THE ROLE OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY OUTCOMES

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

India has one of the largest education systems catering to almost 25 crore children. Despite the scope and expanse of interventions, the issue of low learning levels persists. Only 21% of children from grade 3 can read grade 2 text and 26% of children from grade 3 can do basic subtraction.[1] As learners progress, they carry this lack further which is evident from the data of learners from grade 5. These trends in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) levels have been fairly similar over the past decade. The occurrence of COVID-19 further impacted the trajectory leading to a learning crisis where India's learning poverty shot from 54% to 70%. The World Bank defines 'learning poverty' as the inability of children to attain minimum reading proficiency, and correlates this with the proportion of children who are out of school.[2]

Several factors inside and outside the classroom have led to this situation. Factors inside classrooms are related to students or teachers and include aspects like an already existing learning deficit, multi-level/multi-grade classrooms, and the teachers' capacity to deal with these challenges. Factors outside the classroom entail governance by the administrative infrastructure and low parent participation in the child's learning.

Across the research conducted so far, it is observed that considerable efforts and investments have been made in dealing with student factors or teacher-related issues through classroom interventions. Additionally, governance has also been a key focus area of work owing to multiple studies on monitoring and accountability. **One aspect, however, that needs special attention is parent engagement in a child's education**.

Studies conducted globally and nationally indicate that focused interventions on parent and community engagement have the potential to influence student learning outcomes.[3] Various studies have proven the role of parents in students' life on aspects like high levels of school readiness, higher grades, and hence, a continuation of schooling. In the context of early literacy, significant research by the Harvard Family Research project indicates that parent involvement in schools had a positive impact on the early literacy scores of children.[4] In the Indian context, a randomised field experiment by the American Economic Association highlighted the impact of training mothers in early maths and literacy modules on high maths scores in children.[5]

Along with research, the narratives from National Education Policy (NEP) and Nipun Bharat directives have highlighted parent engagement as one of the key factors for the achievement of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) outcomes. Parent engagement entails the roles that parents play across various spheres of the child's life such as classroom, school, community, and home, hence involvement across these areas is critical.

While the significance of parent and community engagement is well-established, **certain individual challenges related to the parents' background and other challenges rooted in systemic dysfunctions impede them from participating**. These challenges include low

confidence levels in parents, lack of resources, low literacy levels, lack of infrastructure support, paucity of data, and low levels of funding.

In order to deal with these challenges and pave the way forward to ensure parent involvement in schools and community interventions, **current successful scalable solutions are focusing on three kinds of outcomes**: instilling confidence in parents by creating safe and respectful spaces for sharing and learning, increasing awareness about the issue at hand and helping them impact change by actually participating in at-home activities. This report details some scalable solutions across these three categories. For example, Pratham Education Foundation's work with Mothers' groups across fourteen states, Saajha's initiative for creating parental networks reaching out to one lakh parents, and Key Education Foundation's Children Learning, Assisted by Parents (CLAP) project. A detailed analysis of these is mentioned in the subsequent sections.
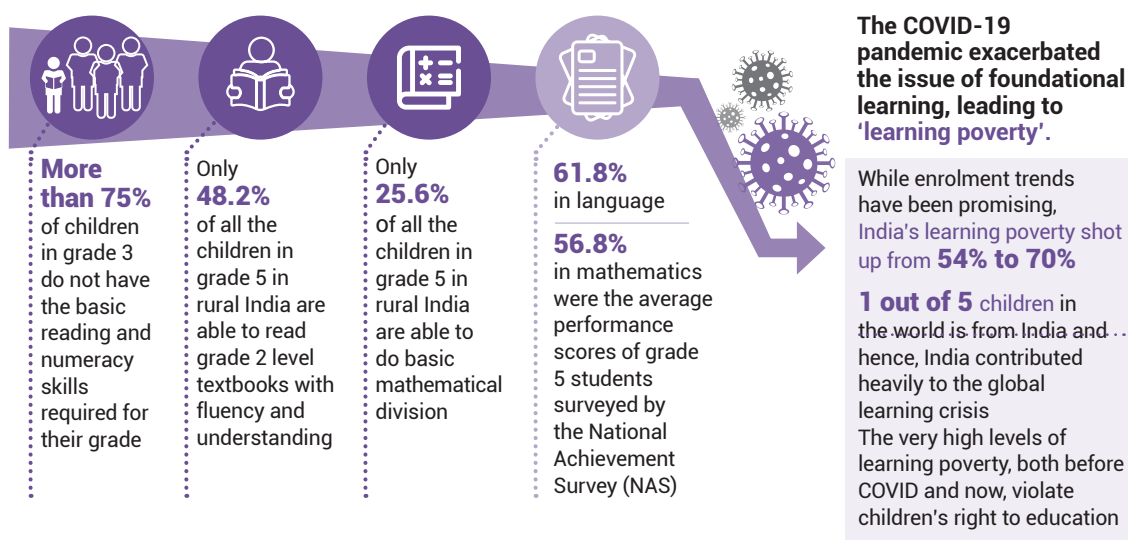
Further investments in these trends by providing patient capital would help actualise the universal accomplishment of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

Why Is It Critical to Engage with Parents?

As of 2022, more than 75% of children do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills appropriate for Grade 3. This learning deficit starts early on and is carried over into subsequent grades.

Only 21% of children from grade 3 are able to read grade 2 text and almost 26% of children from grade 3 are able to do basic subtraction. As learners progress, they carry this lack further which is evident from the data of learners from grade 5. Only 48% of learners are able to read grade 2 text and merely 26% of them are able to perform simple division.[6] These trends in learning levels have been fairly similar for the past decade and have seen only an incremental change.

Figure 1: Status of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India

More than 75% of children in grade 3 do not have the basic reading and numeracy skills required for their grade

Only **48.2%** of all the children in grade 5 in rural India are able to read grade 2 level textbooks with fluency and understanding

Only **25.6%** of all the children in grade 5 in rural India are able to do basic mathematical division

61.8% in language

56.8% in mathematics were the average performance scores of grade 5 students surveyed by the National Achievement Survey (NAS)

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue of foundational learning, leading to 'learning poverty'.

While enrolment trends have been promising, India's learning poverty shot up from **54% to 70%**

1 out of 5 children in the world is from India and hence, India contributed heavily to the global learning crisis
The very high levels of learning poverty, both before COVID and now, violate children's right to education

Source: ASER 2022, Ministry of Education [MoE] 2021, World Bank, 2022

This learning crisis became more complex due to the COVID-19 pandemic when India experienced approximately 82 weeks of school closures, affecting nearly 25 crore children. The situation worsened, as can be seen from the analysis of 2021 learning levels data. The research revealed that 92% of learners had lost one specific language ability, 82% of learners lost one mathematical ability,[7] and India's learning poverty shot up from 54% to 70%.[8] One out of every five children across the globe is from India, and hence, as a nation, we also contributed to the global learning crisis.[9]

Various factors inside and outside the classroom have been responsible for the learning trends we see in India. Over time, efforts are being made to work on the student factors, teacher factors, and governance, whereas parent engagement is an area that has not been explored much or invested in.

Figure 2: Reasons for low FLN outcomes
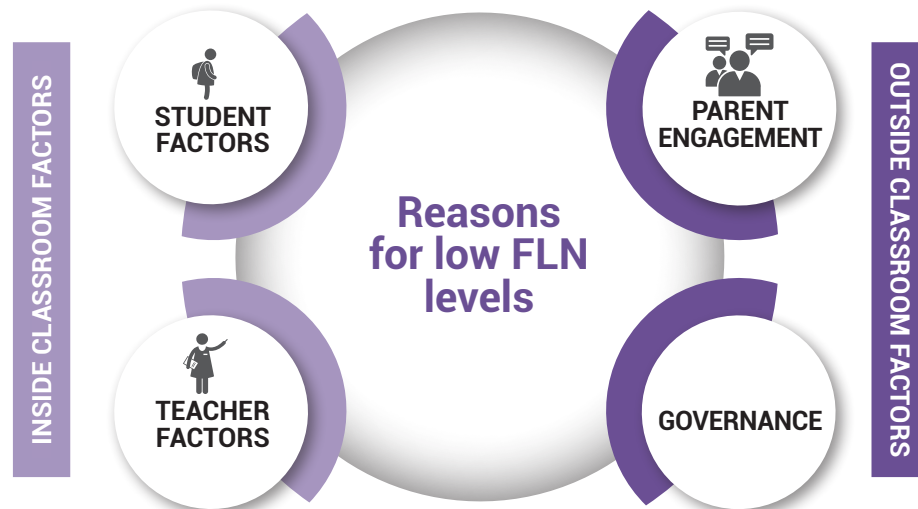
Over the years, the education landscape has focused immensely on understanding and actioning interventions directly impacting students, teachers, and the overall governance structure. For example, organisations like Pratham Education Foundation, Language Learning Foundation, Room-to-Read, Educate Girls, 321, Teach for India, and many others have invested in tackling issues like multigrade and multilingual classrooms, preexisting learning deficit, teacher capacity to conduct interactive sessions, teacher behaviours, and attitudes. A range of organisations like Kaivalya Education Foundation, Samagra, and The Education Alliance actively work with the government at the state, district, block, and school levels. Between 2016-2021, India's education sector received ₹29,918 crores, most of which went into supporting direct interventions by NGOs in classrooms. Moreover, the highest allocation from the Union Budget goes into teacher salaries and training for enabling better classroom management. Parent engagement and community involvement on the other hand are aspects that have received very little attention. The following quotes exemplify the same:

"When we started working in 2012-13, we struggled with two issues. One, there was very little research on parent engagement worldwide but specifically in the Indian context. We referred to Joyce Epstein's work which was based in the context of the US. Another research was that of Pratham where Dr. Banerji had written about the impact of a mother's education qualification on a child's learning levels. Apart from that, we had very few studies done in the Indian context. Two, there were very few organisations working in the area of parent engagement as a means of achieving FLN outcomes."

– Saransh Vaswani, Saajha

"Since I have been in Pratham, for almost 20 years, people in the education sector have heavily focused on classrooms, teachers, and what is happening inside the school. It is only during COVID that we started looking into the households, in families and began to see how they can be engaged. We at Pratham always had our programmes located in the communities but through COVID, we also learned different ways of engagement."

– **Smitin Brid**, Pratham Education Foundation

As the ecosystem is gradually realising the importance of parent engagement in the learning outcomes of children, a multitude of evidence from research conducted across the globe has been strengthening this connection.

Children spend 80% of their time learning outside the classroom, either at home or with friends. The home learning environment plays a formative role in a child's social development and has an influence on a child's educational outcomes at all stages of their learning journey.[10] Parental involvement is linked to children's school readiness. Simple interactions such as reading to young children may lead to greater reading knowledge and skills.[11] This, in turn, influences a child's learning positively and concurrently with school performance. Research shows that greater parent involvement in children's learning improves the child's school performance leading to higher academic achievement[12] and greater social and emotional development.[13]

As we go deeper and understand the impact of parental engagement on literacy and numeracy, the Harvard Family Research Project's work is significant. The attempt here was to understand the impact of specific parenting practices on early literacy development and maths skills. Among three dimensions of parental involvement i.e. involvement at home, involvement at school, and involvement in extracurricular activities, it was observed that parent's involvement in school was significantly associated with early literacy (reading, maths, and general knowledge). Next was the involvement at home where the presence of adequate home resources was associated with high levels of early literacy.[14]

While there has been a paucity of research in the Indian context, a randomised field experiment in India conducted by the American Economic Association indicated the effectiveness of adult literacy and parental involvement interventions in improving children's learning. Mothers received adult literacy training for language and maths and then trained to enhance their children's learning at home. It was observed that the interventions had a significant impact on children's maths scores. The interventions also increased mothers' test scores in both language and maths, and a range of other outcomes such as more time spent with the child, and conversations reflecting greater involvement of mothers in their children's education.[15]

As the engagement of parents leads to better learning outcomes, it also has the potential to impact other social factors such as successful completion of classes, lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, and a greater likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education.[16]

In India, policy tailwinds also signify a focus on parental engagement, with the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) highlighting the role of parents in accomplishing the FLN mission by 2026 through the NIPUN Bharat directive.

Table 1: Ways of engaging parents for achieving FLN outcomes, NIPUN Bharat[17]

- Periodic events in the school or community
- Ongoing interactions in class (for example, one day a month for grandparents to visit children in school)
- Regular activities that can be done in the community (libraries, wall writing, display of children's work, Chaupal reading demonstrations) and home activities
- Home visits
- Parenting workshops
- Regular sharing of information about activities in the school and the child's progress to the parent
- Informing the parents about the expected learning outcomes, portfolios, home assignments, etc.
- Sending portfolios every week/periodically to the parents for review and feedback
- Recommending the kind of assistance the child needs at home for learning
- Sending regular newsletters, e-mails, memos wherever possible
- Inviting parent volunteers for various activities of the school, such as playing games, taking children for field visits, sports/art exhibitions, and annual functions.
- Identifying parent representatives for the class to help with PTMs and other activities
- Organising parents-only events
- Involving willing parents in the community outreach work, mainstreaming out-of-school children/dropouts
- Involving Professional Learning Community (PLC) for language and maths at the district level

As a whole, NEP also highlights the criticality of forming mothers' groups across preschool to primary grades and considers them as a critical factor for ensuring achievement of FLN outcomes.

The following chapters focus on highlighting how parental engagement is looked at, the challenges in ensuring the active involvement of parents as well as nuanced views on interventions so that more parents become co-travelers in this journey to achieve FLN outcomes.

What is Parent Engagement?

Parent engagement is defined and understood in many different ways. Across definitions, however, one commonality is that the focus is on engaging the parents in various aspects, settings, and activities of a child's routine so that learning can be enhanced and well-being ensured.

One such definition is provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the guidebook on Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health. The definition is as follows:

Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents. It is a shared responsibility in which schools are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and parents are committed to actively supporting their children's and adolescents' learning and development.[18]

Another perspective from the global west is that from **Joyce Epstein**, a researcher from Johns Hopkins University. In order to open out parental engagement, Epstein focused on calling out different ways parents can be involved in ensuring a child's well-being. Here, she articulated six types of involvement that allow practitioners to anchor parent engagement programmes:[19]

1. **Parenting:** Create programmes to help families establish home environments to support children as students. For example, family support programmes to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.
2. **Communicating:** Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and children's progress. For example, conferences with all parents at least once a year.
3. **Volunteering:** Recruit and organise parents to support administrative and learning activities at school. For example, having a parent room or family centre for volunteer work or involving parents in organising learning activities at school.
4. **Learning at home:** Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities. For example, information on homework and ways to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
5. **Decision-making:** Pathways to include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives. For example, active PTA/PTO or other parent organisations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety).
6. **Collaborating with Community:** Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community. For example, providing information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programmes or services.

Building these ideas further, various practitioners in India have created their own theory of change for engaging with parents. One such model is created by Saajha, a non-profit anchoring their work on engaging parents and communities to ensure learning outcomes. Saajha looks at parent engagement in four circles:

Figure 3: Saajha's Model for Parent Engagement
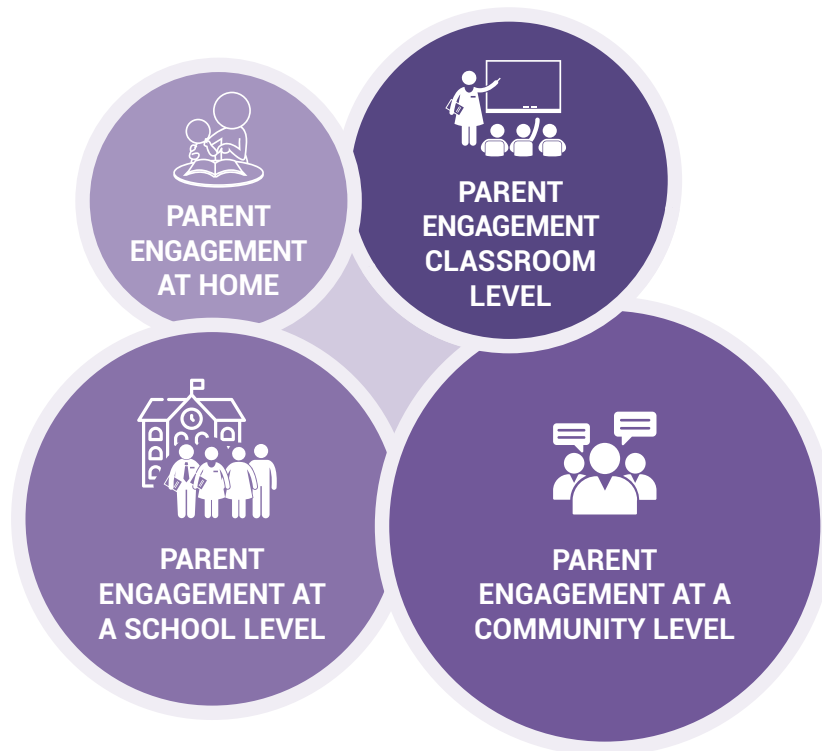
1. **Parent engagement at home**, where parents engage with the child at home;
2. **Parent engagement at the classroom level**, where teacher and parent relationships are involved;
3. **Parent engagement at the school level**, which is where the school management committee comes in;
4. **Parent engagement at a community level**, where parents are engaging with the larger education system and not just the school.

Saajha's framework highlights a critical stakeholder 'group' for parent engagement i.e. the School Management Committees (SMCs). The Right to Education Act of 2009 established the SMC to ensure accountability in India's educational system, particularly government institutions. The SMC is a decentralised governance mechanism that has the authority to monitor how the schools operate, and regulate how the school grants are utilised. Three-fourths of the SMC members are parents. The others include community members, head teachers, teachers, and others. The SMCs are responsible for meeting regularly, usually once in two months, to discuss various issues around the school including infrastructure, teaching-learning, student achievements, etc. Thus, SMCs are a critical medium for engaging with parents in India.

What Impedes Parent Engagement?

Barriers to parental engagement fall under two buckets: individual and systemic factors. Individual factors encompass the challenges parents encounter due to their personal socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. Systemic factors refer to the hurdles faced in the broad ecosystem that hinder parents from engaging. Each of these is detailed below:

Figure 4: Challenges impeding Parental Engagement
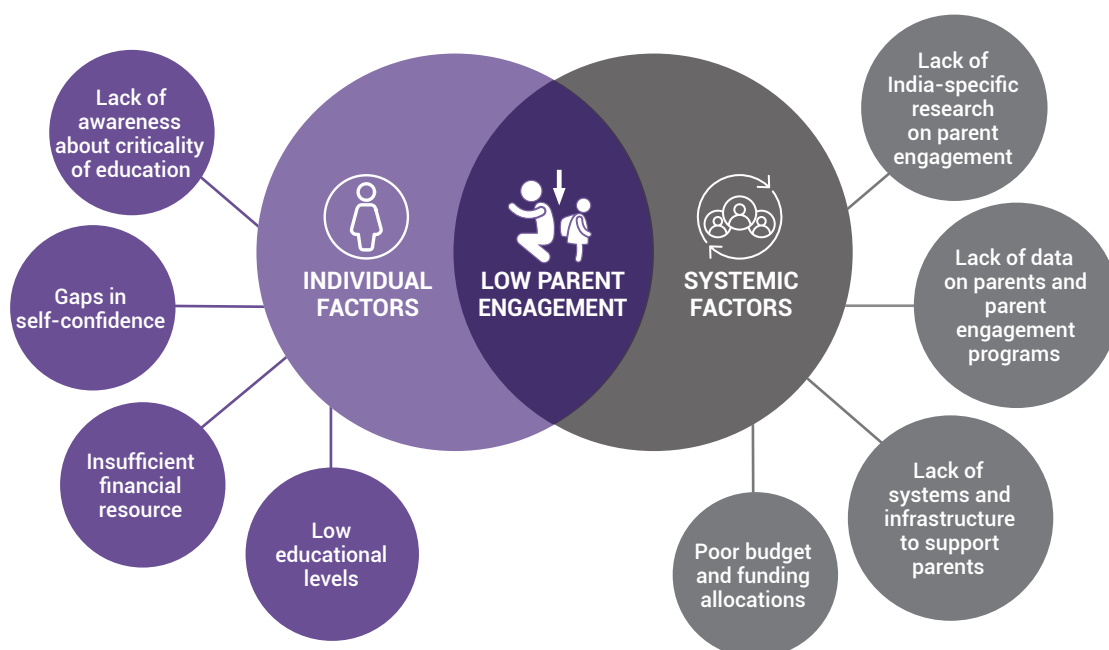
Individual Factors

Limited awareness among parents about the importance of prioritising children's education in their early years becomes an obstacle to parent engagement.

Parents often start showing more interest in their child's education when they reach higher grades, neglecting the significance of support during foundational years. However, establishing a strong base during this crucial period is essential for optimal brain development and paves the way for future academic achievements. Unfortunately, many parents lack complete awareness of this vital information.

"Many times parents have said to me, 'I did not know so much happens in the brain during this period. I always thought education comes in at the age of grade one. But this information about brain development is very important.'

If parents do not understand this, the child is always playing catch up. That's a huge sort of awakening for parents in this community."

– **Amrutha Murali**, Makkala Jagriti

Another notable hurdle for parents is their lack of confidence to support their children academically.

Lack of confidence may arise due to gaps in assurance provided by the educational ecosystem, paucity of resources, and their educational background. Many parents, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, frequently feel that they cannot fulfil the role of a capable and effective parent. This lack of self-efficacy and its impact on the parents' perception of themselves was clear in our conversation with the Co-lead of Early Childhood Education at Pratham Education Foundation, Samyukta Subramanian. While talking about confidence, Samyukta quoted an interaction that the CEO of Pratham had with a parent in the community.

"Once Dr. Rukmini Banerji was in the field in West Bengal and was interacting with a parent. She asked the parent if she supports her child in their studies. The parent answered by saying no. To that, she asked 'why'. The parent said, 'I cannot read and write. How can I help my child?' To this expression, Rukmini said, 'When your child is unwell, are you able to identify?' The parent answered yes. Then Rukmini responded to her, 'You are not a doctor, right? Still, you touch the head and see if your child is okay. Similar techniques are there in education also. So if you have a child and you care for that child, you will do what is required for the child."

Insufficient financial resources and time availability pose significant challenges for parents in engaging with their child's learning.

Empirical studies conducted in emerging and high-income countries have established a link between income and the extent of parental involvement.[20] The lack of financial means restricts parents from acquiring educational materials like books and learning aids, essential for creating a print-rich home environment. Moreover, an unstable financial situation hinders parents from dedicating time to actively participate in school-related activities.[21] This situation is aggravated for families living in poverty-stricken areas. The poor living conditions start a cycle of social problems such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy which presents a situation where there are very young mothers — adolescent girls taking care of children.

"I have seen girls of age 15 with two children. They are themselves so young. Now, what do you do with them? Hence, understanding the context of parents, having data on the kind of families is very critical to decide where we should intervene."

– **Dr Suman Sachdeva**, UNICEF India

Along with income, the education levels of parents also matter.

Literacy, whether in terms of language or technology, presents a strong barrier to their engagement in the academic matters of their children. The following quote helps understand this situation.

"So, we make a lot of material, which the parents can access. When we do so, instead of having English voice notes, we use Hindi or the language they are comfortable with. Some parents can't read Hindi as well. So the trick here is to make your material literacy agnostic. There is a need for tools and resources that are literacy agnostic for parents but can help them support FLN."

– **Chandni Chopra**, Simple Education Foundation

Systemic Factors
A critical challenge faced by the ecosystem while planning and implementing parental engagement interventions is the lack of India-specific relevant research and data.

Saransh Vaswani, co-founder of Saajha highlighted that they had to spend a lot while seeking out relevant research on parent engagement specific to the context of India. Instead, they had to rely on the work of Joyce Epstein who worked in the context of the West. Hence, there is a need for research-specific parent engagement in India so that it helps determine the ways to address cultural diversity and work with parents from these unique experiences.

Data on parents and parent engagement interventions is also missing.

Since parent engagement is not one of the crucial indicators, there is no data on parents, their engagement, and its impact on learning. While starting any new intervention, gaps in this data impact the choice of programme locations or decisions about the type of intervention. This issue is explained further through the following quote:

"There is no data on parents, families, and the overall impact of parent engagement initiatives so far. When we started working in Delhi, we had all the student data, but the data on parents and families was not with the school and we actually created an entire database of parents and understood their profiles for planning our interventions. The gap impacts the speed at which the programme can move and penetrate and hence, it needs attention."

– **Chandni Chopra**, Simple Education Foundation

Lack of infrastructure obstructs parents' participation.

This includes both, the absence of **social infrastructure i.e. human resources** that equip parents with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective engagement, and the lack of **physical infrastructure** such as access to the internet, mobile phones, or learning spaces.

"Another thing that I think we are missing is systems. There are no effective structures to ensure parental hand-holding. There is a teacher, but they are already doing a number of things. There is a School Management Committee but they may not always be functional. Additionally, parents do not have any platforms for engaging and learning. It is not the case that they don't want to engage, but as a system, we completely lack the tools and structures to engage them."

— **Saransh Vaswani**, Saajha

Lack of unique funding is the most critical barrier that affects the penetration of parental engagement programmes.

While NEP as well as Nipun Bharat directives outline the action items for improving parental engagement, there is no budget for the same. This comes in the way of allocating resources for enabling parent engagement and hence, impacts the accountability with which initiatives for increasing parental engagement are handled.

"Unless we have a budget head stating parent engagement where we say that at least ₹10 or 20 per child would go to parent engagement, these interventions would not get their due attention."
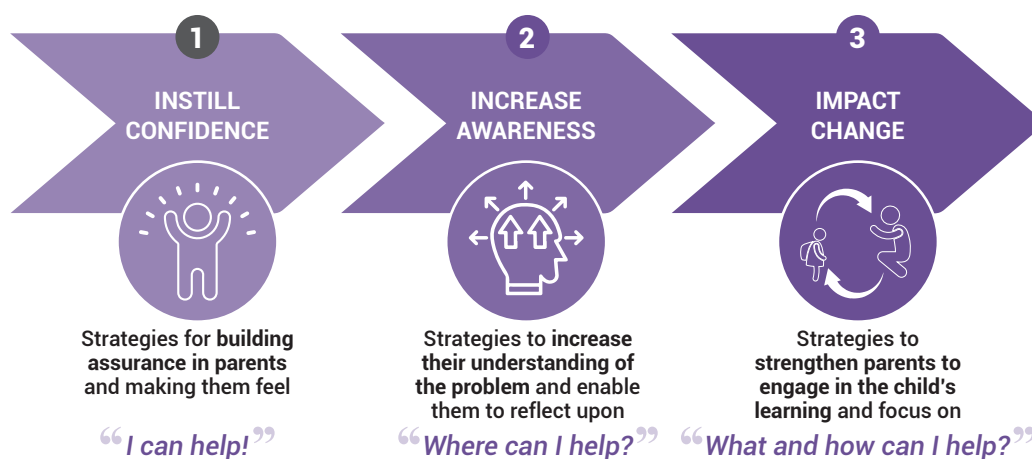
— **Mangal Pandey**, Key Education Foundation

Effective Interventions and Barriers to Overcome

In order to present the existing solutions for strengthening parental engagement, the perspective relies on an analysis of data from ten programmes from the foundational literacy and numeracy ecosystem and interviews with eleven expert practitioners. These examples emphasise the strategies and pathways adopted by organisations to solve different pieces of the complex puzzle of engaging mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings for the achievement of FLN outcomes.

An analysis of these interventions indicates that the strategies and pathways adopted by the organisations create an impact on one or more of the following components:

Figure 5: Categories of interventions/strategies that build parent engagement

1	**2**	**3**
INSTILL CONFIDENCE	**INCREASE AWARENESS**	**IMPACT CHANGE**
Strategies for **building assurance in parents** and making them feel	Strategies to **increase their understanding of the problem** and enable them to reflect upon	Strategies to **strengthen parents to engage in the child's learning** and focus on
I can help!	*Where can I help?*	*What and how can I help?*

The following section presents an inquiry into the nature of these strategies, their description, the spread of their implementation, the challenges faced by the organisations while implementing the same and the way they have overcome the same.

Category 1: Interventions focussing on strategies related to instilling confidence in parents

Usually, as parent engagement interventions are planned, organisations identify areas where parents can be involved in the child's learning and well-being. Typically, a package of activities is created for parents to be conducted with children. As important as it is to provide parents with these support activities, they do not create a deep impact unless parents consider themselves critical stakeholders in impacting the learning outcomes of the child. For example, multiple factors mentioned in the earlier section such as the parents' education qualification, socioeconomic status, and their exposure to schooling and work impacts this confidence. Hence, interventions that entail strategies consciously focusing on boosting the confidence of parents and making them feel assured about their role in the child's learning journey lead to sustained involvement of parents in the intervention.

One such example of strategies that focuses on this construct is by the Pratham Education Foundation. Their initiative of forming mothers' groups with 4-6 mothers in each group as a support system is a unique one. The Foundation has created about 20,000 mothers' groups that serve as safe spaces for mothers.

Geographies	Delhi, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana
Target Groups	• Mothers of children in preschools between ages 3-6 • Mothers of children going to primary schools between grades 1-5
Description of the Intervention	Before the onset of COVID, specifically around 2018, Pratham started engaging with mothers in the communities. Groups of mothers were created, oriented, and supported by the Pratham teams regularly and provided simple material to support children at home. It was done for mothers of children going to anganwadis and primary schools to support learning at home. These groups not only served well, but during COVID could be activated for supporting learning in children. For preschool interventions alone, 15,600 groups could be easily reached and activated as COVID set in.[22] In these groups, mothers conduct weekly meetings to discuss the learning agenda, go through the material sent, and share concerns about the activities they are performing with their child. A 'leader mother' is appointed by each group who leads the activities and discussions and constantly encourages other members to take the lead in activities. The 'leader mother' also changes over time, providing opportunities for other members of the group to take the lead role and practise various leadership and communication skills. Hence, once these groups are activated, they serve as a learning ground that eventually influences the trust mothers feel in themselves to participate in their child's learning. Groups across these fourteen states are not only utilising this space for their child's learning but are also creating it as a centre for capacity building. The following quote describes this: *"Be it health and nutrition, cooking, stitching, or even maths, whatever the women know, they teach that to each other. So, their interactions are not limited to teaching-learning but they truly explore and build on each other's strengths."* – **Smitin Brid,** Pratham Education Foundation With the success of mothers' groups, the Maharashtra Government has adopted this model where mothers' groups are now present across the state and have created a learning ecosystem in the community.

Key Success Factors	1. Providing a very concrete structure to the mothers' group along with clear instructions and responsibilities has helped the mothers hold on to tasks and participate regularly
	2. The presence of the role of the 'leader mother' has enabled the other members of the group. The individual who becomes the 'leader mother' not only supports others but the role itself is aspirational for mothers hence, boosting the motivation to do more.
	3. Patience and time needed to help the group function have been core success factors reported by the team. It was shared that some groups get easily activated, whereas others take time. This is also because the levels of motivation and the belief of the group members about their skills are low.
	"At times, a 'leader mother' is present. But she does not know that she is a leader. She is not aware of her qualities. It is truly a shift in perspective that mothers realise about themselves. We just have to wait quietly and support them to work together. They already know each other, they just need a common purpose to work together and feel good about the work they are doing."
	– **Samyukta Subramanian**, Pratham Education Foundation
Potential Challenges	1. For such changes to take place, time and persistence are needed but with limited time programme cycles and limited funding, it is difficult to demonstrate these changes.
	2. Some of these women are young girls who are married early. Hence understanding their motivations, aspirations, and needs is a critical part of engaging them, which unfortunately is not possible because of budget constraints.

Another example that fits into this category is that of Saajha. Since its inception, Saajha's goal has been to participate in parent engagement as a means to change learning situations. To date, it has worked in multiple geographies like Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Jharkhand. However, for the purpose of this perspective, their work from Delhi and Maharashtra is elaborated in the table below:

Geographies	Delhi and Maharashtra
Target Groups	• SMC members across 1,100 schools in Delhi • Parents from communities in Delhi • Parents of children from ashram schools in Maharashtra
Description of the Intervention	**Model 1: Work in Delhi through SMCs and Parental Networks** When Saajha started working in Delhi in 2014, it initiated work with 60 schools where they focused on strengthening SMCs. This work consisted of working with the SMC members; parents, teachers, principals, and others to engage them in focusing on learning outcomes. For this purpose, they wanted to use existing platforms, and hence, SMCs were the focus.

Description of the Intervention	Looking at the success of their intervention in 60 schools, the Delhi Government approached them to work across all 1,100 schools in Delhi. To help create SMCs as open and interactive structures, Saajha worked on various systems and processes.
	"We ensured that during an SMC meeting, all the members; parents as well as the school administration both are sitting on the same kind of seating; i.e. either all sit-down or all using chairs. Additionally, in every school, we actually put a list of things to do during parent-teacher meetings or SMC meetings. This list of behaviours actually became an important checklist for people."
	– Saransh Vaswani, Saajha
	These behavioural solutions also helped when they organised a mega parent-teacher mela (fair) across Delhi. These meetings created a very energetic atmosphere for parents to feel trust in the process and participate effectively. Additionally, as a part of their annual events, Saajha designed various panel discussions, specifically for parents as a platform for expression. Through the course of these inputs, the values of respect, empathy, and care were at the centre of all the programmes. The essence of these solutions is explained in the quote below:
	"I think what we were able to learn as well as establish very clearly with parental engagement is that dignity and respect are a strong central pillar. So, you can do 'N' number of practices; you can conduct parent-teacher meetings, and provide whatever messaging to parents, but if the parents don't feel cared for and respected when they are coming to school, it doesn't work."
	– Saransh Vaswani, Saajha
	Further to their work with SMCs, Saajha was trying to concretise their learnings where, around 2019, they moved to another phase of their programmes and created parental networks. These networks played a crucial role during COVID. These networks were aligned with Saajha's firm belief that systems and structures for parents to exchange ideas and support each other were a major need in India. For the same, Saajha designed an appropriate tech platform. The parental networks are now extremely active and to navigate the operations, for each group of parents, there is a 'champion parent'. This champion parent leads all kinds of assessment and learning activities for children in that group as well as helps the parents with any queries they may have. As of 2020, around 100,000 parents are a part of these networks.

Description of the Intervention	**Model 2: Sneh Setu in Maharashtra** As a response to COVID, Saajha facilitated volunteer-led direct conversations among 11,126 parents across Thane, Nashik, Nagpur, and Amravati districts as a part of their partnership with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for their programme in ashram schools in Maharashtra. These conversations were compassionate dialogues directed towards understanding the well-being of the family and identifying issues where the government could support them amidst the pandemic. The questions and conversations were related to topics ranging from ration and medical facilities at home to the learning levels of children. The team started with data collection about the families, gathering their contact details through calls. Data collectors were trained thoroughly before calls. The data from these calls were then analysed, and used to provide emergency relief to 133 families and resolve long-term grievances for others.[23]
Key Success Factors	1. Thorough planning to run this multi-stage project of 43 days enabled awareness as well as action to engage parents and resolve their challenges 2. Compassionate dialogues led to the development of trust among stakeholders. This led to increased openness in parents to receive input and support for their children. 3. The questions were simple and followed the MCQ format, which helped in the smooth implementation.
Potential Challenges	1. Network issues hindered the process of these dialogues. 2. The contact details of some parents were not updated, which affected outreach. 3. Sustaining the motivation of the volunteers and helping them maintain their emotional energy through these calls needed focused attention on their emotional and mental health.

Category 2: Interventions with strategies increasing awareness of parents

Awareness or realisation about the issue at hand provides clarity and leads to actionable insights, helping parents identify where they can participate in their child's learning. Interventions focussing on creating awareness are critical because they help parents make informed decisions and hence, increase their accountability and ownership. The awareness could be about a range of aspects such as the learning levels of the child, teaching-learning processes, and their rights and duties. Programmes focused on these outcomes create a space of equity where parents are not only implementing teaching-learning activities but also asking questions and trying to inquire more. Eventually, they make the learning space more accessible and less threatening for the parents.

A range of examples from the organisations studied as a part of the perspective fall into this category. These include the work done by Makkala Jagriti, Simple Education Foundation,

Pratham Education Foundation, and the Delhi Government. A glimpse of each of these interventions is mentioned below:

Makkala Jagriti is a Bangalore-based NGO working in the space of foundational literacy and numeracy with a special focus on the early years. Across their work in Karnataka with the government, they engage with parents to make them aware of the criticality of this age group and the kind of impact parents can create.

Geographies	Karnataka
Target Groups	Parents of children between ages 3-6
Description of the Intervention	In their work across anganwadis in Karnataka, Makkala Jagriti works with parents of children attending the anganwadis. As a mandate, mothers come and meet the teachers during monthly meetings. While these meetings were mostly related to the health and nutrition components, Makkala Jagriti activated these meetings to talk to parents about the criticality of early childhood education. They have developed a simple, picture-based module with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Science (NIMHANS), which includes a flip chart on brain development. It offers an explanation about the connection between biological, social and emotional development that helps parents with the rationale for engagement.
Key Success Factors	1. The simple, picture-based module helped parents understand the messages easily. 2. The focus of these conversations is to provide information to parents so that they are convinced about the criticality of early engagement.
Potential Challenges	1. Mobilisation of parents was, at times, a challenge. 2. Ensuring that the teacher continues to engage with the parent requires focused attention.

The Simple Education Foundation has invested in building three kinds of relationships; between parent and the child, between parent and the teacher and the parent and the school as a whole. The intent is to create awareness and ensure that parents feel equipped to act. They work with SMCs to help member parents understand their rights and responsibilities. This awareness shifts the power dynamics and provides more agency to the parents to participate across settings.

"In Delhi, many times, SMC members did not know their powers and responsibilities. So we have community associates who work with parents to explain to them about their roles and responsibilities, sensitise them about their powers, and the kind of things they can demand from school. There are a whole lot of socio-economic power dynamics that get shifted because of this."

– Chandni Chopra, Simple Education Foundation

The third case under this category is one where assessment is used as a tool for creating awareness.

Geographies	Delhi, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana
Target Groups	Parents of children entering grade 1
Description of the Intervention	Across their interventions for preschool children, Pratham organises fairs called School Readiness Melas. These melas are attended by parents of children who have completed anganwadi and are entering school. With the support of young volunteers, typically adolescents and youth from the village, these readiness fairs set up stalls where parents can get their children tested. The assessment is focused on all the five domains of development i.e. physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional. While these fairs are for assessing children, a spirit of celebration is created in the village where every household ensures that their neighbours are participating. The process of going through various counters and seeing their child perform tasks, itself helps parents understand the criticality of interventions. Towards the end, a report card of the child is handed over to the parents along with a bunch of simple activities that the parents can support. Parent engagement through these readiness melas creates a sense of curiosity among parents. The report card further provides them with information about how their child is doing and what kind of interventions would help the child.
Key Success Factors	1. The involvement of the local village youth, community and sarpanch in conducting the assessment has helped bring a certain level of sustainability. 2. A simple set of activities were conducted in the community during the fair and that provided very clear messages. 3. The assessments help inform parents but they do not pull their morale down. The set of activities given to parents along with the report card act as solutions for parents to help their children.
Potential Challenges	No major challenges

A similar experience highlighting the simplicity of activities was also shared in the context of interventions by the Delhi Government by the Chief Advisor to the Education Minister, Shailendra Sharma:

"When we launched Mission Buniyaad and started engaging with parents, there was a simple ladder diagram that teachers used to help parents understand the impact of them not supporting the child. The teachers used

to show the assessment report card on the ladder and say, "If you take your child to your village and don't attend the summer camp intervention, the child is going to step down.""

As can be seen across these interventions, high levels of awareness lead to increased buy-in hence, impacting the quality of parent participation positively. These activities also demystify education and make it seem accessible hence, encouraging the parents to do more.

Category 3: Interventions with strategies to help parents bring about change and participate in their child's learning

These strategies include content creation or simple activities for parents to do with their children at home. Compared to the other two categories of interventions, this one has a maximum number of programmes both from the public and private ecosystems. Under the PM eVidya scheme, initiatives such as DIKSHA, Swayam, Swayam Prabha TV, Gali Gali Sim Sim, NCERT's e-Pathshala, Project Smile, and many others were launched.

In the private space, Indian ed-tech startups received a total investment of ₹18,207 crore in 2020 alone, compared to 4,536 crore in 2019. Over 90 ed-tech players received funding in 2020, out of which 61 players received seed funding.[24] Online learning solutions for learners across India became the central discussion point. India also witnessed more than fifty organisations, NGOs and tech platforms creating online content for parents and children from underserved communities. These programmes were offered on platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, YouTube, Google Classroom, and similar spaces. While there is an abundance of these interventions, ensuring technology infrastructure in rural parts of the country and providing the agency of the device to vulnerable groups, especially girls, are gaps that need to be addressed.

Online content creation which skyrocketed during COVID, sustained post-COVID as well. Simple activities that parents could do with their children at home are a key focus area for multiple organisations working in the FLN space, such as the Key Education Foundation (KEF), Rocket Learning and Pratham Education Foundation. The KEF model is elaborated below.

| Geographies	Karnataka
Target Groups	Parents of children between ages 3-8
Description of the Intervention	Established in 2017, the Key Education Foundation worked deeply with parents of children between ages 3-8 to supplement learning and to achieve FLN outcomes. Through its CLAP Project, KEF is supporting the transition of children to school as well as strengthening their competencies.

Description of the Intervention	CLAP is an AI-enabled, WhatsApp-based programme for parents with children aged between 3-8. It brings together the most effective early learning activities that can be easily done at home by parents in less than 30 minutes a day. CLAP will help children practise the foundational skills they need to easily transition back to school. It is a free programme where parents can access over 100 activities in the language of their choice, currently available in Kannada, Hindi, and English.
	KEF is working closely with the government to systematise these efforts to ensure quality intervention at scale. To operationalise this, teachers are trained especially for parent engagement by the KEF team. While the programme focuses on providing simple to-do activities at home through worksheets and otherwise, parents are also oriented to look at the concept of learning differently.
	"Typically, parents think that when the child writes a lot, he or she is learning. It is a feeling of pride when the child has filled pages in the notebook. We don't negate that but help parents understand that learning can also be seen in how the child talks, how the child expresses or children play."
	– Mangal Pandey, Key Education Foundation
	Additionally, all the training and interactions with parents focus on helping them understand the 'why' behind any activity. This clarity helps parents implement the activities effectively.
Key Success Factors	1. Simple, easy-to-do activities which parents can conduct with minimal support.
	2. Focus on a continuum of age groups.
	3. The activities have been a result of multiple research studies and have been vetted by experts.
	4. Teacher training to engage with and support parents is a critical modality that is helping in the long-term sustainability of the programme.
Potential Challenges	Technology penetration at times comes in the way of parents' participation.

How Can Funders Intervene to Strengthen Parent Engagement?

Across the three categories of interventions, funders can accelerate the pace and enhance the depth of parent engagement by investing in the following areas.

Figure 6: Areas of investment for funders to accelerate parent engagement
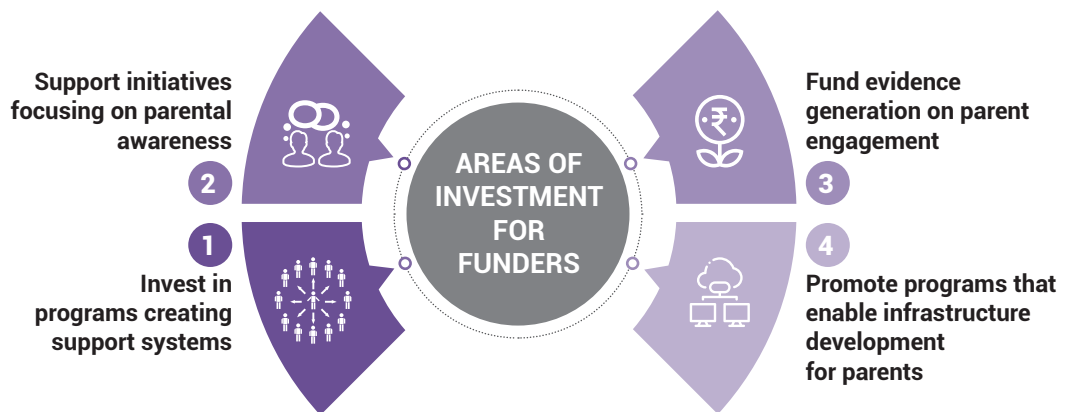
Action points for each area of investment are mentioned below:

1. **Invest in programmes creating support systems for parents to make them feel cared for, respected and confident to participate in their child's learning.**
   a. Support interventions leveraging groups as a mechanism for programming. For example, mothers' groups, and other parental networks.
   b. Provide capital to enable the capacity building of parents in their strength areas so that they feel equipped and self-reliant.

2. **Support initiatives focusing on parental awareness so that parents understand the issue at hand and make informed decisions for supporting their children.**
   a. Invest in the creation of modules on parenting as a concept.
   b. Promote interventions that use assessment as a tool to engage parents.

3. **Fund evidence generation on parent engagement so that practitioners can make effective programmatic decisions.**
   a. Support India-specific research and theory building on parent engagement.
   b. Invest in the creation of data dashboards and portals enabling the updation of data on parents, the status of their involvement, etc.

4. Promote programmes that enable infrastructure development for parents so that they have access to systems that help them participate in their child's learning.
   a. Provide capital for technology infrastructure (devices, internet) for remote interventions.
   b. Ensure the creation of spaces in the community, such as community learning centres, that help parents learn and stay updated.

Funding efforts across these areas would empower parents to be engaged in their children's learning process and enable accountability for ensuring FLN outcomes.

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