



# Early school-based parent involvement, children's self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An Australian longitudinal study



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## ABSTRACT

Parent involvement is widely accepted as being associated with children's improved educational outcomes. However, the role of early school-based parent involvement is still being established. This study investigated the mediating role of self-regulated learning behaviors in the relationship between early school-based parent involvement and children's academic achievement, using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children ( $N = 2616$ ). Family socioeconomic position, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, language background, child gender and cognitive competence, were controlled, as well as home and community based parent involvement activity in order to derive a more confident interpretation of the results. Structural equation modeling analyses showed that children's self-regulated learning behaviors fully mediated the relationships between school-based parent involvement at Grade 1 and children's reading achievement at Grade 3. Importantly, these relationships were evident for children across all socio-economic backgrounds. Although there was no direct relationship between parent involvement at Grade 1 and numeracy achievement at Grade 3, parent involvement was indirectly associated with higher children's numeracy achievement through children's self-regulation of learning behaviors, though this relationship was stronger for children from middle and higher socio-economic backgrounds. Implications for policy and practice are discussed, and further research recommended.

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## 1. Introduction

The term parent involvement has been used to refer to home, school and community-based activities in which parents engage to support their children's education and development (Epstein, 1995; Seginer, 2006). Extensive research over several decades has documented a broad range of academic and socio-emotional benefits for children associated with parent involvement (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Wilder, 2014). Although the ongoing involvement and interest of parents provides students with support throughout their education, parent involvement is particularly effective in the earlier years of schooling, (Avvisati, Besbas, & Guyon, 2010; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Cheadle, 2009; Fan & Williams, 2010; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). These benefits are evident regardless of family social and economic background (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Wilder, 2014). In recent times there has been renewed policy interest in the poten-

tial of parent involvement to contribute to school improvement and to promote equity in schooling outcomes (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008; DEEWR, 2008; World Bank, 2008).

A limitation of research in the field of parent involvement research has been the inconsistent application of fundamental terms, restricting the establishment of a rigorously developed foundation to support different parent involvement practices (Baker & Soden, 2005; Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Parent involvement in general terms is defined as representing "...parents' active commitment to spend time to assist in the academic and general development of their children" (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012, p. 20). Researchers have posited different forms of parent involvement, the most recognized of these being a typology developed by Epstein (1987; 1995) that includes parents' involvement in parenting, communicating with schools, volunteering in school activities, supporting learning at home, involvement in school decision making processes and engagement with community resources. Pomerantz et al. (2007) proposed that the broad distinction between home-based and school-based parent involvement offers a useful conceptualization for investigating the processes and outcomes of parent involvement. In this paper, we focus specifically on parent involvement in school-based activities.

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Extensive research has established that parent involvement in general is associated with improved academic outcomes for children (Emerson et al., 2012; Wilder, 2014). In a comprehensive meta-analysis of a large range of educational interventions, Hattie (2009) found an effect size for the association between parent involvement and student academic outcomes of  $d = .51$  ( $p < .05$ ). A meta-analysis of 41 studies of parent involvement in urban elementary schools by Jeynes' (2005) found a medium effect size of  $d = .40$  ( $p < .05$ ) for this association. When Jeynes (2005) included only those studies with sophisticated controls, this relationship was still evident, though the effect size reduced to  $d = .21$  ( $p < .05$ ).

Although a great deal is known about the academic benefits associated with parent involvement in general, the role of school-based parent involvement in student's academic outcomes is still being investigated. One important limitation of current research is that few studies have examined potential mediating variables in this relationship. Drawing on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997) that proposes contextual and personal factors may jointly affect students' academic achievement, the present study considers the role of children's self-regulated learning behaviors in the relationship between school-based parent involvement and student academic outcomes in the early years of school.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to children's ability to manage their learning behaviors for goal attainment (Wolters, 2003) and has received increasing recognition as an important factor linked to student academic achievement. However, its relationship with school-based parent involvement has rarely been investigated. The purpose of the present study was to investigate if SRL mediates the relationship between school-based parent involvement and academic achievement in the early years of schooling, while controlling for a number of contextually important demographic variables. The exploration of this model can contribute new understandings of how parent involvement might impact on student academic achievement, and the importance of family-school partnerships to improve student learning outcomes. Identifying these child-related mediators provides theorists and practitioners with a deeper understanding of the complexities of the relationship between parent involvement and student outcomes.

### 1.1. School-based parent involvement

As a form of parent involvement, school-based parent involvement can be defined as encompassing a range of "practices on the part of parents that require their making actual contact with schools" (Pomerantz et al., 2007, p. 374), and represents one of the most visibly identifiable forms of parent involvement in children's education. These activities include visiting the classroom, volunteering in school activities, attending concerts and performances involving their children, and communicating informally and formally with the teacher.

A number of studies have identified positive associations between higher school-based parent involvement and improved student success, particularly in the earlier years of schooling (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Craft, 2003; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Dearing et al. (2006) for example found school-based parent involvement in the early years of children's education predicted higher literacy skills in later years of elementary school, controlling for children's literacy skills during kindergarten. Jeynes' (2005) meta-analysis reported that attendance and participation in school-based parent involvement activities had an effect size on academic standardized test results of  $d = .22$  ( $p < .05$ ). However, only two studies that met the required statistical rigor for inclusion were available for Jeynes' review, reporting a wide range in findings ( $d = .2$  and  $d = .42$ ). Neither study included sophisticated statistical controls.

Other studies that have included statistical controls for socio-economic status, cultural background, and initial school performance have reported no statistically significant relationship between school-based parent involvement and academic achievement (Domina, 2005; El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Furthermore, meta-analyses by Avvisati et al., 2010; Jeynes (2007), and Wilder (2014) found no significant relationship between school-based parent involvement and academic achievement when standardized test scores rather than school-based assessments were analysed.

Jeynes (2010, 2011) suggested that parent involvement is more complex than originally envisioned and that the more subtle forms of parent involvement, such as quality of communication between parents and their children, parenting style, and higher educational expectations, may be more salient in supporting improved student outcomes. Jeynes (2011) suggests that the next step in parent involvement research is to rigorously establish the efficacy of particular strategies of parent involvement in different socio-cultural contexts, and to investigate the mechanisms by which different strategies are effective.

In investigating the mechanisms between general parent involvement and children's academic achievement, some mediators have been examined. Dotterer and Wehrspann (2015) identified the mediating role of student school engagement variables, such as school bonding, school self-esteem and school trouble, in the relationship between parent involvement and student perceived academic competence with a group of adolescents. In relation to school-based parent involvement, Hill and Craft (2003) found kindergarten children's academic skills to be a mediator between school-based parent involvement and math performance among African American kindergarten children. Choi, Chang, Kim, and Reio (2015) found that school-based parent involvement predicted math achievement among 10th graders through the pathway of math efficacy. However, self-regulated learning (SRL) as a mediator in parent involvement research has rarely been examined. In this study, we focus on the mediating role of SRL in the specific relationship between school-based parent involvement and children's academic achievement.

### 1.2. Children's self-regulated learning as a mediator

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to students' active participation in their own learning by setting goals, monitoring and controlling their cognition, and motivation and behavior to appropriately transform their mental abilities into actual performance for goal attainment (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002, 2008; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). In general, self-regulated learners have been characterized as reflective individuals who possess a repertoire of strategies, and who have the ability to purposefully manage their learning behaviors (Wolters, 2003). SRL comprises the processes of self-motivation, self-control and self-evaluation (Xu, Kushner Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010). It has been shown to have positive links to students' motivation and academic achievement (Bodovski & Youn, 2011; Pintrich, 2000; Pintrich & de Groot, 1990; Xu et al., 2010; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988).

Individual intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the initiation and maintenance of SRL strategies (Paris Lipson & Wixson, 1983; Pintrich, 1988, 1989; Pintrich, Cross, Kozma, & McKeachie, 1986). School-based parent involvement is thought to provide children with a demonstration of their faith in, and support of, the child through their investment of time in the school context, increasing children's confidence and demonstrating the availability of encouragement and support for the child (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Parr, McNaughton, Timperley & Robinson, 1993). Based on an adaptation of the expectancy-value theory of motivation (Eccles, 1983), Pintrich and de Groot (1990) theorized

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