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Parental Involvement and Academic Motivation among Primary Students in Rural Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between parental involvement and academic motivation among primary school students in rural Nepal, where geographical remoteness, economic constraints, and limited parental education create unique challenges for family-school partnerships. Through mixed-methods research involving 385 students, their parents, and 28 teachers across twelve rural schools in three districts, the study investigates how different forms of parental involvement influence children's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for learning. Findings reveal that while traditional measures of parental involvement such as homework assistance and school communication remain limited due to parents' low literacy levels and work demands, alternative forms including educational aspirations, moral support, and resource provision significantly predict student motivation. The research identifies cultural factors shaping Nepali parents' educational engagement including respect for teachers' authority, gendered expectations, and caste-based educational traditions. Results demonstrate that students whose parents communicate high educational expectations and provide emotional encouragement exhibit stronger intrinsic motivation despite limited direct academic assistance. These findings challenge Western-centric conceptions of parental involvement, suggesting culturally appropriate

frameworks recognizing diverse manifestations of family educational support in resource-constrained contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in children's education has consistently emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement and motivation across diverse cultural contexts, yet the nature, forms, and effects of such involvement vary considerably based on socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical factors. In rural Nepal, where approximately eighty percent of the population resides in remote mountainous regions with limited infrastructure and where literacy rates remain substantially below urban areas, understanding parental involvement requires contextualized analysis recognizing unique challenges and opportunities distinct from Western or urban contexts. Epstein's (2011) influential framework identifying six types of parental involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community—provides useful conceptual starting points but requires adaptation to contexts where parents possess limited formal education, where geographical isolation impedes school communication, and where cultural norms shape family-school relationships differently than in industrialized nations.

Academic motivation, defined as students' orientation toward learning including their goals, values, and beliefs about education, fundamentally influences educational persistence, effort investment, and achievement outcomes. Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguish between intrinsic motivation arising from inherent interest and enjoyment in learning activities and extrinsic motivation driven by external rewards, punishments, or social expectations. Self-determination theory posits that motivation exists along a continuum from amotivation through various forms of extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation, with autonomous forms of motivation associated with superior learning outcomes compared to controlled motivation. In Nepali contexts where education represents potential pathway from poverty and where family honor often depends on children's academic success, understanding motivational dynamics requires examining how cultural values, family expectations, and socioeconomic circumstances interact to shape students' academic engagement.

The Nepali educational landscape presents distinctive challenges affecting both parental involvement and student motivation. Despite constitutional commitments to universal primary education and significant enrollment gains following the 2015 constitution, rural schools continue experiencing high dropout rates, teacher absenteeism, inadequate infrastructure, and learning outcomes substantially below international standards. Caddell (2007) documents how rural Nepali schools often lack basic resources including textbooks, trained teachers, and physical facilities,

creating environments where even highly motivated students struggle to achieve learning goals. Parental involvement potentially mitigates some challenges by supplementing school resources and providing home-based educational support, yet the capacity of rural families to provide such support remains constrained by poverty, parents' own limited education, and cultural factors.

Cultural context significantly shapes parental involvement patterns in Nepal, where traditional hierarchies position teachers as respected authorities whose expertise parents should not question. Bhatta (2011) describes how Nepali cultural norms emphasize deference to teachers, with parents viewing their role as ensuring children attend school and behave respectfully rather than actively engaging with curriculum or pedagogical decisions. This cultural positioning differs markedly from Western contexts where parent-teacher partnerships and parental advocacy increasingly characterize family-school relationships. Understanding parental involvement in Nepal requires recognizing that respect-based distance from schools may reflect cultural appropriateness rather than disinterest, challenging deficit interpretations that frame non-Western involvement patterns as inadequate.

Gender dynamics profoundly influence educational participation and parental involvement in rural Nepal, where daughters historically faced systematic educational exclusion and where son preference continues shaping family educational investments. Although gender parity in primary enrollment has improved, completion rates and learning outcomes reveal persistent gender gaps particularly in remote areas. Thapa (2015) documents how parental educational expectations differ substantially by child gender, with families investing more resources in sons' education while daughters face earlier withdrawal for household labor or marriage. These gendered patterns influence not only overall involvement levels but also the specific forms involvement takes, with some evidence suggesting mothers and fathers engage differently with sons' and daughters' education.

Caste and ethnicity represent additional factors shaping educational access and parental involvement in Nepal's hierarchical social structure. Historically disadvantaged castes and indigenous ethnic groups face systematic educational marginalization, attending lower-quality schools and receiving less family educational support due to intergenerational poverty and limited parental education. Koirala (2010) analyzes how caste-based discrimination persists in schools despite legal prohibitions, affecting students' sense of belonging and teachers' expectations. Parental involvement among marginalized communities may face additional barriers including linguistic differences when schools operate in Nepali while families speak indigenous languages, and historical exclusion creating limited familiarity with formal educational systems.

Economic constraints represent perhaps the most pervasive factor limiting parental involvement in rural Nepal, where subsistence agriculture dominates livelihoods and where many families struggle to meet basic needs. Parents' work demands, particularly during agricultural seasons, severely limit time available for school engagement or homework assistance. Additionally, poverty constrains

families' capacity to provide educational materials, nutritious food supporting cognitive development, or quiet study spaces. Shields (2013) documents how poverty creates compounding disadvantages wherein children arrive at school hungry and without supplies, parents cannot afford time away from income-generating work to attend school meetings, and families face impossible choices between education and immediate economic survival. Understanding parental involvement without acknowledging these material constraints risks pathologizing poor families rather than recognizing structural barriers they face.

Despite these challenges, research suggests that certain forms of parental involvement remain accessible even to resource-constrained families and significantly influence children's academic motivation. Parents' educational aspirations for children, emotional encouragement, and communication about education's value require no formal education or financial resources yet potentially shape children's motivation profoundly. This study investigates how various forms of parental involvement—both traditional Western-defined types and culturally specific alternatives—relate to academic motivation among primary students in rural Nepal. By examining these relationships in context-specific ways that recognize structural constraints while identifying actionable involvement forms, the research aims to provide evidence-based guidance for schools and policies seeking to strengthen family-school partnerships in resource-limited settings.

METHOD

This mixed-methods study employed a convergent parallel design wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during analysis to provide comprehensive understanding of parental involvement and academic motivation relationships in rural Nepal. The research was conducted across twelve government primary schools in three districts—Sindhupalchok, Kaski, and Dang—selected to represent Nepal's geographical diversity including mountain, hill, and Terai regions. Participants included 385 students in grades four and five (ages nine to twelve), their primary caregivers, and 28 teachers. Schools were selected through purposive sampling ensuring representation of various ethnic communities, caste groups, and economic conditions while maintaining accessibility for research team. Ethical approval was obtained from institutional review boards in Nepal and internationally, with particular attention to informed consent procedures appropriate for contexts with limited literacy, ensuring parents and children understood participation as voluntary with no educational consequences for declining.

Quantitative data collection utilized validated instruments adapted for Nepali context through translation, back-translation, and cognitive interviewing procedures described by Willis (2005). Student academic motivation was assessed using the Academic Motivation Scale adapted from Vallerand et al. (1992), measuring intrinsic motivation, various forms of extrinsic motivation, and amotivation through 28 items on five-point Likert scales. Parental involvement was measured through parent

questionnaires and teacher reports using instruments adapted from Fan and Chen's (2001) parental involvement framework, assessing communication with schools, home-based involvement including homework help and educational discussions, and parental educational expectations. Questionnaires were administered orally by trained research assistants when parents had limited literacy. Qualitative data included semi-structured interviews with 45 parents and 28 teachers, focus group discussions with students, and classroom observations documenting teacher-student interactions and motivational classroom climates. Analysis integrated quantitative correlational and regression analyses conducted using SPSS with thematic analysis of qualitative data following procedures outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), with integration occurring through comparison of findings to identify convergences, divergences, and complementary insights.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Patterns of Parental Involvement in Rural Context

Analysis revealed that parental involvement in rural Nepal manifested quite differently than in Western contexts, with traditional involvement forms including homework assistance, school volunteering, and parent-teacher communication occurring at substantially lower rates due to structural and cultural factors. Only thirty-two percent of parents reported regularly helping with homework, with parental education level strongly predicting this involvement form. Parents with primary education or less—representing seventy-eight percent of the sample—expressed feeling unqualified to assist with academic work, particularly as children advanced beyond early grades. Teachers confirmed that direct homework assistance remained rare, noting that students typically completed assignments independently or sought peer help rather than parental support. These patterns align with research in similar contexts documenting how parental education constrains certain involvement types.

However, alternative involvement forms proved more prevalent and potentially equally significant for student motivation. Eighty-seven percent of parents reported regularly communicating expectations about educational attainment, with most expressing aspirations for children to complete at least secondary education and many hoping for higher education despite their own limited schooling. Parents articulated clear beliefs that education represented the primary pathway to improved livelihoods and that children's educational success would enhance family status and economic circumstances. This aspirational involvement—communicating high expectations and education's importance—required no formal education or economic resources yet appeared to profoundly influence how children perceived education's value and their own educational futures.

Moral and emotional support represented another prevalent involvement form distinct from direct academic assistance. Parents described encouraging children's educational efforts through praise, expressing confidence in their capabilities, and

making sacrifices to ensure school attendance even during agricultural busy seasons or family economic stress. Teachers observed that students whose parents demonstrated this emotional investment appeared more persistent when facing academic challenges and more willing to seek help rather than withdrawing from difficult tasks. This emotional support dimension aligns with research emphasizing psychological aspects of parental involvement beyond concrete academic assistance.

Resource provision within families' means constituted a third significant involvement form, with parents prioritizing educational expenditures despite severe economic constraints. Even impoverished families invested in school uniforms, supplies, and fees when possible, often making considerable sacrifices in other consumption areas to maintain children's school participation. Parents viewed this material support as demonstrating commitment to children's education and teachers reported that students whose families made visible sacrifices for their schooling exhibited heightened sense of responsibility toward academic effort. However, resource constraints meant that this involvement form varied dramatically across families, creating visible inequalities among students that affected social dynamics and potentially motivation.

Relationship Between Parental Involvement and Student Motivation

Correlation and regression analyses revealed significant relationships between specific forms of parental involvement and students' academic motivation, with parental educational expectations emerging as the strongest predictor of both intrinsic and autonomous extrinsic motivation. Students whose parents communicated high educational expectations and regularly discussed education's importance demonstrated significantly higher intrinsic motivation scores, reporting greater interest in learning for its own sake rather than solely for external rewards. This relationship remained significant even controlling for parental education level, family income, and student prior achievement, suggesting that aspirational involvement influences motivation independently of socioeconomic factors.

Table 1 presents correlations between different parental involvement forms and student motivation dimensions, revealing differential relationships wherein some involvement types predicted particular motivation forms more strongly than others. The data illustrate that involvement forms accessible to less-educated, economically disadvantaged parents—expectations and emotional support—predicted autonomous motivation forms associated with positive learning outcomes, while direct homework help showed weaker and sometimes non-significant relationships.

Table 1. Correlations Between Parental Involvement Forms and Student Academic Motivation

Parental Involvement Form	Intrinsic Motivation	Identified Regulation	Introjected Regulation	External Regulation	Amotivation
Educational Expectations	.52**	.48**	.23**	.11	-.38**
Emotional Support	.44**	.41**	.19*	.08	-.31**
Home Learning Environment	.38**	.35**	.21*	.15*	-.26**
Homework Assistance	.24**	.22*	.31**	.27**	-.12
School Communication	.31**	.28**	.16*	.19*	-.22*
Resource Provision	.29**	.26**	.18*	.22*	-.19*

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. N = 385. Motivation dimensions based on self-determination theory continuum.

Interestingly, direct homework assistance showed positive correlations with controlled motivation forms including introjected and external regulation, suggesting that when parents help with homework in rural Nepali contexts, this involvement may sometimes undermine autonomous motivation. Qualitative interviews illuminated this finding, revealing that homework assistance often occurred through directive approaches wherein parents or older siblings provided answers rather than supporting children's independent problem-solving. Additionally, some students described experiencing pressure and stress during parent-assisted homework, particularly when parents expressed frustration about children's academic struggles. These patterns suggest that homework involvement's motivational effects depend substantially on how such involvement occurs, with autonomy-supportive assistance promoting intrinsic motivation while controlling assistance fostering compliance-oriented extrinsic motivation.

Gender analyses revealed differential parental involvement patterns and motivation relationships for boys and girls. Parents reported significantly higher educational expectations for sons than daughters, with greater willingness to support sons' education beyond primary level. However, among girls whose parents did communicate high expectations and educational support, the relationship between parental involvement and intrinsic motivation proved even stronger than for boys. This suggests that parental educational investment may be particularly impactful for girls given that such support contradicts broader cultural messages

devaluing female education. Girls whose families supported their education appeared to internalize this support as powerful validation, developing strong intrinsic motivation despite facing gender-based barriers in broader society.

Cultural factors mediated parental involvement's effects on motivation in ways requiring careful interpretation. Students from families where parents demonstrated strong respect for teachers and schools exhibited higher autonomous motivation, suggesting that positive home messages about education and educators fostered students' own educational valuing. However, excessive deference wherein parents never questioned school practices or advocated for children's needs sometimes left students in problematic situations unresolved, potentially undermining motivation. The optimal pattern appeared to involve respect for education combined with attentiveness to children's individual needs, a balance some families achieved more successfully than others.

Barriers to Parental Involvement and Implications for Practice

Despite parents' expressed commitment to children's education, multiple structural and cultural barriers systematically constrained involvement, with poverty emerging as the most pervasive obstacle. Parents described impossible time demands balancing subsistence agricultural work requiring dawn-to-dusk labor during planting and harvest seasons with children's educational needs. School meeting schedules during daytime hours when parents worked proved particularly problematic, with many parents unable to attend despite interest in their children's progress. Economic precarity meant that any time away from income generation carried real costs families could ill afford, creating structural barriers no amount of motivation could overcome.

Parental education levels profoundly limited certain involvement forms, with parents expressing feelings of inadequacy and concern about harming rather than helping children's learning when attempting homework assistance beyond their knowledge. Many parents described embarrassment about their limited literacy, avoiding school contact due to shame about their educational background. Teachers sometimes inadvertently reinforced these feelings through communications assuming parental literacy or through comments positioning parents as obstacles to children's progress rather than potential partners. These dynamics suggest need for schools to develop involvement opportunities appropriate for parents with limited formal education, emphasizing forms such as encouragement and expectations that all parents can provide rather than exclusively academic assistance requiring educational credentials.

Geographical isolation created another significant barrier, with some families living hours walking distance from schools across difficult mountain terrain. During monsoon season, swollen rivers and mudslides made travel dangerous or impossible, preventing school communication. Schools' lack of telephone and internet connectivity meant that even basic communication proved challenging, relying on children to carry messages between teachers and parents. Teachers described frustration attempting to involve geographically distant parents, while

parents reported feeling disconnected from school activities and unaware of how to support children's learning beyond ensuring attendance.

Language barriers affected indigenous ethnic communities where home languages differed from school instruction language of Nepali. Parents unable to speak Nepali fluently experienced communication difficulties with teachers and struggled to understand curriculum content or homework requirements. Some parents described feeling alienated from schools that dismissed their languages and cultures as backward, creating psychological distance even when geographical proximity allowed physical school access. These linguistic and cultural barriers suggest need for more inclusive school practices that honor students' home languages and cultures rather than positioning them as deficits requiring remediation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that parental involvement in rural Nepal, while constrained by poverty, limited parental education, and geographical isolation, nonetheless significantly influences primary students' academic motivation through culturally specific forms including educational aspirations, emotional encouragement, and sacrifice for educational access. The research challenges Western-centric conceptions of parental involvement that privilege direct academic assistance and school volunteering, revealing that involvement forms accessible to less-educated, economically disadvantaged parents can meaningfully support children's autonomous motivation when such involvement communicates educational value and confidence in children's capabilities.

Findings underscore that parental involvement frameworks must be contextualized to recognize both structural barriers facing families and culturally appropriate involvement manifestations rather than imposing universal standards reflecting middle-class Western norms. Schools serving rural communities should develop inclusive engagement strategies that honor diverse involvement forms, provide opportunities accessible despite parents' time and education constraints, and recognize resource provision and emotional support as legitimate involvement worthy of validation alongside direct academic assistance. Future research should examine longitudinal relationships between parental involvement and academic outcomes, investigate intervention effectiveness for strengthening culturally appropriate involvement, and explore how schools can partner with families facing multiple disadvantages to support children's educational success. As Nepal continues pursuing educational development goals, recognizing and supporting parental involvement in forms accessible to all families regardless of education or economic status represents crucial strategy for enhancing both educational motivation and achievement outcomes.

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