconomic status, parental education, and urban residence were key determinants of educational spending in India, while cultural and gender norms further shaped priorities.

Summary

Early research on parental investment established the foundational insight that family involvement exerts a powerful influence on children's educational and developmental outcomes beyond material resources alone. Studies such as Ho (2000) and Hango (2005) demonstrated that emotional support, parental engagement, and home-based involvement significantly mediate the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, contributing not only to academic success but also to long-term well-being. Complementing these findings, Loughran, Datar, and Kilburn (2008) and Mistry et al. (2008) highlighted parents' adaptive and compensatory behaviors, showing that investments often respond to children's needs and are shaped by the quality of the home environment. Subsequent research brought critical attention to gendered patterns of investment, with evidence from India, Bangladesh, and other patriarchal contexts revealing persistent son preference and unequal allocation of educational and health resources (Barcellos et al., 2012; Begum et al., 2014), while cross-national comparisons underscored the role of cultural norms and family structures in shaping parental priorities (Pacáková & Ježek, 2017; Kuranchie & Addo, 2017). Socioeconomic and cultural determinants further emerged as key mediators, as policy reforms, livelihood structures, and intra-class differences were shown to differentially shape parental capacity and strategies for investment (Chi & Qian, 2015; Hedges et al., 2016; Gupta, 2020; Cheung & Wong, 2020). More recent psychological and behavioral perspectives emphasized the centrality of parental beliefs, expectations, and stress in influencing educational outcomes, often outweighing purely financial inputs (Byrne, 2013; Attanasio et al., 2019; Hedges, 2019). In the Indian context, contemporary evidence confirms that income insecurity, parental education, urban-rural location, and entrenched gender norms continue to structure patterns of educational investment, underscoring the need for integrated policy approaches that address both economic constraints and sociocultural dynamics (Kumar, 2020; Pradhan, 2024).

6.2 Thematic Findings

6.2.1 Trends and Evolution of Research on Parental Investment and Academic Achievement

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The literature on parental investment and academic achievement has evolved substantially over the past two decades. Early studies were largely grounded in economic and sociological perspectives, emphasising financial inputs, parental education, and household resources as primary determinants of student achievement (Becker & Tomes, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Over time, research expanded to include non-monetary dimensions such as parental involvement, expectations, and home learning environments, recognising that material resources alone do not fully explain variations in academic outcomes (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2012). Recent scholarship reflects a further shift towards multidimensional and process-oriented approaches, incorporating psychosocial factors, digital engagement, and parental mindsets, particularly in response to technological change and educational disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020; Park & Holloway, 2022).

In the Indian context, earlier research focused predominantly on access, enrolment, and socioeconomic disparities, while more recent studies increasingly examine quality of engagement, differential parental strategies, and policy linkages, especially in relation to NEP 2020 (Azam & Bhatt, 2020; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2021). This temporal shift indicates a growing recognition of parental investment as a dynamic and context-sensitive process rather than a static set of inputs.

6.2.2 Multidimensional Forms of Parental Investment and Differential Effects:

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that parental investment is multidimensional, with different forms exerting distinct effects on academic achievement. Financial investments—such as expenditure on private schooling, tutoring, books, and digital devices—are positively associated with achievement, particularly in contexts where public provision is uneven (Tilak & Kumar, 2021). However, evidence suggests diminishing marginal returns when financial inputs are not complemented by supportive home practices (Cunha & Heckman, 2018).

Time-based and behavioural involvement, including homework supervision, academic monitoring, and communication with teachers, show robust and consistent associations with student achievement, motivation, and self-regulation across contexts (Jeynes, 2012; Kim & Hill, 2020). Emotional support and the communication of high but realistic expectations emerge as especially influential, fostering resilience, persistence, and positive academic self-concept (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Cognitive and cultural investments—such as literacy practices, language use, and exposure to intellectually stimulating activities—further enhance learning by aligning home environments with school expectations (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Lareau, 2021).

6.2.3 Socioeconomic, Cultural, Gendered, and Locational Mediators in India:

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central theme in the literature concerns the mediating role of socioeconomic status, cultural norms, gender relations, and rural–urban location. Higher-SES families possess greater capacity to mobilise financial, cultural, and informational

resources, enabling more strategic and sustained forms of parental investment (Kingdon, 2007; Desai & Kulkarni, 2020). Conversely, economic insecurity constrains both material provision and emotional availability, as explained by the Family Stress Model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

6.2.4 Gender-based differentials remain salient in India:

While enrolment gaps have narrowed, disparities persist in expenditure on tutoring, technology access, and parental expectations, particularly in secondary and STEM education (Jayachandran, 2019; Kundu & Biswal, 2023). Rural–urban divides further shape investment patterns, with rural and tribal households facing infrastructural, informational, and institutional constraints that limit effective engagement with schools (ASER, 2023; Tilak & Kumar, 2021).

6.2.5 Emerging Dimensions:

Digital Engagement, Parental Mindset, and Crisis Contexts Recent literature highlights emerging forms of parental investment, notably digital engagement and parental mindset. The pandemic accelerated parents' involvement in facilitating online learning, structuring home routines, and supporting socio-emotional well-being, revealing stark digital divides but also new possibilities for engagement (Andrew et al., 2020; Borah & Dutta, 2022). Studies increasingly emphasise parental beliefs about intelligence, effort, and returns to education as key drivers of involvement and student motivation, consistent with expectancy–value perspectives (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2021).

Summary

The thematic synthesis of the literature indicates that research on parental investment and academic achievement has progressively shifted from a narrow focus on economic and structural determinants to a nuanced, multidimensional, and process-oriented understanding of how families influence learning outcomes. While early studies emphasised financial resources, parental education, and household socioeconomic status as primary drivers of achievement, subsequent scholarship demonstrated that non-monetary forms of investment—such as parental involvement, expectations, emotional support, and home learning environments—are equally, if not more, consequential. Contemporary research further extends this perspective by incorporating psychosocial processes, parental mindsets, and digital engagement, particularly in response to technological change and crisis contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Indian context, this evolution is marked by a transition from concerns with access and enrolment to a deeper examination of the quality, strategies, and effectiveness of parental engagement, aligned with policy developments such as NEP 2020. Across studies, parental investment is consistently shown to be multidimensional, with financial, time-based, emotional, and cultural inputs exerting differential and interacting effects on academic achievement. These relationships are strongly

mediated by socioeconomic status, cultural norms, gender relations, and rural–urban location, which shape both families’ capacities and constraints. Persistent gender-based differentials in expenditure, expectations, and access to educational opportunities, alongside pronounced rural–urban and digital divides, underscore the context-sensitive nature of parental investment. Overall, the literature converges on the view that parental investment is a dynamic and adaptive process, shaped by structural inequalities, parental beliefs, and changing educational landscapes, with significant implications for educational equity and policy design.

7. Implications

Across contexts, several consistent themes emerge:

- **Emotional and relational investments** often outweigh material contributions in shaping children’s development.
- **Gender disparities** persist, particularly in South Asia and Africa, though cross-national comparisons reveal cultural variation.
- **Socioeconomic status and household livelihood patterns** strongly mediate parental investment, with income uncertainty and opportunity costs influencing decisions.
- **Parental beliefs and expectations** play a pivotal role, shaping both the quantity and quality of investments.
- **Policy interventions**—such as free education, preschool quality improvements, and belief-based programs—can mitigate inequalities, but their effectiveness depends on sustained parental engagement.

8. Critical Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the breadth of research on parental investment and academic achievement, several critical gaps remain that warrant further exploration:

8.1 Intersectionality of Gender, Class, and Culture

- Much of the literature highlights gender disparities, but few studies systematically examine how gender interacts with caste, ethnicity, or religion in shaping parental investment, particularly in South Asia and Africa.
- Future research should adopt intersectional frameworks to capture the layered disadvantages faced by marginalized groups.

8.2 Longitudinal and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

- While longitudinal studies in the U.S. and Europe provide valuable insights, similar long-term datasets are scarce in developing countries.

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- Comparative research across diverse cultural contexts would help identify universal versus context-specific patterns of parental investment.

8.3 Role of Fathers and Non-Traditional Caregivers

- Most studies emphasize maternal involvement, leaving paternal roles and contributions underexplored.
- Research should expand to include fathers, grandparents, foster parents, and community caregivers, especially in societies where extended families play a central role.

8.4 Digital and Post-Pandemic Learning Environments

- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward digital learning, yet evidence on how parental investment adapts in online and hybrid settings remains limited.
- Future studies should investigate how digital literacy, access to technology, and parental mediation influence children's outcomes in virtual classrooms.

8.5 Psychological Pathways and Stress Dynamics

- Several studies note the mediating role of parental stress, but mechanisms linking economic insecurity, parental mental health, and educational investment are not fully understood.
- Research integrating psychology, economics, and education could clarify how stress dynamics shape investment decisions.

8.7 Policy Evaluation and Intervention Studies

- While interventions such as belief-modification programs and preschool quality improvements show promise, evidence on scalability and sustainability is limited.
- Rigorous evaluations of policy initiatives across varied socioeconomic contexts are needed to assess long-term impacts and equity outcomes.

8.8 Children's Agency and Reciprocal Effects

- Most studies conceptualize children as passive recipients of parental investment.
- Emerging evidence suggests that children's skills, aspirations, and agency can influence parental behavior, pointing to the need for research on reciprocal dynamics.

Despite extensive scholarship on parental investment and academic achievement, important gaps remain that call for deeper inquiry. Future research must adopt intersectional approaches to understand how gender

interacts with caste, ethnicity, and religion, particularly in regions like South Asia and Africa. There is also a pressing need for longitudinal and cross-cultural studies in developing countries to complement existing evidence from Western contexts. Beyond maternal involvement, greater attention should be given to fathers, grandparents, and non-traditional caregivers, especially in extended family systems. The rapid expansion of digital and post-pandemic learning environments further demands investigation into how parental mediation, technology access, and digital literacy shape outcomes. Moreover, the psychological pathways linking economic insecurity, parental stress, and educational investment remain underexplored, requiring interdisciplinary approaches. While interventions such as preschool quality improvements and belief-modification programs show promise, their scalability and sustainability across diverse socioeconomic settings need rigorous evaluation. Finally, children's agency and reciprocal influence on parental behavior represent an emerging frontier, highlighting the importance of viewing children not merely as passive recipients but as active participants in shaping educational trajectories.

9. Conclusion

The literature on parental investment and academic achievement demonstrates a dynamic interplay between family resources, cultural norms, psychological beliefs, and institutional contexts. While early studies emphasized material and socioeconomic factors, recent research highlights the importance of emotional support, parental expectations, and belief-oriented interventions. National and international evidence underscores that equitable educational outcomes require not only structural reforms but also strategies to empower parents, reduce gender bias, and sustain engagement across diverse socioeconomic settings.

Future scholarship must move beyond documenting disparities to designing actionable strategies that empower families and reduce inequities. By integrating intersectional analysis, cross-cultural comparisons, digital learning contexts, and intervention-based evaluations, researchers can provide more nuanced insights into how parental investment shapes academic achievement in an increasingly complex world.

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