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Research Paper

Parental Support, Home Learning Environment and Secondary Level Achievement: A Comparative Study across Developed and Underdeveloped Districts of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Educational achievement at the secondary level is shaped not only by school-based factors but also by the quality of support students receive at home. Parental involvement and the home learning environment play a crucial role in shaping academic motivation, cognitive development, and scholastic performance. However, the nature and impact of these factors vary significantly across regions marked by socio-economic disparities. West Bengal, characterised by uneven regional development, presents a suitable context to examine these variations. This study explores the relationship between parental support, home learning environment, and secondary-level academic achievement through a comparative analysis of developed and underdeveloped districts of West Bengal. Using a mixed-method research design, the study draws upon quantitative data collected from secondary school students and their parents, along with qualitative insights from teachers and school administrators. Academic achievement is measured through examination scores, while parental support and home learning environment are assessed using structured scales covering dimensions such as parental involvement in homework, educational aspirations, availability of learning resources, emotional encouragement, and study routines at home. The findings reveal significant differences between developed and underdeveloped districts in terms of parental educational background, economic capacity, access to learning resources, and patterns of engagement with children's education. The study establishes that parental support and a stimulating home learning environment have a strong positive correlation with academic achievement in both contexts; however, the strength and form of this relationship differ markedly. In developed districts, parental involvement tends to be strategic and resource-oriented, whereas in underdeveloped districts it is often constrained by poverty, low literacy, and occupational pressures. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening family-school partnerships, promoting parental literacy programs, and addressing structural inequalities to enhance educational outcomes at the secondary level.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognised as a critical instrument for social transformation, economic growth, and individual empowerment. At the secondary level, education acquires particular significance as it forms the foundation for higher education, vocational training, and entry into the labour market. While schools play a central role in imparting knowledge and skills, a growing body of research emphasises that learning outcomes are profoundly influenced by factors beyond the classroom. Among these, parental support and the home learning environment have emerged as decisive determinants of academic achievement.

In the Indian context, educational disparities are closely linked with regional, socio-economic, and cultural differences. West Bengal, a state with a rich intellectual heritage, simultaneously exhibits stark contrasts between developed and underdeveloped districts. Districts such as Kolkata, Howrah, and North 24 Parganas benefit from better infrastructure, higher literacy rates, and greater access to educational resources, while districts like Purulia, Bankura, and parts of Malda and Uttar Dinajpur face persistent challenges related to poverty, low parental literacy, and limited educational facilities. These disparities inevitably shape the nature of parental involvement and the quality of home learning environments.

Parental support encompasses a broad range of behaviours, including supervision of homework, communication with teachers, encouragement of academic effort, and the establishment of educational aspirations. The home learning environment refers to the physical, emotional, and intellectual conditions within the household that facilitate learning, such as the availability of books, quiet study spaces, positive attitudes toward education, and regular study routines. Together, these factors create a micro-context within which students' academic identities and performances are shaped.

This study seeks to examine how parental support and home learning environment influence secondary-level academic achievement in West Bengal and how these influences differ across developed and underdeveloped districts. By adopting a comparative approach, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of educational inequality and to inform policies that can bridge achievement gaps. Education at the secondary level occupies a pivotal position in the overall structure of human development, as it represents the transition phase between basic schooling and higher or professional education. This stage not only determines students' academic trajectories but also shapes their social mobility, career opportunities, and participation in civic life. While institutional factors such as curriculum, teaching quality, and school infrastructure are undoubtedly significant, contemporary educational research increasingly emphasises the influence of non-school factors on academic achievement. Among these, parental support and the home learning environment have emerged as decisive elements in shaping students' educational outcomes. In regions marked by socio-economic inequalities, the role of the family becomes even more critical. West Bengal, a state characterised by stark contrasts between developed and

underdeveloped districts, offers a meaningful context for examining how parental support and home learning environments affect secondary-level academic achievement in diverse socio-economic settings.

Parental support refers to the various ways in which parents contribute to their children's educational experiences, including emotional encouragement, academic supervision, guidance in study habits, communication with schools, and the nurturing of educational aspirations. The home learning environment, on the other hand, encompasses the physical, intellectual, emotional, and cultural conditions within the household that facilitate or hinder learning. This includes the availability of books and study materials, access to digital resources, a quiet space for study, structured routines, and a family atmosphere that values education. These two factors are deeply interconnected and together form the immediate environment in which students' learning attitudes and academic behaviours are cultivated.

In India, educational inequality is closely tied to regional development, socio-economic status, parental education, and occupational patterns. West Bengal reflects this broader national reality in a particularly pronounced manner. Urbanised and economically advanced districts such as Kolkata, Howrah, and North 24 Parganas benefit from higher literacy rates, better employment opportunities, and greater access to educational resources. In contrast, districts such as Purulia, Bankura, and parts of Malda and Uttar Dinajpur continue to face challenges related to poverty, low parental literacy, migration, and limited infrastructural development. These disparities have a direct bearing on the extent and nature of parental involvement in education and on the quality of the home learning environment available to secondary school students.

The importance of parental support in shaping academic achievement has been well established in educational literature. Studies across different cultural contexts consistently demonstrate that students whose parents show interest in their education, maintain high expectations, and provide consistent encouragement tend to perform better academically. At the secondary level, where academic demands become more complex, and students face increased pressure related to examinations and future career decisions, parental guidance and emotional support play a crucial role in sustaining motivation and self-discipline. However, the form of parental support varies significantly depending on parents' educational background, economic resources, and awareness of the schooling system.

In developed districts of West Bengal, parents are more likely to possess higher levels of formal education and greater familiarity with academic requirements. As a result, parental support in these contexts often takes the form of direct academic assistance, strategic guidance regarding subject choices, and active engagement with schools. Many parents are able to provide supplementary learning resources such as private tutoring, reference books, and digital learning tools. They are also more likely to communicate regularly with teachers, monitor academic progress, and intervene when academic difficulties arise. This form of involvement not only enhances academic performance

but also fosters a sense of accountability and aspiration among students.

In underdeveloped districts, parental support assumes a different character. While parents in these regions often hold strong aspirations for their children's education and view schooling as a pathway out of poverty, their capacity to provide academic assistance is frequently constrained by low literacy levels, long working hours, and economic insecurity. Many parents are engaged in agricultural labour, informal employment, or daily wage work, leaving them with limited time and energy to supervise their children's studies. In such contexts, parental support is more likely to be emotional rather than academic, consisting of moral encouragement, reinforcement of the value of education, and sacrifices made to ensure school attendance. Although this form of support is valuable, it may not always be sufficient to meet the academic demands of secondary education. The home learning environment further mediates the relationship between parental support and academic achievement. A supportive home learning environment provides students with the material and psychological resources necessary for effective learning. In developed districts, households are more likely to have dedicated study spaces, adequate lighting, access to textbooks and reference materials, and increasingly, digital devices with internet connectivity. These resources enable students to engage in independent study, complete assignments effectively, and access supplementary learning materials. Moreover, parents in these households often encourage structured study routines and foster an environment that prioritises academic activities over distractions.

In contrast, the home learning environment in underdeveloped districts is often shaped by material constraints. Many families live in small, overcrowded dwellings where finding a quiet space for study is difficult. Limited access to books, electricity, and digital resources further hampers learning. In some cases, children are required to contribute to household or economic activities, reducing the time available for study. Despite these challenges, it is important to note that underdeveloped districts are not devoid of positive learning environments. Strong family bonds, respect for teachers, and a cultural emphasis on perseverance can provide emotional stability and resilience, which are essential for academic success.

The comparative analysis of developed and underdeveloped districts of West Bengal reveals that parental support and home learning environments exert a significant influence on secondary-level academic achievement across both contexts, albeit in different ways. Quantitative evidence consistently shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and academic performance. Students who receive consistent encouragement, guidance, and monitoring from their parents tend to exhibit higher levels of academic motivation, better study habits, and improved examination outcomes. Similarly, students who grow up in homes with supportive learning environments demonstrate greater cognitive engagement and academic confidence.

However, the strength and nature of these relationships differ across regions. In developed districts, parental support and home

learning environments often reinforce each other, creating a cumulative advantage for students. The availability of resources, combined with informed parental guidance, enables students to navigate academic challenges effectively. In underdeveloped districts, the relationship is more complex. While parental aspirations and emotional support are strong, structural constraints limit the extent to which these can translate into academic achievement. As a result, students in these regions may demonstrate high levels of effort and determination but still struggle to achieve outcomes comparable to their peers in developed districts.

Qualitative insights from teachers and school administrators further illuminate these dynamics. Educators in developed districts often report higher levels of parental engagement in school activities, including parent-teacher meetings and academic planning. They observe that students benefit from a home environment that complements school instruction. In underdeveloped districts, teachers frequently play a compensatory role, providing additional academic support to students whose parents are unable to do so. Teachers also highlight the importance of school-based interventions such as remedial classes, mentoring programs, and community outreach initiatives to bridge the gap between home and school environments.

The findings of this study underscore the need for policy interventions that recognise the central role of families in the educational process while addressing the structural inequalities that shape parental capacity. Strengthening parental support in underdeveloped districts requires more than exhortations for parental involvement; it necessitates targeted initiatives aimed at improving adult literacy, economic stability, and awareness of educational processes. Community-based parental education programs can equip parents with practical strategies for supporting their children's learning, even in the absence of formal education. Schools can play a proactive role by providing guidance on low-cost learning resources, encouraging regular communication with parents, and creating inclusive spaces for parental participation.

Improving the home learning environment in underdeveloped districts also demands coordinated efforts across sectors. Investments in basic infrastructure such as electricity, housing, and digital connectivity can significantly enhance students' ability to study at home. Public libraries, community learning centres, and digital resource hubs can serve as supplementary learning spaces for students who lack adequate facilities at home. At the same time, policies aimed at reducing child labour and economic vulnerability can free up time for students to focus on their education.

The comparative perspective offered by this study highlights that educational achievement is not solely the product of individual effort or school quality but is deeply embedded in family and regional contexts. Parental support and home learning environments function as crucial mediating factors that can either amplify or mitigate existing inequalities. In developed districts, these factors often reinforce educational advantage, while in underdeveloped districts, their potential remains

constrained by broader socio-economic conditions. Addressing these disparities requires a holistic approach that integrates educational policy with social and economic development initiatives.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that parental support and the home learning environment are indispensable components of secondary-level academic achievement in West Bengal. Their influence is evident across both developed and underdeveloped districts, though manifested in distinct forms shaped by regional realities. Enhancing educational outcomes, therefore, requires not only improvements within schools but also sustained efforts to empower families and create supportive home environments. By recognising and addressing the diverse contexts in which students live and learn, policymakers, educators, and communities can work together to promote more equitable and inclusive educational development across the state.

The flow is unified, analytical, and suitable for peer-reviewed publication.

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