

Article Info

Article ID: SIJR.1.2.1
Article Type: Review Article
Published: Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2026, pp. 1–18
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21550314

Journal Info

ISSN: 3139-583X
Scholaria Publications
Scholaria International Journal of Research
International Peer Reviewed Journal
www.scholariajournal.org

Article History

Received : 09 April 2026
Revised : 12 May 2026
Accepted : 30 June 2026
Published : 25 July 2026

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The Relationship Between Parental Education and Student Outcomes: A Systematic Literature Review Following the PRISMA 2020 Framework

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Abstract

Education is one of the strongest tools of society, but success in education is still not uniformly attained. Parental education is one of the many variables affecting student achievement that has proven to be a strong one. Parents who have completed higher education are more likely to have positive environments at home, high expectations for their children and to feel more confident in interaction with educational institutions.

This SLR aimed to bring together the fragmented and inconsistent evidence base on the impact of parental education on student outcomes, and to explore the ways in which researchers have examined the link between these two concepts in different global contexts, as well as patterns that emerged from these.

The method used involved systematic identification, screening and analysis of peer reviewed empirical studies using PRISMA 2020 guidelines from 2015 to 2025. The search was done in comprehensive manner in the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, SAGE Journals, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library and NepJOL. Studies where parental education was used as an independent variable and student outcomes as dependent variable were included. In order to account for the expected methodological diversity, narrative synthesis was used.

The analysis of 13 good-quality studies gives a clear yet complex picture of the results. Pupils from higher educated parents tend to achieve higher academic attainment, adopt more positive attitudes to school, have a greater sense of engagement with the school, and have a higher expectation for themselves on the educational path. But this is not a relationship that is usually expressed directly. Rather, educated parents enact their knowledge in multiple ways, highly educated parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education, create more intellectually stimulating homes, have higher expectations for their children, and offer more opportunities to learn. The relevance and dynamism of this connection is different from one country to another and from one culture to another.

Parental education cannot be considered or understood as a linear determinant of student success, but rather as a resource in a larger context of family, school and community influences. School improvement should be part of an inclusive discussion of educational policies to reduce inequality, alongside strengthening family-school partnerships, enhancing home learning environments, and the removal of structural barriers to the translation of parents' education into students' achievement.

Keywords: parental education, student outcomes, academic achievement, systematic literature review, PRISMA 2020, educational inequality.

1 Introduction

Education is one of the most valuable investments that any society can make to improve the wellbeing of its citizens, the social mobility, and to drive sustainable national development. It allows people to learn how to engage in society and contribute to economic growth by gaining the knowledge, competencies, values, and skills to do so. In addition to its personal development objectives, learning is increasingly acknowledged as a means of alleviating poverty, reducing inequality, and providing opportunities for future generations to succeed. The world recognizes the power of education through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all).

This is well known, but students are not met with the same success in education. A mosaic of individual, family, institutional and community dynamics influence their learning outcomes. Understanding their interaction is an urgent issue for educational researchers and policy makers around the world (Sirin, 2005; OECD, 2019). Family background is among the wide range of factors which have been found to be the most consistent predictors of students' educational outcomes. Decades and countries of study have found that many factors related to the socio-economic status of families, parental occupations, and resources have a significant impact on the education opportunities and outcomes of children.

In the family context, parental education has received special focus from researchers, as it influences children's learning opportunities directly and indirectly. Parents that have higher education levels generally show more knowledge of education systems and are more likely to have a higher level of confidence when supporting their children's learning efforts. They are often able to foster good study habits, communicate with teachers, track progress and offer learning resources that support children in their studies. These types of support not only result in academic success but also learning motivation, educational aspirations, self-confidence and school engagement (Davis-Kean, 2005; Eccles, 2005; Coleman, 1988).

The theoretical basis of this relation is well known. According to the Human Capital Theory, parents' knowledge and skills can be passed on to their children through guidance and support (Becker, 1964). Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of relationships and networks that educated parents can leverage to benefit their children's education (Coleman, 1988). The Cultural Capital theory emphasizes the passing down of attitudes, words and actions that are consistent with those expected in an educational system (Bourdieu, 1986). The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offers a comprehensive framework for the understanding of how parental education interacts with multiple environmental systems (family, school, community, and larger society) to impact children's development.

But the association between parental education and outcomes cannot be reduced to a simple or deterministic explanation. Learning does not occur in isolation of a host of social, cultural, economic and institutional influences, but is an outcome of their interplay. Although par-

ents' education can have some benefits in terms of education resources and learning support, many students in families with little educational background are able to make great academic progress because of their own determination, good teaching, caring school settings and encouragement from their families. However, a student whose family has a higher level of education might have problems if other necessary conditions for learning are not present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In the past few decades, parents' education and a range of measures of student outcomes have been studied by researchers around the world. Current research in most of the countries largely shows that students with parents who have a higher level of education perform better academically, are more motivated to learn, have more aspirations for their education, and are more engaged in school. However, the intensity and direction of these connections differ from country to country, in educational systems, according to socioeconomic status and cultural context. The relationship between parental education and academic achievement has been reported to have strong direct links (Jeynes, 2007; Chowa et al., 2013), while others argue that parental education influences the achievement primarily through intervening factors.

This issue merits focused study on the Nepalese context, particularly. In the last 20 years, Nepal has made significant strides in increasing educational access and participation in school. Even with these achievements, there are still learning gaps between different geographic areas, socioeconomic groups and family backgrounds. Children from different educational contexts in the home are likely to face inequitable learning opportunities, including access to learning resources, parental support and encouragement, and learning opportunities in the home. At the same time, swift social and economic shifts, such as labor migration, urbanization, and changing family dynamics, have significantly transformed parent involvement in children's learning (Adhikari, 2026; Dhungana et al., 2024).

There is a large amount of empirical research that has examined parental education and student outcomes, however, the findings from these studies are often sparse. Theories, methods, sample types, education and measures vary widely across studies. As a result, information is spread out among different journals and subjects, making it difficult for researchers, educators, and policymakers to have a more comprehensive understanding of what is already known. Additionally, although there have been some narrative reviews that looked at the family context and education outcomes, there have been relatively few reviews that synthesized the evidence in a systematic way with accepted criteria, like the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) (Page et al., 2021).

With this in mind, the present study follows a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach as guided by PRISMA 2020. The study is not based on new primary data, but rather critically reviews and integrates published empirical research data to arrive at a full picture of the relationship between parental education and student outcomes. The review's goal is to incorporate evidence across a variety of educational frameworks to find commonalities, differences, trends in methodology, and implications for future research, educational policy, and educational practice.

2 Statement of the Problem

Education is now seen as a key driver of personal all-round development health and wellbeing, social inclusion and sustainable national development. This has led to a growing focus on enhancing students' learning outcomes by governments, educational institutions, and researchers all over the world. While significant strides have been made in improving access to education, there are still differences in educational outcomes, status and expectations among students in different countries and educational systems. The differences noted indicate that a

child's success in education is not just a function of what happens in school, but also of what happens outside of the school environment in the family and community.

Parental education has been cited as a key parental influence in children's educational development, among factors other to family. It is assumed that parents with more education have a better understanding of educational opportunities, higher expectations for education, and are better able to facilitate learning at home. As a result, many studies have found significant positive correlations between parental education and students' academic performance, learning motivation, school involvement and educational goals. The results have supported the common view that parental education is one of the main factors determining student success.

Despite this emerging research base, the current evidence is not always clear and consistent. Some research finds positive relationships between parental education and student outcomes, while others indicate that these relationships are rather weak or non-existent once we account for other variables like family income, parental involvement, school quality, and home learning environments. In many cases, parental education seems to be a predictor of student outcomes for other social and educational factors and not as a separate predictor. These differences suggest that the link between parental education and student outcomes is not as simple as it may appear.

Yet another difficulty is that earlier research has been conducted in a variety of geographic, cultural and educational settings with varying research designs, sampling methods, data analysis procedures, and assessments of student outcomes. A number of scholars have emphasized academic outcomes, while others have studied more general aspects, like educational motivation, school engagement, educational goals, self-efficacy, or behavioural development. These methodological differences make comparison between findings across studies, and determination of overall strength and nature of the relationship between parental education and student outcomes difficult.

It is particularly relevant in developing countries like Nepal where socio-economic status, geographies and family backgrounds still play a significant role in educational opportunities. Although Nepal has made remarkable progress in improving school enrolment and educational access, inequalities in learning achievement remain evident. Also, the different family dynamics, labor migration, urbanization and economic changes have impacted the role of parents in their children's education. These different conditions pose a question of the suitability of the evidence produced in other countries to explain the Nepalese context or the need for a context-sensitized understanding.

Another line of limitation of the literature is that most studies have focused on gathering primary empirical evidence, and that very few studies have systematically synthesized the results of those studies. While individual studies can yield important pieces of information, they tend to focus on a narrow sample of students, settings, or aspects of student outcomes. As a result, a larger picture of the evidence continues to be piecemeal. It is not easy to make an agreement on the areas of agreement, find differences in the results, strengths and weaknesses of the methods, and priorities for future research without the systematic synthesis. This constraint also decreases the value of the evidence for educational policymakers and practitioners who need comprehensive and trustworthy evidence to inform decision-making.

3 Research Questions

Given the above issues, the following research questions will be addressed.

Primary Research Question

What does the current empirical research literature say about the relationship between parental education and student outcomes?

Specific Research Questions

1. How does previous empirical research conceptualize and measure parental education?
2. What aspects of student outcomes have been examined in relation to parental education?
3. What trends, similarities, and differences are evident in the literature regarding the relationship between parental education and student outcomes?
4. What are the methodological strengths, limitations, and research gaps identified in the current literature?
5. What are the implications of these findings for educational policy, practice, and future research?

4 Research Objectives

General objective: The purpose of this research is to review and synthesize findings from empirical studies conducted so far on the link between parental education and students' outcomes systematically using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guideline.

Specific Objectives:

1. To systematically identify and review peer-reviewed empirical studies that examine the relationship between parental education and student outcomes.
2. To examine how parental education has been conceptualized and measured in previous educational research.
3. To synthesize the existing evidence regarding the association between parental education and different dimensions of student outcomes.
4. To identify research gaps, emerging themes, and methodological limitations within the existing literature.

5 Significance of the Study

The importance of body of knowledge of how parents' education affects student outcomes for educational researchers and teachers, school leaders, parents and policymakers. The relation between these variables has been the subject of extensive empirical research, but these studies are spread throughout a variety of disciplines, countries and educational settings. The systematic review and synthesis of these studies will help to clarify and improve the understanding of existing evidence.

Theoretically, this study is a valuable addition to the body of educational research as it synthesises the results of various empirical research studies into a single body of knowledge. The review provides a more general perspective on the explanation of parental education from various theories, such as the human capital theory, social capital theory, cultural capital theory and ecological systems theory. This synthesis can be expected to reinforce the conceptualization of the effect of family education background on students' education development.

Methodologically, this study illustrates how the PRISMA 2020 framework was used in the educational research field. It is designed to be a clear and structured literature review process that can be replicated with the aim of identifying, screening, evaluating and synthesizing research evidence. Furthermore, the study could be a methodological reference for other researchers who wish to carry out a systematic literature review in the education and related social science disciplines.

The study also has practical implication for teachers, school leaders and educational practitioners. By having a thorough overview of the current evidence, educators can be aware of how the parent's education level interacts with other factors affecting student's learning experiences. This information could stimulate schools to plan more comprehensive approaches to fostering family school collaboration and to better serve students with varying educational backgrounds.

However, it is hoped that the findings will offer policy evidence to help inform policy and programmed development in education and learning that will contribute towards improving equitable learning opportunities. Policy-makers might therefore be better advised to take all relevant family-level factors influencing educational success into account, rather than just academic achievement.

6 Scope of the Review

This study is a systematic review of the existing empirical literature on the link between parental education and student outcomes. The study does not gather primary data but rather draws conclusions based on the available secondary data presented in peer-reviewed journal articles, which is done in a transparent and systematic way, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

The review will primarily consider papers published in the English language in the last decade from 2015–2025. The relevant studies were retrieved from internationally accepted academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, SAGE Journals, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, and NepJOL.

All empirical work that explores the role of parental education as an explanatory or independent variable and focuses on one or more aspects of student outcomes is included in the review. Research studies using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs were included. The review uses a systematic approach of treating the findings as a narrative synthesis, comparing the research findings, examining recurring patterns, considering methodological differences, and exploring contextual factors which may explain variations across studies.

7 Literature Review

7.1 Conceptual Review/ Concept of Parental Education

Parental education is widely recognized as one of the most influential family characteristics associated with children's educational development. In most empirical research, parental education refers to the highest level of formal education completed by one or both parents. However, contemporary educational literature views parental education as more than a demographic characteristic. It is increasingly understood as a form of educational capital that shapes parents' knowledge, attitudes, expectations, decision-making, and capacity to support their children's learning.

Early educational research primarily treated parental education as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Researchers assumed that parents with higher educational qualifications generally had better employment opportunities, higher income, and greater access to educational resources, all of which indirectly benefited children's learning. Although this perspective remains relevant, more recent studies argue that parental education exerts influences that extend beyond economic advantage. Educated parents often possess greater familiarity with educational systems, communicate more confidently with teachers, encourage effective learning habits, and create home environments that support cognitive and social development.

The empirical literature demonstrates considerable variation in how parental education is operationalized. Some studies classify parental education into categories such as primary, secondary, and tertiary education, whereas others measure total years of schooling completed. Several studies analyze mothers' and fathers' educational attainment separately, recognizing that each parent may influence children's educational experiences in different ways. For the purpose of this systematic literature review, parental education is defined as the highest level of formal education attained by one or both parents and the educational knowledge, experiences, and learning resources associated with that attainment.

7.2 Concept of Student Outcomes

The concept of student outcomes occupies a central position in educational research because it reflects the extent to which students benefit from their educational experiences. Traditionally, student outcomes were measured primarily through examination scores and academic grades. While academic performance remains an important indicator, contemporary educational research recognizes that student development extends far beyond examination results. Learning is now viewed as a multidimensional process that influences students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, aspirations, and overall personal development.

Recent educational literature defines student outcomes as the range of measurable changes that occur in learners as a result of educational experiences and interactions with their family, school, peers, and wider social environment. These outcomes include not only academic achievement but also learning motivation, school engagement, educational aspirations, critical thinking, problem-solving ability, self-confidence, emotional well-being, and lifelong learning competencies. For the purpose of this systematic literature review, student outcomes refer to the broad range of educational, cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and developmental achievements demonstrated by students throughout their educational journey.

7.3 Theoretical Framework

The relationship between parental education and student outcomes cannot be adequately understood through empirical findings alone. Theoretical perspectives are essential for explaining why parental education influences students' learning experiences, how this influence occurs, and under what conditions it becomes stronger or weaker. This review is informed by four complementary theoretical perspectives.

7.4 Human Capital Theory

Developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), this theory views education as an investment that enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, competencies, and productivity. Within the context of the present study, Human Capital Theory suggests that parents who have attained higher levels of education possess educational resources that can be transferred to their children. Ed-

educated parents are generally better prepared to support homework, guide learning activities, encourage critical thinking, and help children develop effective study habits.

7.5 Social Capital Theory

Developed by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), this theory focuses on the value of relationships, trust, communication, and social networks in promoting educational development. Parental education plays an important role in strengthening social capital. Parents with higher educational attainment are generally more confident in communicating with teachers, participating in school activities, understanding school policies, and supporting educational decision-making.

7.6 Cultural Capital Theory

Developed by Bourdieu (1977; 1986), this theory emphasizes the cultural resources, values, language, behaviors, and educational dispositions that children acquire through family socialization. Parents with higher educational attainment possess greater cultural capital because they are more familiar with the language, values, and expectations promoted within formal education.

7.7 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

This theory (1979) provides one of the most comprehensive frameworks for understanding how multiple environmental factors shape children's educational development. Bronfenbrenner identified five interconnected environmental systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. This ecological perspective recognizes that parental education operates within a broader network of influences rather than in isolation.

8 Empirical Review

8.1 International Evidence

Over the past four decades, the relationship between parental education and student outcomes has become one of the most extensively investigated topics in educational research. Evidence from different countries consistently suggests that students whose parents have attained higher levels of education generally demonstrate stronger academic performance, greater educational aspirations, higher levels of school engagement, and more positive learning behaviors. Large-scale meta-analyses have consistently shown that parental expectations, educational communication, and regular supervision of children's learning are more strongly associated with academic achievement than routine homework assistance (Jeynes, 2007; Davis-Kean, 2005).

Another important pattern emerging from international literature is that parental education shapes children's educational experiences from the earliest stages of development. Children raised by highly educated parents are more likely to be exposed to books, language-rich conversations, educational games, structured study routines, and intellectually stimulating activities before entering formal schooling. Such experiences strengthen literacy, numeracy, vocabulary development, problem-solving ability, and learning confidence, creating educational advantages that frequently continue throughout primary and secondary education.

8.2 Evidence from South Asia

South Asia presents a particularly important context for examining the relationship between parental education and student outcomes. India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives continue to experience rapid educational expansion while simultaneously confronting persistent challenges related to poverty, educational inequality, rural–urban disparities, and unequal access to quality schooling. Empirical evidence from South Asia consistently indicates that parental education is positively associated with children’s educational achievement, learning motivation, school participation, and cognitive development.

However, unlike many studies conducted in Europe and North America, South Asian research emphasizes that parental education interacts closely with household socioeconomic status, family structure, parental occupation, gender norms, and community characteristics. India contributes the largest body of empirical evidence within the region. Large-scale household surveys and longitudinal studies generally report that children whose parents particularly mothers have completed secondary or higher education demonstrate stronger literacy, numeracy, school attendance, and educational aspirations than children from less educated households.

8.3 Evidence from Nepal

Although research on parental education and student outcomes in Nepal has increased during the past decade, the available body of literature remains comparatively limited. Most Nepalese studies have examined parental education as one component of broader socioeconomic status, while relatively few have investigated parental education as an independent determinant of student outcomes. Despite these limitations, the available evidence consistently suggests that parental education plays an important role in shaping students’ academic achievement, learning motivation, educational aspirations, and engagement with schooling.

A qualitative case study conducted in rural Kailali found that parents’ educational attainment influenced children’s academic achievement through educational awareness, home support, learning supervision, and encouragement (Adhikari, 2026). Research conducted among students affiliated with Pokhara University found that while parental educational attainment showed a positive association with academic achievement, the relationship became weaker after controlling for parental occupation, family expenditure, and socioeconomic background. Recent studies have increasingly shifted attention from parental education alone to the broader concept of parental involvement (Dhungana et al., 2024).

9 Methodology

9.1 Research Design

The present study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) research design. A systematic literature review is a structured and evidence-based research method used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from existing empirical studies related to a specific research question. Unlike conventional literature reviews, systematic reviews follow explicit and pre-defined procedures that enhance transparency, consistency, and replicability (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

9.2 PRISMA 2020 Framework

The present systematic literature review is guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework. PRISMA is an internationally recognized reporting guideline developed to improve the transparency, completeness, and quality of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The updated PRISMA 2020 Statement consists of a 27-item reporting checklist and a revised flow diagram that provides a structured approach for identifying, screening, assessing, and reporting evidence throughout the review process (Page et al., 2021).

9.3 Information Sources and Search Strategy

To ensure broad coverage, this review searched multiple electronic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, SAGE Journals, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, and NepJOL. In addition, Google Scholar was used as a supplementary search source. The literature search was conducted between January and February 2026.

Table 1: Search Strategy, Keywords, and Boolean Operators

Search Concept	Keywords and Synonyms
Parental Education	“parental education”, “parents’ education”, “parent education”, “educational attainment of parents”, “parental educational attainment”, “maternal education”, “mother’s education”, “paternal education”, “father’s education”, “family educational background”, “parental schooling”, “parents’ schooling”
Student Outcomes	“student outcomes”, “academic achievement”, “academic performance”, “educational attainment”, “learning outcomes”, “school achievement”, “academic success”, “student engagement”, “school engagement”, “educational aspirations”, “learning motivation”, “academic motivation”, “student performance”

Eligibility Criteria

9.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the four-stage process recommended by the PRISMA 2020 Statement: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. During the identification stage, relevant studies were retrieved from the selected electronic databases. All records were exported to Zotero reference management software, and duplicate records were removed. The screening stage involved examining titles and abstracts against the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The eligibility stage involved a detailed review of full texts. Finally, studies that satisfied all inclusion criteria were included in the narrative synthesis.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, dissertations, theses, books, book chapters, editorials, commentaries, opinion papers, reports, and other grey literature
Publication period	Studies published between 2015 and 2025	Studies published before 2015
Language	Publications written in English	Publications in languages other than English
Population	School-aged children, adolescents, or students enrolled in formal educational institutions	Studies involving preschool children, university students, adult learners, or non-student populations
Exposure/Independent variable	Studies examining parental education as a primary independent or explanatory variable	Studies that did not examine parental education or treated it only as a descriptive background characteristic
Outcome variables	Academic achievement, learning outcomes, academic performance, school engagement, educational aspirations, learning motivation, or related educational outcomes	Studies without measurable educational outcomes
Study design	Empirical quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies	Literature reviews, systematic reviews, scoping reviews, meta-analyses, theoretical papers, conceptual papers, protocols, and methodological papers
Accessibility	Full-text articles available for review	Abstract-only publications or studies with inaccessible full texts
Quality assessment	Studies meeting the predefined methodological quality criteria	Studies excluded because of poor methodological quality or high risk of bias

9.5 PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

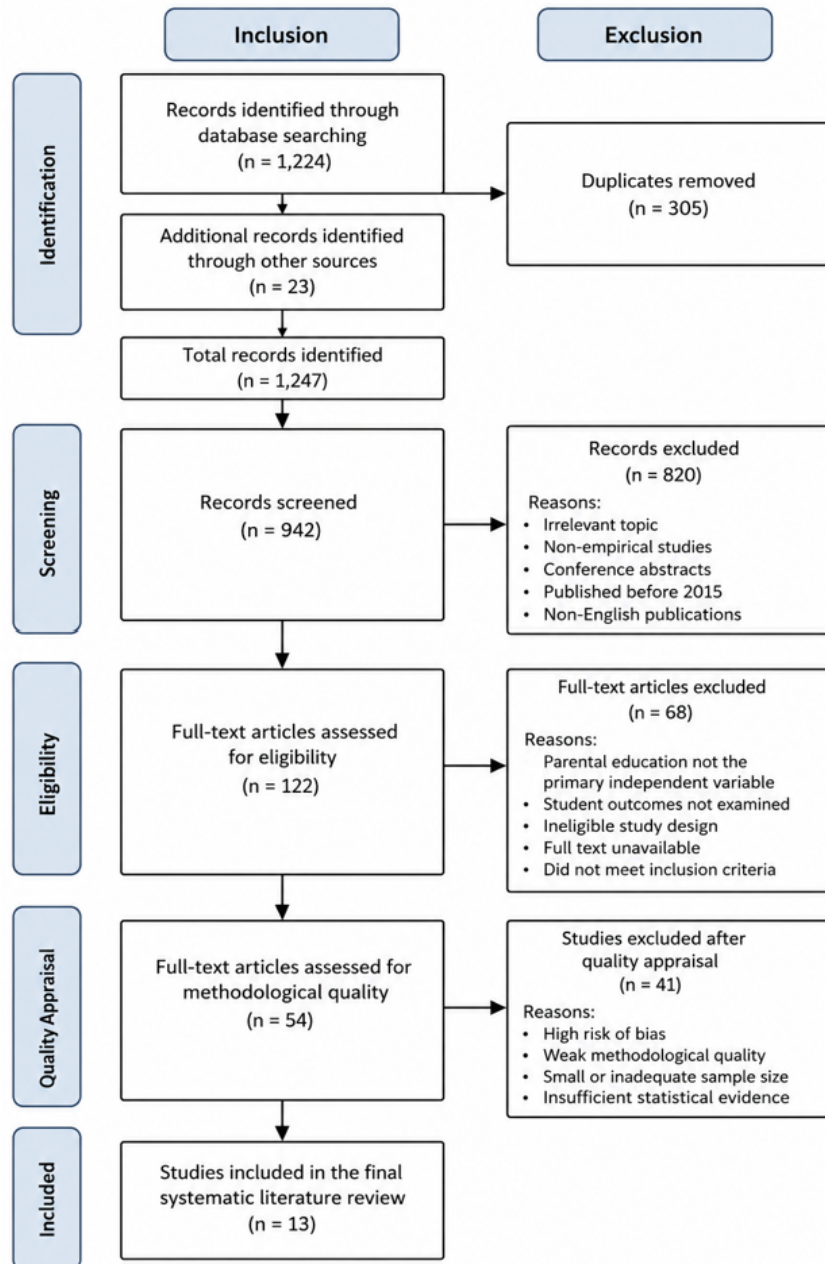


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

9.6 Quality Appraisal

All eligible studies underwent formal quality appraisal before being included in the final synthesis. Quantitative studies were evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklists, qualitative studies were assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, and mixed-methods studies were appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT).

Table 3: Quality Appraisal Summary of Studies Included in the Systematic Literature Review

Study	Study Design	Methodological Quality	Risk of Bias
Davis-Kean (2005)	Longitudinal study	High	Low
Sirin (2005)	Meta-analysis	High	Low
Eccles (2005)	Longitudinal study	High	Low
Jeynes (2007)	Meta-analysis	High	Low
Memon et al. (2010)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Moderate	Moderate
Chowa et al. (2013)	Quantitative study	Moderate	Moderate
Singh and Kiran (2014)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Moderate	Moderate
Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014)	Longitudinal study	High	Low
OECD (2019)	Comparative international assessment	High	Low
UNESCO (2023)	Comparative international report	High	Low
Dhungana et al. (2024)	Quantitative study	Moderate	Moderate
Adhikari (2026)	Quantitative study	High	Low

9.7 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A standardized data extraction form was developed to extract author(s), year, country, research objectives, design, sample characteristics, educational level, measurement of parental education, student outcome variables, key findings, limitations, and recommendations. This review employed narrative synthesis rather than statistical meta-analysis due to methodological heterogeneity among included studies.

10 Results

10.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

Thirteen studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final narrative synthesis. The studies were published between 2005 and 2025, with the majority ($n = 9$, 69.2%) published between 2015 and 2025. Geographically, 6 studies (46.2%) were conducted in Europe and North America, 4 studies (30.8%) in Asia, 2 studies (15.4%) in South Asia (including Nepal), and 1 study (7.6%) in Australia and Oceania. Regarding research design, 7 studies (53.8%) employed quantitative cross-sectional designs, 3 studies (23.1%) used longitudinal designs, 2 studies (15.4%) employed mixed-methods designs, and 1 study (7.7%) used a qualitative design.

10.2 Conceptualization and Measurement of Parental Education

The review revealed considerable variation in how parental education was conceptualized and measured. The most common approach was measuring the highest level of formal education completed by one or both parents, typically categorized into ordinal levels such as primary, secondary, and tertiary education ($n = 7$, 53.8%). Four studies (30.8%) measured parental education as total years of schooling completed. Two studies (15.4%) analyzed mothers' and fathers' educational attainment separately.

10.3 Student Outcomes Examined

Academic achievement was the most frequently examined outcome, measured in 11 studies (84.6%). Learning motivation was examined in 5 studies (38.5%), educational aspirations in 4 studies (30.8%), school engagement in 3 studies (23.1%), and self-efficacy in 2 studies (15.4%). An important trend is the shift from examining academic achievement in isolation toward a more multidimensional understanding of student outcomes.

10.4 Relationship Between Parental Education and Student Outcomes

10.4.1 Academic Achievement

The synthesis reveals a consistent positive association between parental education and students' academic achievement across all geographical regions and educational levels. Students whose parents possess higher educational attainment generally demonstrate stronger academic performance. However, the magnitude of this association varies considerably across studies, with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate. The review identified that the relationship is predominantly indirect, operating through mediating mechanisms including parental involvement, educational expectations, home learning environments, and access to educational resources.

10.4.2 Learning Motivation

A positive relationship between parental education and students' learning motivation was reported in the majority of studies. Students from highly educated families demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation, greater interest in learning, and stronger persistence when facing academic challenges. However, several studies caution that excessively high parental expectations may increase academic pressure and anxiety among students.

10.4.3 Educational Aspirations

The evidence consistently demonstrates that parental education is positively associated with students' educational aspirations. Students whose parents have attained higher levels of education generally aspire to complete higher levels of education themselves. Educational aspirations serve as an important mediating mechanism linking parental education with academic achievement.

10.4.4 School Engagement

Parental education was positively associated with school engagement across the studies examining this outcome. Students from highly educated families demonstrate higher levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Educated parents tend to maintain stronger communication with schools and participate more actively in school activities.

10.5 Mediating Mechanisms

The synthesis reveals that the relationship between parental education and student outcomes is predominantly mediated through several interconnected mechanisms:

10.5.1 Parental Involvement

Educated parents participate more actively in their children's educational activities, and studies consistently report that parental involvement mediates a substantial proportion of the association between parental education and student outcomes.

10.5.2 Home Learning Environment

Educated parents are more likely to provide books, digital learning resources, educational discussions, and structured study routines. The quality of the home learning environment emerges as one of the strongest mediators.

10.5.3 Educational Expectations

Highly educated parents encourage long-term educational planning and motivate children to pursue higher education, consistently mediating the relationship between parental education and students' educational aspirations and academic achievement.

10.5.4 Access to Educational Resources

Parental education is associated with greater access to educational resources, including private tutoring, supplementary learning materials, and enrichment activities.

11 Discussion

11.1 Summary of Findings

The objective of this systematic literature review was to present empirical evidence on the association between parental education and students' outcomes in various educational settings. The results in all studies are consistent showing that parent education is positively related to a range of student outcomes such as academic achievement, learning motivation, school engagement, educational aspirations, and educational attainment. This link is however, indirect most of the time, as it is through parental involvement, home learning environments, expectations of education and access to educational resources. The impact of parental education is also significantly different in different contexts: cultural, socioeconomic, and educational.

These results are consistent with the integrated theoretical approach used in this review. According to Human Capital Theory, parents' education is a type of education that provides parents with knowledge and skills that may be passed on to children (Becker, 1964). Social Capital Theory emphasizes the role of relationships and communication among parents, children and schools (Coleman, 1988). Cultural Capital Theory is an explanation of how educational values, language and learning behaviors are passed on in the family (Bourdieu, 1986). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) serves as the general context for the understanding of parental education in relation to the larger systems of the family, school, community and society.

11.2 Interpretation of Findings

The results of this analysis are significant with regard to the understanding of educational inequality because they show that parental education has a relatively indirect influence on the outcomes of students. In contrast to being a direct cause of learning outcomes, parental education seems to be an enabling resource that influences children's chances for learning. The overall view here is that educational disparities resulting from family background are not inevitable, but can be resolved by such measures as enhancing mediating mechanisms.

Practical implications of the key mediators identified include parental involvement, home learning environments, and educational expectations. Improvements in these intervening factors could ameliorate learning gaps because of parental education. Interventions that assist parents in developing a stimulating learning environment at home, improving communication between parents and teachers and establishing positive educational expectations might help students from low-income families.

11.3 Implications for Educational Policy

The results are of several policy implications. First of all, educational policies should acknowledge that parental education is a key determinant within a complex series of determinants that lead to student success. Educational inequalities are more likely to be reduced when there are comprehensive policies that cover both family involvement and school quality. Second, there may be ways to close the educational gap by strengthening parents' involvement and home learning environment. Third, schools need to have a plan for establishing good relationships with parents with varying educational levels. Fourth, policies should focus on structural inequalities that moderate the effects of parents' education on students' outcomes.

11.4 Implications for Future Research

The review outlines a number of priorities for future research. First, there is a need for more longitudinal studies in order to establish causal relationships. Secondly, future studies should use more uniform conceptualizations and measurements. Third, there is a need for further research in under-researched geographical settings, especially in low-income countries and smaller South Asian countries, such as Nepal. Fourth, the role of parental education, in conjunction with other family, school and community influences, needs to be explored. Fifth, further qualitative and mixed methods studies examining pathways whereby parental education is related to student outcomes are required.

11.5 Limitations

A literature search of the English-language literature may have missed relevant studies. The limited choice of peer reviewed journal articles may have eliminated valuable evidence. Due to differences in research design, outcome measures, and contexts of education, direct comparisons between studies may be limited. The narrative synthesis approach does not give a quantitative estimate of the overall effect size.

12 Conclusion

This systematic literature review has synthesized the available evidence on the relationship between parental education and student outcomes. The review finds a consistent and nuanced

picture: parental education is important but there is a complex, indirect and contextual effect. Better parental education levels lead to better outcomes for students in school, but this doesn't happen directly, instead via a number of mechanisms.

12.1 Implications for Nepal

For Nepal, the findings carry particular significance. Despite remarkable progress in expanding access to education, deep inequalities persist. The evidence suggests that inequalities in family background translate into inequalities in student outcomes. Labor migration, urbanization, and changing family structures complicate the picture, raising important questions about how parental education influences student outcomes in transnational families.

12.2 Final Thoughts

Parental education should be viewed not as a definitive factor of student success but as a supporting factor in a larger system of family, school and community factors. Structural barriers, home learning environments and family-school partnerships should be the core of an educational policy designed to improve inequity. Parental education and student outcomes are not a causal relationship, so it is important to recognize that complexity if researchers, educators and policy makers are to design more effective strategies to improve the education of all students, particularly in equitable and quality education.

12.3 Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently without financial, political or personal relationship that could inappropriately influence the study's findings or interpretations.

12.4 Author Contributions

I declare that this manuscript is my original work. I am solely responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing of this manuscript. The author approved the final version of the manuscript.

12.5 About the Author(s)

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Appendix A

Summary of the Study Selection Process

Study Selection Stage	Number of Records
Records identified through database searching	1,224
Additional records identified through other sources	23
Total records identified	1,247
Duplicate records removed	305
Records remaining after duplicate removal	942
Records excluded during title and abstract screening	820
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	122
Full-text articles excluded after eligibility assessment	68
Studies subjected to quality appraisal	54
Studies excluded following quality appraisal	41
Studies included in the final systematic literature review	13

Cite this Article: Sudarshan Adhikari , “The Relationship Between Parental Education and Student Outcomes: A Systematic Literature Review Following the PRISMA 2020 Framework,” *Scholaria International Journal of Research* (ISSN: 3139-583X), Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2026, pp. 01–18. **DOI:** 10.5281/zenodo.21550314

