

# ***The Impact of Family Involvement on Learning Motivation and Outcomes of Non-Native English Learners in the Post-Pandemic Era***

**Zining Zhang<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Sydney, Sydney*

*a. 910472666@qq.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted education, particularly for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, who have faced unique challenges due to remote learning and limited access to in-person schooling. In this new context, parental involvement has become more critical than ever. The transition to online learning, reduced communication between parents and teachers, and the need for parents to quickly adapt to new educational demands have all highlighted the essential role families play in supporting their children's academic success. This study examines how parental involvement affects ESL learners' academic outcomes, focusing on the post-pandemic period. It also explores the additional challenges posed by economic difficulties and emotional stress, which have further strained families' ability to engage in their children's education. Despite these challenges, many parents have embraced digital tools to stay involved. The study also reveals how factors such as socio-economic status and educational background have shaped the extent of parental involvement, with disparities that have been accentuated by the pandemic. Understanding the evolving role of parents is crucial for developing strategies that can better support ESL learners in the future, ensuring they have the necessary resources and encouragement to succeed.

**Keywords:** English Learning, COVID-19 pandemic, Parental Involvement, Motivation

## **1. Introduction**

With the increasing importance of English as a global language, more and more schools have incorporated English into their curricula. The benefits of learning English go beyond communication; it opens doors to better job opportunities and helps individuals access knowledge across various fields [1]. As the number of English learners rises, concerns related to poverty, stress, and learning difficulties have also come to the forefront, all of which are closely tied to their English learning outcomes. Research has shown that active parental involvement in the learning process, along with communication with their children, significantly contributes to the development of students' English proficiency [2]. In recent years, the shift to online learning due to the pandemic has further emphasized the critical role of parents, particularly in providing emotional support and academic guidance to aid the learning process [3]. This study will utilize a case study approach, analyzing existing research and real-world examples to understand the impact of parental involvement on ESL

learners' academic performance post-pandemic. Specifically, it will explore how changes in the learning environment, such as the transition to online education, have influenced parental roles in supporting ESL learners. The research will also examine how socio-economic status and access to digital tools contribute to the effectiveness of parental involvement in different family contexts. By investigating these aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how to strengthen parental engagement in ESL education in the future, ensuring that learners have the support they need to succeed academically in the post-pandemic era. The study shows that these factors combined have significantly impacted the academic performance of ESL students.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. The proposal and theoretical basis of family involvement**

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, individuals are continuously influenced by their environment, with the family (microsystem) playing a key role in their development. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner believes that interactions within structural layers and between layers are key to this theory. For instance, the relationship between parents and children is bidirectional—parents influence a child's beliefs and behaviors, but children can also influence their parents' beliefs and behaviors [4].

### **2.2. Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, suggests that individuals internalize social values to develop a unified sense of self. This internalization requires motivation and continuous activity. According to the Cognitive Evaluation Theory (a subtheory of SDT), intrinsic motivation—driven by curiosity—requires support from the social environment to be maintained. While external rewards can diminish intrinsic motivation, feedback and positive social context enhance it, leading to more creative and effective learning [5].

### **2.3. The Uniqueness of Education in the Post-Pandemic Era**

The COVID-19 pandemic increased parental involvement in education and shifted learning to online platforms. However, this shift hindered ESL students' language development due to lack of direct school interaction, leading to a loss of up to 30% of annual reading progress [6]. Remote learning also presented challenges for parents, who had to teach without training and manage multiple children with limited resources [7]. Furthermore, the loss of communication between parents and teachers hampered relationship-building and hindered information exchange, negatively affecting ESL students' learning outcomes [8].

## **3. Previous Research**

### **3.1. The Fundamental Definition of Parental Involvement and Its Role in Education**

As early as the mid-20th century, a significant body of literature began to emerge exploring the relationship between family and education. In the 1960s, Mayer stated that the most enduring lessons humans acquire are those imparted by our parents in the home; the principles and knowledge nurtured within individuals are never lost, and they, in turn, contribute to the advancement of society [9].

In the context of education, parents bear a crucial responsibility. While in earlier centuries—specifically the seventeenth and eighteenth—parents often took on the role of educators, today the

responsibility has shifted largely to public institutions. Regrettably, many parents now neglect their duties, assuming that schools will automatically resolve the challenges their children encounter [9].

The foundational moral and intellectual principles of a child are cultivated within the family. Children, being exceptionally observant, often mirror the actions and attitudes of adults. The overall environment at home plays a pivotal role, while material wealth tends to be of lesser importance. What truly matters is that the appreciation for learning is nurtured, and that parents actively engage with knowledge. A genuine passion for intellectual growth can be stimulated through various means, such as encouraging reading, fostering an appreciation for music, and introducing children to visual arts. These practices contribute to an environment that motivates children to pursue true intellectual development [9].

However, when parents fail to engage in these ways, it can unintentionally suppress their children's learning. Many parents exhibit impatience towards their children and show a lack of attention to their children's concerns, inadvertently hindering their natural curiosity and desire for learning. Children naturally possess an innate curiosity, which forms the strongest foundation for their educational development. It is evident that parents must continue to evolve emotionally and intellectually. The family should function as a complementary force to formal education, rather than a passive entity. Parents must ensure that the arts play a significant role in their children's lives, and that genuine cultural experiences are integrated into family life. This process should begin at the earliest possible stage. Children should be encouraged to express their thoughts, fostering a dynamic of collaboration and ensuring that a true spirit of democracy is established in the parent-child relationship [9].

### **3.2. The Application of Parental Involvement in Language Learning**

The home environment is closely linked to children's language learning outcomes. In Coleman's Social Capital Theory, proposed in 1988, parents' human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and education that parents possess; it is identified as a crucial factor influencing the home language environment. A study reveals that highly educated parents, especially mothers, actively participate in their children's English language learning at home, as evidenced by their educational backgrounds and English proficiency. For instance, in the case of a Chinese family, both parents have received higher education in China and Canada and are fluent in English. These parents are able to provide high-quality instructional guidance and design various practice activities for their children, such as creating flashcards and supervising vocabulary memorization. Simultaneously, these parents are also able to provide strong emotional support and aspirations. For example, they may remind children of their ambitious schools and motivate them to put in hard effort [10].

In contrast, in families where both parents are low-income and low education workers, their limited English proficiency restricts the role they can play in supporting their children's English reading and writing development. Although the parents are supportive of their children's education, they are unable to tutor them in English at home. They cannot understand the English letters sent from the school, and are unaware of their children's performance and activities at school, nor do they engage in communication with teachers [10]. Moreover, parents with low-income are unable to provide their children with newly released English books due to financial constraints [11]. Compared to parents with higher educational levels who are more attentive to their children's academic development, entrepreneurial families are unable to be actively engaged in their children's learning, and are not able to gain these valuable insights. As a result, the investment choices they make may not align with their children's learning needs [12].

### 3.3. Forms of family involvement in English language learning

In today's globalized society, since English is a significant medium of acquiring knowledge such as science, business, tourism etc., it is widely taught and applied in 118 countries [13]. As the result shows, ESL (English as a second language) learners's English proficiency tends to increase in tandem with the perceived support from their parents. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Theory (ZPD) suggests that learners are capable of accomplishing tasks with the help of more experienced individuals, such as parents, teachers, or peers, who offer essential guidance and assistance in the language development process. Parental involvement, in particular, has proven to be a powerful contributor to students' academic success, with a clear positive correlation between the extent of ESL parents' engagement and the academic performance of ESL students. It is crucial for parents to engage in activities like reading to their children, helping them develop strong reading habits, and recommending books that are appropriate for their age. Moreover, parents should prioritize reading aloud to their children, as this practice helps to increase vocabulary and cultivates a positive mindset towards language learning [14].

Jerome Bruner's scaffolding theory has been widely recognized as a critical factor in enhancing parental involvement in the language learning process. According to the scaffolding theory, parents can significantly improve their children's language skills by addressing their individualized needs. As Vygotsky posits, scaffolding involves breaking down challenging tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. For example, parents can begin by outlining a learning plan for their child, then translate that plan into concrete actions by establishing specific learning steps, followed by interactive engagement with the child to complete the tasks. During the learning process, parents can also provide guidance and feedback [14].

Given that the execution of the learning plan may evolve over time, parents are required to tailor their strategies according to the child's unique learning needs and preferences, making adjustments and innovations as necessary. The effectiveness of scaffolding is maximized under such conditions, where structured planning enables parents to increase the efficiency of their support. The parents' level of assistance can gradually decrease as the child's abilities develop. Current research has demonstrated that parents, through the application of scaffolding techniques, can significantly enhance the language skills of ESL learners, particularly in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and writing proficiency [14].

### 3.4. Family involvement and its impact on English learning motivation

In the process of learning English, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play crucial roles. Parents serve as key role models for their children. When considering students' English learning outcomes, parental involvement is directly related to academic performance. Compared to learners with lower English proficiency, those with higher levels of English competence are more likely to take their parents' feelings and expectations into account [15]. Moreover, according to Emerson and colleagues, when parents communicate educational expectations and emphasize the value of learning, it helps create a supportive environment for academic goals. However, high expectations without emotional connection can lead to inferiority and poor performance. In contrast, supportive parents who understand their children's mistakes contribute to both emotional development and academic success [16].

As parents are often the primary source of support and motivation, they play a vital role in their ESL learners' language development. Children's social-emotional skills play a critical role in their academic development. Research indicates that children with more positive peer relationships and fewer behavioral issues tend to achieve higher levels of academic success. In the context of second language acquisition, students often face limitations in their language abilities, which can lead to

varying degrees of stress and social-emotional challenges, such as anxiety, loneliness, and difficulties with attention in the classroom [15]. These issues can have a negative impact on students' learning outcomes.

However, studies have shown that parental involvement in a child's education significantly reduces the occurrence of such challenges. Children in the early grades are at risk of developing negative social and emotional behaviors, but increased parental engagement in their education has been associated with fewer reported social and emotional difficulties among ELL children, and may even help prevent such issues from arising. Through this process, parents can facilitate the development of their children's linguistic skills and enhance their confidence in using English. Parents should encourage their children to reflect on how they can self-monitor and evaluate their language use, as well as how they can apply the language they have learned in diverse contexts [15].

According to Bourdieu, parents' social class influences their values and behaviors, which in turn affect their attitudes and investments in their children's education. Parents from higher social classes typically have more financial resources, enabling them to provide greater educational opportunities and access to quality resources for their children. For instance, they can afford to live in neighborhoods with better schools, hire private tutors, or offer a wide range of extracurricular activities for English learning [11].

In contrast, parents from lower social classes often face economic constraints that limit the resources they can offer for their children's education, which results in a downward spiral. For example, in China, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face significant challenges in providing their children with high-quality education due to insufficient financial resources. Additionally, parental attitudes tend to change in response to students' academic progress. Parents with lower socioeconomic status may perceive fewer opportunities for their children's advancement as they enter secondary school. As parental expectations decline, students' English performance may also be negatively impacted, creating a feedback loop where lower academic achievement leads to further reductions in parental expectations. In the Cambridge test, which primarily assesses students' receptive skills and basic writing abilities, there were no significant differences in average listening and reading/writing scores among students in elementary school based on parental socioeconomic background. However, by the eighth grade, significant differences emerged related to socioeconomic status [17].

#### **4. New Opportunities for Parental Involvement during and after the Pandemic**

Although the pandemic has posed challenges for ESL students' English learning and had some negative effects on communication between parents and teachers, studies show that, despite these setbacks, it has also heightened parents' awareness and involvement in their children's learning. Parents have begun to spare no effort, through online learning or other means, to ensure that their children have equal educational opportunities. Due to their children's poor progress in English, parents have not only sought help from external professionals but have also started interacting with their children in English at home, with an increasingly serious attitude. Moreover, more and more parents are tutoring their children with homework and even using various printed materials to support their children's learning. All of this reflects the realization during the difficult phase of the COVID-19 pandemic that education is not solely the responsibility of teachers; parents must also take responsibility for their children's education and ensure their success. Research has also confirmed that the higher the level of parental involvement, the better the academic performance of the children [18].

Meanwhile, surveys conducted in China reveal that, although the use of textbooks and reference books remains common (34.09%), parents are gradually integrating online tutoring into their home education practices. A significant proportion of parents (62.5%) have chosen to use technological



tools for teaching, and 29 parents (32.95%) reported using online interactive platforms for education [18]. These findings indicate that parents are not only concerned about their children's English education but are also actively seeking various methods to intervene and support their learning.

## 5. Future Directions

Despite the critical role of parental involvement in the education of ESL learners, particularly in the context of remote learning, future research could further explore the role of technological tools in facilitating parental engagement. Specifically, as online learning platforms and educational apps become more prevalent, it is important to investigate how parents can effectively use these technological tools to support their children's language learning, especially in resource-limited households. Additionally, research could focus on how different family backgrounds influence the quality and effectiveness of parental involvement, particularly in terms of how cultural differences shape parents' educational beliefs and practices. Furthermore, studies could explore how community support and school collaboration can assist parents, particularly those from non-native-speaking households, in overcoming language barriers and socio-economic challenges, thereby strengthening family-school partnerships.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, parental involvement plays a positive role in the language learning of ESL learners, both in terms of academic support and emotional encouragement, especially in the context of remote learning. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, it has also provided new opportunities to explore and improve ways of engaging parents in their children's education. Research indicates that parents not only play a crucial role in providing emotional support and academic tutoring, but also in enhancing their digital literacy and utilizing technological tools to better support their children's learning. Therefore, schools and educational policies should focus more on providing effective support for parents, particularly those with lower educational backgrounds. Future research can further explore the role of family background, cultural differences, and technological tools in parental involvement, helping educators design more inclusive educational models that promote ESL learners' language acquisition and overall academic achievement. Overall, strengthening the collaboration between families and schools to create a supportive learning environment will have a profound impact on the education of ESL learners.

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