

Parental Engagement and Early Childhood Cognitive Development A Case Study of Home Learning Environment and School Readiness in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Parental engagement is a key determinant of Early Childhood Education (ECE) effectiveness and early cognitive development, particularly in low and middle-income settings such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. This study examines the influence of parental factors on cognitive, linguistic, executive functioning, and socio-emotional development of children, with emphasis on parental education, socioeconomic status, home learning environment quality, cognitive stimulation, and responsive caregiving. A qualitative descriptive and policy analytical approach was adopted using secondary data from UNICEF Pakistan reports, ASER datasets, KP Education Sector Plan (2020–2025), government statistics, and peer-reviewed literature. Key indicators analyzed included preschool participation, parental literacy levels, home based learning practices, and rural-urban disparities. The findings reveal that enriched home learning environments significantly improve language acquisition, executive function skills, attention control, problem-solving ability, and socio-emotional regulation, leading to improved school readiness. In contrast, parental illiteracy, poverty, sociocultural barriers, and limited awareness of early childhood development negatively affect parental engagement, especially in rural areas of KP. The study concludes that strengthening parental capacity is essential for improving early childhood developmental outcomes and long-term educational attainment. It recommends structured parent education programs, stronger school-family partnerships, and community-based early stimulation initiatives to enhance equitable cognitive development in the region.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Parental Engagement, Cognitive Development, School Readiness, Home Learning Environment