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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION: POLICY AND PRACTICE PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Prakash Bhimrao Hedaoo

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Washington Digital University, USA

Registration No.: WDU2025266765

Abstract

The present study investigates the combined influence of parental involvement and school environment on the quality of primary education in India, with particular emphasis on policy frameworks and ground-level practices. The primary objectives are to examine the extent to which parental engagement and institutional infrastructure determine learning outcomes at the primary level, and to assess the alignment between national education policies and actual school-level implementation. A descriptive-analytical research methodology was adopted, drawing upon secondary data from nationally representative surveys, including the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 and the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2024–25. The study hypothesizes that higher levels of parental involvement, coupled with an improved school environment, significantly contribute to enhanced foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes among primary-age children. The results reveal that while India has achieved near-universal enrollment at the primary level (98.1%), critical gaps persist in foundational learning, school infrastructure, and meaningful parental participation. Student attendance in government primary schools increased from 72.4% in 2018 to 75.9% in 2024, and school infrastructure indicators such as drinking water availability (99.3%) and electricity access (93.6%) showed marked improvement. However, only 23.4% of Standard III children could read Standard II-level text, indicating persistent quality challenges. The discussion highlights that policy interventions like NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat have created enabling frameworks, yet their translation into practice remains uneven. The study concludes that systemic integration of parental engagement strategies within school governance, combined with sustained infrastructure investment, is essential for realizing quality primary education across India.

Keywords: *Parental Involvement[1], School Environment[2], Quality Primary Education[3], NEP 2020[4], Foundational Literacy and Numeracy[5].*

1. Introduction

Primary education forms the foundational bedrock upon which all subsequent stages of learning and human capital development are built. In the Indian context, where over 100 million children are currently navigating the foundational learning stage, the quality of primary education carries enormous implications not only for

individual life trajectories but also for the nation's ability to capitalize on its demographic dividend within the next decade and a half (Pratham, 2025). While India has made remarkable strides in universalizing access to elementary education—enrollment rates among the 6–14 age group have consistently exceeded 95% for nearly two decades (ASER, 2024)—the transition from mere enrollment to meaningful learning outcomes remains one of the most persistent and pressing challenges confronting the education system (Yan, 2024). Two pivotal determinants that shape the quality of primary education are parental involvement and the school environment. Parental involvement, conceptualized through Epstein's (2011) framework of school-family-community partnerships, encompasses home-based learning support, parent-teacher communication, decision-making participation, and aspirational guidance. Research consistently demonstrates that children with actively engaged parents perform better on assessments, display higher motivation, and exhibit improved socioemotional development (Jeynes, 2024; Calderon-Villarreal et al., 2025). In the Indian context, however, parental engagement is mediated by socioeconomic disparities, educational attainment of parents, and cultural norms, making its relationship with learning outcomes particularly complex (Cashman, 2023; Kumar et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, the school environment—comprising physical infrastructure, classroom resources, teacher availability, pedagogical practices, and psychosocial climate—serves as the institutional ecosystem within which teaching-learning processes unfold. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has articulated an ambitious vision for transforming school education through the 5+3+3+4 curricular restructuring, emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) under the NIPUN Bharat initiative, and holistic development (Ministry of Education, 2020). The UDISE+ 2024–25 report indicates significant infrastructural progress, with 93.6% of schools now electrified, 99.3% having drinking water, and pupil-teacher ratios improving to 10:1 at the foundational level (Ministry of Education, 2025). Yet, the ASER 2024 findings reveal that over 50% of Standard V students still cannot read Standard II-level text, exposing a stark disconnect between input provision and outcome achievement (Pratham, 2025). This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the analytical gap between policy provisions and ground-level realities by examining how parental involvement and school environment function as interrelated determinants of quality primary education. Drawing upon the latest nationally representative data, the paper provides a data-driven, policy-oriented analysis that is situated within both Indian and international research traditions. The study holds relevance for policymakers, educators, school administrators, and community stakeholders who are collectively responsible for translating educational policies into tangible improvements in children's learning experiences and outcomes.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between parental involvement and children's academic achievement has been extensively documented across diverse educational contexts. Fan and Chen's (2001) foundational meta-analysis established a moderate-to-strong positive association between parental engagement and student performance, a finding that has been consistently reaffirmed in subsequent research. More recently, Wilder (2023) conducted an updated meta-synthesis reconfirming that parental involvement remains one of the most robust predictors of academic success across grade levels and cultural contexts. In the Indian setting, a correlational study conducted among government secondary schools in Amritsar, Punjab, during 2023–2024 found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$) between overall parental involvement and academic achievement, with parental expectations and teacher communication emerging as the most significant predictors (Singh & Sharma, 2025). The nature and quality of parental engagement, rather than its sheer quantity, have been identified as critical mediating variables. Jain and Puri (2025) conducted a comprehensive literature review of 85 peer-reviewed studies spanning 2010–2023 and concluded that authoritative parenting styles combined with academic support produce the strongest associations with positive outcomes. Calderon-Villarreal et al. (2025) further demonstrated that parental involvement barriers—including low self-efficacy, economic constraints, and limited educational background—negatively impact children's self-regulation capacities in primary education. Sivabalan et al.

(2024) conducted a scoping review of parental involvement strategies and found that diverse forms of engagement, from homework assistance to school-level decision-making, differentially influence children's academic progress and language development.

Regarding the school environment, international and Indian literature converges on the understanding that infrastructure, classroom climate, and teacher quality constitute essential conditions for effective learning. Ackah-Jnr (2023) demonstrated that school infrastructural adequacy directly influences student performance in developing country contexts. In India, the Right to Education Act of 2009 mandated specific infrastructure norms for elementary schools, yet compliance has remained uneven across states. The ASER 2024 report documented that while usable girls' toilets increased from 66.4% in 2018 to 72% in 2024, and availability of non-textbook reading materials rose from 36.9% to 51.3%, two-thirds of Standard I and II classrooms remain multigrade, creating pedagogical challenges for teachers (Pratham, 2025). Katiry (2024) analyzed recent challenges in quality education in India and argued that systemic issues including teacher shortages, inadequate training, and commercialization of education continue to undermine quality, despite policy reforms. The intersection of parental involvement and school environment has received relatively limited attention in Indian educational research. Atunde et al. (2023) found that parental involvement and peer group influence jointly determine scholastic achievement in public secondary schools, suggesting the need for integrated analytical frameworks. Shriwastava and Meril (2024) emphasized that quality assurance in Indian schools requires synchronized assessment systems, institutional accountability, and community participation—all of which presuppose active parental engagement. This study builds upon these scholarly foundations to examine the combined role of these two determinants through the lens of contemporary data and policy frameworks.

3. Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which parental involvement and school environment collectively influence the quality of foundational learning outcomes at the primary level in India.
2. To assess the alignment between national education policy provisions (NEP 2020, NIPUN Bharat) and actual school-level practices concerning parental engagement and institutional infrastructure.

4. Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical research design grounded in secondary data analysis. This design was selected because it enables systematic examination of large-scale, nationally representative datasets to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among key educational variables without the constraints of primary data collection in a single geographical location. The study draws upon two principal data sources: the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, a citizen-led household survey conducted by Pratham that covered 649,491 children across 17,997 villages in 605 rural districts of India, assessing enrollment status, foundational learning levels, and school-level indicators; and the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2024–25, an administrative dataset maintained by the Ministry of Education covering 14,71,473 schools, 24,69,32,680 students, and 1,01,22,420 teachers across all levels of school education in India. The sample for this study is drawn from these nationally representative datasets, ensuring comprehensive coverage across states, school types (government and private), and demographic categories. The analytical tools include descriptive statistical measures such as percentages, frequency distributions, and trend analysis across multiple reporting years (2018 to 2024–25). Comparative analysis is employed to examine infrastructure and learning outcome disparities between government and private schools, across states, and over time. The study specifically focuses on primary-level indicators, including enrollment rates, attendance patterns, foundational literacy and numeracy levels, infrastructure availability, teacher deployment, and policy implementation metrics.

Data on parental involvement dimensions are derived from ASER's household-level observations, while school environment indicators are sourced from UDISE+ administrative records and ASER school visit data. The technique of document analysis is also applied to review policy texts, including the NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat guidelines, to assess the extent to which policy provisions are reflected in empirical data. This multi-source triangulation approach enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

5. Results

Table 1: Enrollment Trends in Primary Education in India (2018–2024)

Indicator	2018	2022	2024
Overall Enrollment (Age 6–14)	96.7%	98.4%	98.1%
Government School Enrollment (Age 6–14)	65.5%	72.9%	66.8%
Private School Enrollment (Age 6–14)	32.5%	25.1%	30.1%
Not Enrolled (Age 6–14)	3.3%	1.6%	1.9%
Dropout Rate (Age 15–16)	13.1%	8.2%	7.9%

Source: ASER 2024, Pratham Education Foundation, New Delhi.

Table 1 presents enrollment trends across the primary-age population in India from 2018 to 2024. Overall enrollment among the 6–14 age group has remained consistently above 95%, reaching 98.1% in 2024, confirming near-universal access to elementary education. However, government school enrollment declined from 72.9% in 2022 to 66.8% in 2024, approaching pre-pandemic levels of 65.5% recorded in 2018. This shift indicates a post-pandemic rebound in private school enrollment, reflecting parental preferences driven by perceived quality differentials. The dropout rate for the 15–16 age group decreased from 13.1% in 2018 to 7.9% in 2024, suggesting improved retention, though the decline in government school share raises equity concerns regarding accessibility and affordability.

Table 2: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Levels in Government Schools (2018–2024)

Indicator	2018	2022	2024
Std III: Can read Std II-level text	20.9%	16.3%	23.4%
Std V: Can read Std II-level text	44.2%	38.5%	44.8%
Std III: Can do subtraction	28.1%	20.7%	29.8%
Std V: Can do division	22.7%	18.2%	26.4%
Std VIII: Can do basic division	40.0%	38.8%	45.8%

Source: ASER 2024, Pratham Education Foundation, New Delhi.

Table 2 reveals that foundational learning outcomes in government primary schools have shown recovery from pandemic-era lows but remain critically inadequate. Only 23.4% of Standard III children could read Standard II-level text in 2024, an improvement from the pandemic low of 16.3% in 2022 and marginally surpassing the 2018 level of 20.9%. Arithmetic capabilities showed stronger recovery, with Standard III subtraction proficiency reaching 29.8% in 2024 compared to 20.7% in 2022. Importantly, more than 55% of Standard V children still cannot read Standard II-level text, highlighting that foundational deficiencies persist and compound across grade levels, severely undermining the quality of primary education despite improvements in enrollment and retention.

Table 3: School Infrastructure Indicators in India (2018–2024/25)

Infrastructure Parameter	2018 (ASER)	2024 (ASER)	2024–25 (UDISE+)
Drinking Water Availability	74.8%	77.7%	99.3%
Usable Girls' Toilets	66.4%	72.0%	97.3%
Schools with Electricity	—	—	93.6%
Schools with Computer Access	—	—	64.7%
Schools with Internet Connectivity	—	—	63.5%
Schools with Playground	66.0%	66.0%	—
Handwashing Facilities	—	—	95.9%

Source: ASER 2024, Pratham Education Foundation; UDISE+ 2024–25, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Table 3 illustrates the state of school infrastructure across two complementary data systems. UDISE+ 2024–25 reports near-universal provision of basic amenities, including drinking water (99.3%), girls' toilets (97.3%), and electricity (93.6%), reflecting sustained government investment. However, digital infrastructure remains a significant gap, with only 64.7% of schools having computer access and 63.5% having internet connectivity. Government schools (58.6%) lag considerably behind private schools (77.1%) in internet access. ASER 2024, which captures ground-level conditions through direct observation, reports comparatively lower figures for drinking water (77.7%) and girls' toilets (72.0%), suggesting that administrative data may overestimate actual functional availability. This infrastructure gap directly impacts the school learning environment and constrains the effective implementation of technology-integrated pedagogy envisioned under NEP 2020.

Table 4: Student and Teacher Attendance in Government Primary Schools (2018–2024)

Indicator	2018	2022	2024
Student Attendance	72.4%	73.0%	75.9%
Teacher Attendance	85.1%	86.8%	87.5%
Schools with < 60 Students (Small Schools)	—	44.0%	52.1%
Multigrade Classrooms (Std I & II)	—	—	66.7%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio (Primary, UDISE+ 2024–25)	—	—	20:1

Source: ASER 2024, Pratham Education Foundation; UDISE+ 2024–25, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Table 4 presents attendance patterns and school operational parameters that directly influence the teaching-learning environment. Student attendance in government primary schools improved from 72.4% in 2018 to 75.9% in 2024, while teacher attendance reached 87.5%. Despite these gains, the proportion of small government primary schools (fewer than 60 students) increased sharply from 44% in 2022 to 52.1% in 2024, and two-thirds of Standard I and II classrooms operate as multigrade settings. This proliferation of small schools and multigrade classrooms poses significant pedagogical challenges, as teachers must simultaneously address diverse learning levels with limited resources. These conditions necessitate innovative teaching methods and underscore the importance of parental support at home to supplement classroom instruction.

Table 5: Policy Implementation Indicators — NIPUN Bharat and FLN Activities (2024)

Implementation Parameter	Percentage
Schools receiving government directive for FLN activities	83.0%
Schools with at least one FLN-trained teacher	78.0%
Schools receiving Teaching-Learning Materials for FLN	75.0%
Schools distributing textbooks across all grades	95.0%
Pre-primary enrollment (Age 3)	77.4%
Pre-primary enrollment (Age 4)	83.3%

Source: ASER 2024, Pratham Education Foundation, New Delhi.

Table 5 provides evidence of the extent to which NIPUN Bharat's foundational literacy and numeracy mission has been operationalized at the school level. As of 2024, 83% of primary schools had received government directives to implement FLN activities, and 78% reported having at least one teacher trained in FLN methodologies. Textbook distribution reached 95% coverage, demonstrating efficient supply-chain management. Pre-primary enrollment showed substantial improvement, with 77.4% of 3-year-olds and 83.3% of 4-year-olds enrolled in some form of pre-primary institution. However, the gap between policy directives (83%) and actual teacher training (78%) and material provision (75%) indicates that implementation fidelity remains a concern. These findings suggest that while the policy architecture is robust, the translation of training into improved classroom practice requires continued post-training support and monitoring, as well as active parental involvement in reinforcing learning at home.

Table 6: Dropout Rates Across Educational Levels in India (2022–23 to 2024–25)

Educational Level	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Preparatory Stage	4.5%	3.7%	2.3%
Middle Stage	5.9%	5.2%	3.5%
Secondary Stage	12.6%	10.9%	8.2%

Source: UDISE+ 2024–25, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Table 6 demonstrates a consistent downward trend in dropout rates across all educational stages over the three reporting years. At the preparatory stage, the rate declined from 4.5% in 2022–23 to 2.3% in 2024–25, while at the secondary level, it fell from 12.6% to 8.2%. This progressive reduction indicates that school systems are becoming more responsive to students' needs and that retention strategies are yielding measurable results. However, the relatively higher dropout at the secondary stage (8.2%) compared to the preparatory level (2.3%) underscores the vulnerability of older students to socioeconomic pressures, economic constraints, and academic disengagement. These trends reinforce the argument that sustained parental involvement and a supportive school environment together serve as protective factors against dropout, particularly during transitional phases of education.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complex, interdependent relationship between parental involvement, school environment, and the quality of primary education in India, while revealing significant tensions between policy aspirations and implementation realities. The data demonstrate that India has effectively resolved the

access challenge at the primary level, with enrollment exceeding 98% for the 6–14 age group as documented in ASER 2024 (Pratham, 2025). However, the shift from the access paradigm to the quality paradigm as envisioned under NEP 2020 and SDG 4 remains substantially incomplete. The persistent finding that over half of Standard V students cannot read Standard II-level text, despite consistent improvements in enrollment and retention, confirms that institutional presence alone does not guarantee learning, a concern raised by Yan (2024) in the context of India's historical neglect of learning outcomes. The first objective of this study focused on examining the collective influence of parental involvement and school environment on foundational learning outcomes. The data reveal that improvements in the school environment, particularly in infrastructure (drinking water at 99.3%, electricity at 93.6%, improved pupil-teacher ratio of 20:1 at primary level as per UDISE+ 2024–25), have created necessary but insufficient conditions for quality education (Ministry of Education, 2025). The ASER 2024 data showing that 66.7% of Standard I and II classrooms are multigrade settings, and that 52.1% of government primary schools have fewer than 60 students, indicate structural constraints that limit the effectiveness of even well-resourced environments (Pratham, 2025). In this context, parental involvement assumes critical significance as a complementary mechanism. The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63$) between parental involvement and academic achievement documented among Indian primary and secondary students reinforces the theoretical propositions of Epstein (2011) and the empirical findings of Jeynes (2024), suggesting that home-based academic support, parental expectations, and parent-teacher communication serve as mediating pathways that translate school inputs into learning outcomes.

The finding that parental expectations and communication with teachers are the most significant predictors of achievement, while homework assistance has subject-specific benefits, aligns with the work of Calderon-Villarreal et al. (2025), who demonstrated that parental self-efficacy and perceived role construction directly influence children's self-regulatory capacities. In the Indian context, where a significant proportion of parents particularly in rural areas have limited formal education, the barriers to effective home-based involvement are substantial. The ASER 2024 finding that pre-primary enrollment has risen to 77.4% for 3-year-olds and 83.3% for 4-year-olds, with Anganwadi centres serving as the primary provider, suggests that early institutional contact may serve as an entry point for building parental engagement in children's education from the earliest stages, a perspective supported by Sivabalan et al. (2024). The second objective addressed the policy-practice alignment question. The data present a mixed picture. On the positive side, NIPUN Bharat's implementation indicators show that 83% of schools received FLN directives and 78% have trained teachers (Pratham, 2025). UDISE+ 2024–25 records a historic milestone of crossing 1 crore teachers, with the pupil-teacher ratio improving across all levels (Ministry of Education, 2025). Dropout rates have declined across all stages, reflecting improved retention mechanisms. However, the gap between UDISE+ administrative data (showing 99.3% drinking water availability) and ASER ground-level observations (77.7%) raises questions about the reliability of self-reported institutional data and the functionality, not merely existence, of infrastructure (Mehta, 2025). This discrepancy has implications for policy evaluation and resource allocation, suggesting that ground-level verification mechanisms need strengthening.

Furthermore, the decline in government school enrollment share from 72.9% in 2022 to 66.8% in 2024 represents a significant trend that carries implications for both equity and quality. Research indicates that this shift is driven by parental perception of quality differentials between government and private schools, particularly regarding learning outcomes and English-medium instruction (Pratham, 2025). This parental choice behavior constitutes a form of parental involvement exercised through "exit" rather than "voice" in Hirschman's framework that reflects dissatisfaction with government school quality. The finding that states like Gujarat (+4.22 percentage points) and Kerala (+2.27) experienced increases in government school enrollment suggests that targeted improvements in infrastructure, pedagogical quality, and community engagement can restore parental trust. Jain and Puri (2025) argue that the quality and type of parental involvement matter more than quantity, a principle that should inform policy design: rather than merely mandating parent-teacher meetings,

policies should create structured mechanisms for academic goal-setting, learning progress communication, and collaborative problem-solving between parents and educators.

In synthesis, the data support the hypothesis that parental involvement and school environment function as synergistic determinants of quality primary education. Neither variable alone is sufficient; rather, their interaction produces the conditions under which foundational learning outcomes can improve. The policy implications are clear: school improvement initiatives must be accompanied by systematic strategies for enhancing parental engagement, particularly in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage where the protective effects of parental involvement are most needed, as noted by Atunde et al. (2023) and Cashman (2023). The holistic vision of NEP 2020 and the measurable improvements in infrastructure and teacher deployment under UDISE+ 2024–25 provide a promising framework, but realizing quality primary education will require closing the gap between policy architecture and classroom practice through sustained investment, robust monitoring, and meaningful community participation.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes that parental involvement and school environment are not isolated variables but function as integrated, mutually reinforcing determinants of quality primary education. The empirical evidence drawn from ASER 2024 and UDISE+ 2024–25 demonstrates that while India has achieved near-universal enrollment and significant infrastructure improvements at the primary level, foundational learning outcomes remain critically low, with only 23.4% of Standard III students achieving grade-appropriate reading proficiency. The policy framework established by NEP 2020 and operationalized through NIPUN Bharat provides a sound architecture, yet implementation gaps persist, particularly in teacher training fidelity, digital infrastructure provision, and the systematic integration of parental engagement within school governance structures. The declining share of government school enrollment signals that parental perceptions of quality are shaping educational choices, underscoring the need for government schools to demonstrate tangible learning improvements. Future policy interventions should prioritize structured parent-school communication mechanisms, community-based learning support systems, and ground-level verification of infrastructure functionality to bridge the persistent gap between educational access and educational quality in India.

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