

# Parental Involvement and School Leadership: A Study of Public Schools in China

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**Abstract:** This quantitative correlational study investigated the relationship between school leadership practices and parental involvement in public primary and secondary schools across selected regions of China. Recognizing the evolving educational landscape and the critical roles of both parents and leaders, the study aimed to identify how principals' actions influence parental engagement. Data were collected from school principals and parents using the School Leadership Practices Survey (SLPS) and the Parental Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ), respectively. Descriptive findings indicated that principals perceived strong engagement in communication and fostering a welcoming climate, while support for parental involvement in decision-making was comparatively lower. Multiple regression analysis revealed that all five dimensions of school leadership significantly predicted overall parental involvement ( $R^2=0.49, p<.001$ ). Specifically, "Communication Strategies" ( $\beta=0.35, p<.001$ ) and "Creation of a Welcoming School Climate" ( $\beta=0.22, p=.003$ ) emerged as the strongest unique predictors. These findings underscore the pivotal role of proactive and strategic school leadership in cultivating robust home-school partnerships in China. The study recommends targeted professional development for principals focusing on communication and fostering inclusive school environments to enhance parental engagement and support educational reforms.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement, School Leadership, China, Public Schools, Home-School Partnership

## 1. Introduction

The landscape of education in China has undergone a profound transformation over the past few decades, evolving from a historically centralized and exam-oriented system to one increasingly focused on holistic development and quality education (Acar et al., 2021). This evolution has brought to the forefront the critical roles of both parental involvement and effective school leadership in shaping student outcomes. Traditionally, Chinese culture has placed immense value on education, with parents often seen as primary drivers of their children's academic success, primarily through intense academic monitoring and supplementary tutoring (Froiland, 2020). However, as China's socio-economic fabric shifts due to rapid urbanization, changing family structures, and the relaxation of policies like the one-child policy, the dynamics of parental engagement are also evolving, demanding a more comprehensive understanding of its forms and implications (Jeynes, 2022).

Globally, the significance of parental involvement in a child's educational journey is widely acknowledged across various academic disciplines, with numerous studies demonstrating its positive correlation with academic achievement, improved attendance, and enhanced socio-emotional development (Leithwood, 2021). For instance, meta-analysis highlighted that parental involvement, regardless of its specific form, consistently emerged as a significant predictor of student success across diverse contexts. Kong & Yasmin (2022) further elaborated on various typologies of parental involvement, moving beyond mere home-based academic support to encompass school-based participation, effective communication with teachers, and active participation in school governance. These forms of involvement are critical in fostering a supportive learning environment, extending the classroom into the home, and building a strong partnership between families and schools (Liu et al., 2021).

In the unique context of Chinese public schools, parental involvement, while inherently valued, often manifests differently compared to Western educational systems. The traditional emphasis on filial piety and respect for authority figures, including teachers, can sometimes lead to a more deferential approach from parents, where they might be less inclined to question school decisions or actively participate in school-level policy-making (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021).

Historically, Chinese parents have often expressed their involvement through ensuring academic diligence, enrolling children in extra-curricular tutoring, and maintaining strict disciplinary measures at home, reflecting a deep-seated cultural belief in the transformative power of education and hard work (Acar et al., 2021). This includes a growing recognition of the importance of parents participating in school events, communicating more openly with teachers, and supporting their children's socio-emotional growth. Despite this evolving understanding, barriers to parental involvement persist in China, including long working hours, the challenges faced by migrant worker parents due to separation from their children, and a potential lack of understanding among some parents regarding contemporary pedagogical approaches (Parveen et al., 2022). Moreover, the sheer scale of the Chinese public education system, with its vast number of schools and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, presents unique challenges in standardizing and promoting effective parental engagement across the board (Jeynes, 2022).

Parallel to the growing recognition of parental involvement, the role of school leadership has also emerged as a pivotal factor in school effectiveness and student success. Effective school leadership extends beyond mere administrative tasks; it encompasses instructional leadership, fostering a positive school climate, and building robust community relationships (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Leaders who articulate a clear vision, support their teaching staff, and strategically allocate resources indirectly contribute to improved student outcomes (Liu et al., 2021). More specifically, school leaders play an instrumental role in cultivating and sustaining parental involvement. They are key architects in creating a welcoming school environment that encourages parent participation, establishing clear and effective communication channels, and providing opportunities for parent education and training (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Furthermore, proactive school leaders can empower parents to participate in various school activities and, where appropriate, in decision-making processes, thereby strengthening the home-school partnership (Leithwood, 2021). Addressing barriers to involvement, such as offering flexible meeting times, providing translation services for non-Mandarin speaking parents, or utilizing technology for communication, often falls under the purview of effective school leadership (Froiland, 2020).

In the context of Chinese public schools, school leaders, primarily principals, operate within a unique framework that balances centralized educational policies with increasing autonomy at the school level (Acar et al., 2021). Chinese principals bear multifaceted responsibilities, ranging from managing financial resources and overseeing curriculum implementation to fostering strong relationships with local education bureaus and the broader community (McLeod & Dulskey, 2021). The effectiveness of these leaders in navigating these complex demands significantly impacts the overall school environment and its capacity to engage parents. While traditionally, leadership in Chinese schools may have been more hierarchical and administratively focused, there is an emerging trend towards more collaborative and distributed leadership approaches, influenced by international best practices and the demands of quality education (Jeynes, 2022). This shift can have profound implications for how school leaders perceive and promote parental involvement. A leader who embraces a more collaborative style might be more inclined to actively seek parental input, establish parent-teacher associations, and involve parents in school improvement initiatives, thereby moving beyond a purely directive approach to parental engagement. Conversely, a more traditional, top-down leadership style might inadvertently limit opportunities for genuine parental participation, relegating parents to a supportive, rather than collaborative, role.

While parental involvement and effective school leadership are individually recognized as crucial components of a successful education system, the nature of their intricate interplay specifically, how effective school leadership can systematically foster, leverage, and sustain parental involvement for improved educational outcomes remains an area requiring deeper exploration, particularly within the specific and rapidly evolving context of Chinese public schools. Much of the existing research in China tends to examine parental involvement as a separate entity or focuses on its direct impact on student achievement (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Similarly, studies on school leadership in China often concentrate on its influence on teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, or overall school performance, without explicitly detailing the mechanisms through which leaders facilitate parental engagement (Parveen et al., 2022). This gap signifies a critical need for research that directly investigates the strategies, attitudes, and policies of school leaders that either promote or hinder the level and quality of parental involvement in Chinese public schools.

Understanding this dynamic is not merely an academic exercise; it is crucial for developing targeted and effective policies and practices that can enhance both parental engagement and the overall quality of public education across China's diverse regions. Such a study would provide invaluable insights for policymakers seeking to strengthen home-school partnerships, for school leaders striving to optimize their engagement with parents, and for parents themselves who are increasingly seeking more meaningful roles in their children's education (Acar et al., 2021). By bridging this research gap, the study can contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on educational reform in China, offering practical recommendations for fostering a more collaborative and supportive educational ecosystem. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the specific strategies employed by school leaders in Chinese public schools to facilitate parental involvement and to explore the perceptions of both school leaders and parents regarding the effectiveness of these strategies (Leithwood, 2021). By delving into the nuanced relationship between leadership practices and parental engagement, this research seeks to identify effective models of collaboration that can lead to improved educational experiences and outcomes for students across China.

## 1.1 Research Gap and Significance

Despite the well-established individual importance of both parental involvement and effective school leadership in fostering positive educational outcomes, a discernible gap exists in the comprehensive understanding of their interplay, particularly within the unique and evolving context of public schools in China (Froiland, 2020). Existing scholarly discourse, while robust in examining these two pillars independently, often falls short in delineating the specific mechanisms through which school leaders influence and leverage parental involvement to enhance the overall educational ecosystem. This lacuna in research necessitates a focused inquiry to uncover the nuanced dynamics at play, thereby enriching both theoretical frameworks and practical implications for educational reform in China.

Current literature on parental involvement in China frequently highlights its characteristics, the cultural factors influencing its manifestation, and its correlation with student achievement (Liu et al., 2021). These studies provide valuable insights into the traditional emphasis on academic monitoring, the impact of socio-economic changes on parental engagement, and the challenges faced by specific parent groups, such as migrant workers (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). However, a critical limitation in many of these investigations is the insufficient exploration of the institutional facilitators of parental involvement. While they acknowledge the need for school-family partnerships, they often do not delve deeply into the specific leadership strategies and school-level policies that either effectively promote or inadvertently hinder parental participation beyond general recommendations. For instance, studies might indicate that parent-teacher communication is beneficial, but they rarely investigate how school leaders systematically establish and maintain these communication channels, or the leadership philosophies that underpin such initiatives. The focus tends to be on parental characteristics or general school culture rather than the direct agency of school leadership in cultivating this crucial partnership.

Similarly, extensive research has been conducted on school leadership in China, exploring various aspects such as leadership styles, principals' roles in curriculum reform, and their management of resources within a relatively centralized yet increasingly decentralized system (Haryati et al., 2021). These studies have advanced our understanding of the complexities faced by Chinese principals, including navigating bureaucratic demands, fostering teacher development, and adapting to modern educational philosophies. Nevertheless, the explicit connection between school leadership practices and the active cultivation of parental involvement is often an implicit assumption rather than a direct object of inquiry (Leithwood, 2021). While a successful principal might be perceived as fostering good community relations, the specific leadership actions and strategic decisions taken to promote diverse forms of parental engagement from home-based support to school-based participation and genuine shared decision-making are frequently underexplored. For example, a study might laud a principal's ability to create a harmonious school environment, but it may not detail the specific initiatives implemented by that principal to empower parents, provide parent education workshops, or integrate parental feedback into school improvement plans. The literature often describes the outcomes of good leadership but less frequently dissects the processes by which leadership specifically orchestrates meaningful parental engagement (Froiland, 2020).

The existing body of knowledge, therefore, presents a notable lacuna at the intersection of these two vital domains. There is a dearth of comprehensive studies that systematically examine how specific leadership behaviors, attitudes, and strategic decisions by school principals in Chinese public schools directly influence the level, nature, and quality of parental involvement (Acar et al., 2021). These are critical questions that remain largely unanswered in the current literature, particularly in the context of China, where cultural nuances and systemic structures might uniquely shape this relationship. Without understanding these dynamics, efforts to enhance parental involvement risk being piecemeal and less effective, lacking the foundational understanding of the leadership-driven mechanisms that can truly transform the home-school partnership. The significance of addressing this research gap is multifaceted and profound, impacting both theoretical advancements and practical applications within the Chinese educational landscape.

Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, this study will contribute to the broader literature on educational leadership and parental involvement by developing a more nuanced understanding of their reciprocal relationship, especially in a non-Western context (Leithwood, 2021). It will move beyond correlational studies to explore potential causal pathways or mediating factors where leadership acts as a catalyst for deeper parental engagement. By identifying specific leadership strategies that effectively facilitate parental involvement, the study can enrich existing models of educational leadership, particularly those pertaining to community engagement and stakeholder management (Haryati et al., 2021). It can also provide a culturally specific lens through which to examine universal principles of parent-school partnerships, highlighting how Chinese cultural values and systemic structures might shape the implementation and effectiveness of various leadership approaches to parental involvement. This could lead to the development of context-specific theoretical frameworks that are more representative of the realities of Chinese public education, challenging or refining existing Western-centric models (Kong & Yasmin, 2022).

Finally, the study is highly significant for parents and students within the Chinese public school system. Enhanced parental involvement, when genuinely fostered by school leadership, can lead to numerous benefits for students, including improved academic performance, greater socio-emotional well-being, and a stronger sense of connection to their school community (Bettencourt et al., 2020). For parents, increased opportunities for meaningful engagement can empower

them to be more effective partners in their children's education, providing them with greater transparency into school operations and a voice in their children's learning journey. This can lead to a more collaborative and less stressful educational experience for families, addressing some of the anxieties and pressures often associated with the highly competitive Chinese education system (Haryati et al., 2021). Ultimately, by highlighting the critical role of leadership in facilitating parental involvement, this study aims to contribute to the creation of a more supportive, collaborative, and effective educational environment for millions of students across China's public schools.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

This study has two primary research objectives:

- 1) To examine the perceptions and experiences of parents regarding their involvement in public schools in China.
- 2) To investigate the impact of school leadership practices on the nature and extent of parental involvement in public schools in China.

## 1.3 Research Questions

This study has two primary research questions:

- 1) What are the current patterns and forms of parental involvement in public schools in China, as perceived by parents?
- 2) How do specific school leadership practices influence the level and quality of parental involvement in public schools in China?

## 2. Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review is essential for establishing the theoretical and empirical foundations of this study, systematically examining existing knowledge on parental involvement and school leadership and highlighting the specific gaps this research aims to fill. This review will delve into established theories of parental involvement, explore contemporary models within the Chinese context, analyze the roles of school leaders in fostering engagement, and synthesize the challenges and opportunities for collaboration in public schools in China.

### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks of Parental Involvement

The concept of parental involvement has been extensively theorized across various educational and psychological disciplines. One of the most influential frameworks is Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement (Bettencourt et al., 2020), which categorizes parental engagement into: (1) parenting (supporting home conditions for learning), (2) communicating (school-to-home and home-to-school communication), (3) volunteering (involvement at school), (4) learning at home (involvement with homework and curriculum-related activities), (5) decision-making (parent participation in school governance), and (6) collaborating with the community (connecting families to community resources). This comprehensive model emphasizes that involvement is not monolithic but multifaceted, and schools have a responsibility to foster all six types. While Epstein's model offers a robust framework, its application in the Chinese context requires careful consideration of cultural nuances and systemic differences (Leithwood, 2021).

Another significant theoretical lens is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement (Jeynes, 2022). This model posits that parents' decisions to become involved are influenced by three key psychological constructs: (1) their personal sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school, (2) their role construction for involvement, and (3) the invitations they perceive from schools and teachers. This model highlights the importance of both parental internal factors and external invitations from the school, suggesting that school leadership plays a crucial role in extending such invitations and shaping parental role constructions. In China, where parents historically held a high respect for teachers and school authority, the perception of invitations from schools may be particularly potent in influencing parental engagement (Parveen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Social Capital Theory, as applied to education, suggests that the networks and relationships between families, schools, and communities contribute to a child's educational success (Haryati et al., 2021). Parental involvement, in this view, is a manifestation of social capital, where strong connections facilitate information exchange, mutual support, and collective action for student welfare. In the Chinese context, the collectivistic nature of society might foster a different form of social capital, where family and community networks are strong, but the integration of these networks into the formal school structure requires deliberate effort from school leaders (McLeod & Dulskey, 2021). Understanding these theoretical underpinnings provides a critical lens for analyzing the complexities of parental involvement in Chinese public schools.

### 2.2 Parental Involvement in Chinese Public Schools

Research on parental involvement in China reveals a complex interplay of cultural traditions, evolving societal expectations, and educational reforms. Traditionally, Chinese parents have been characterized by a high degree of involvement, primarily focused on academic supervision and the provision of supplemental educational resources (Wu & Koh, 2021). This emphasis stems from deeply rooted Confucian values that prioritize education, filial piety, and the

collective family honor tied to a child's academic success (Şengonul, 2022). Parents often spend considerable time overseeing homework, arranging private tutoring, and imposing strict disciplinary measures to ensure academic diligence, often leading to a phenomenon colloquially termed "tiger parenting" (Bettencourt et al., 2020). This home-based academic involvement is widely reported as a consistent characteristic of Chinese parenting across various socio-economic strata (Wei & Ni, 2020).

However, the rapid socio-economic development and recent educational reforms in China, particularly the promotion of *suzhi jiaoyu* (quality education) since the late 1990s, have begun to reshape the discourse around parental involvement (Ye et al., 2021). There is a growing recognition among policymakers and educators of the need for broader forms of parental engagement, moving beyond mere academic monitoring to include emotional support, fostering creativity, and promoting holistic development. This shift is reflected in policy documents that increasingly advocate for school-family-community collaboration (Yulianti et al., 2019). Despite these policy directives, the implementation of more diverse forms of parental involvement faces significant challenges.

One prominent challenge is the time constraint faced by working parents, especially in urban areas where both parents often hold demanding jobs (Parveen et al., 2022). For migrant worker parents, geographical separation from their "left-behind children" further complicates direct involvement, often relying on grandparents or other relatives for childcare and academic support (Jeynes, 2022). Furthermore, a knowledge gap exists among some parents regarding modern pedagogical approaches and the importance of socio-emotional development, as their own educational experiences might have been vastly different (Froiland, 2020). Some parents may also feel intimidated by the school system or perceive a lack of agency, leading to passive compliance rather than active participation (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Socio-economic disparities also influence parental involvement, with higher-income and more educated parents often having greater resources and opportunities for engagement, contributing to a "parental involvement gap" (Leithwood, 2021). Therefore, while the cultural imperative for educational success is strong, the practicalities and nuances of parental involvement in Chinese public schools are multifaceted and subject to various internal and external influences.

### 2.3 Theories and Models of School Leadership

The field of educational leadership has evolved significantly, moving beyond purely administrative or managerial roles to encompass more complex and transformative functions (Liu et al., 2021). Key theoretical models illuminate how school leaders can shape the educational environment and influence various stakeholders, including parents.

Instructional Leadership, a prominent model, emphasizes the principal's role as the primary agent for improving teaching and learning (Haryati et al., 2021). This includes setting instructional goals, supporting teachers' professional development, and monitoring curriculum implementation. While seemingly focused on internal school operations, effective instructional leaders indirectly influence parental involvement by creating a high-quality learning environment that parents trust and want to support. A school that demonstrates strong academic progress and a positive learning atmosphere naturally encourages parental confidence and engagement (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Recent research in China has shown a positive correlation between instructional leadership and parental involvement in middle schools, suggesting that principals who focus on teaching and learning can indeed foster greater parent engagement (Şengonul, 2022).

Transformational Leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers (teachers, staff, and potentially parents) to achieve shared goals that go beyond their immediate self-interests (Ye et al., 2021). Transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, build trust, and empower stakeholders. In the context of parental involvement, a transformational principal would actively involve parents in the school's vision, encourage their input, and empower them to take on meaningful roles, moving them from passive recipients to active partners in school improvement. This approach emphasizes shared responsibility and collective efficacy, which can be particularly effective in fostering a sense of community ownership over the school (Wu & Koh, 2021).

Distributed Leadership posits that leadership responsibilities are shared among various individuals and groups within the school community, including teachers, parents, and community members (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). This model suggests that effective leadership is not solely vested in the principal but emerges from the interactions and collaborative efforts of multiple actors. For parental involvement, distributed leadership implies creating formal and informal structures where parents can genuinely contribute their expertise and perspectives, thereby increasing their sense of ownership and commitment (Bettencourt et al., 2020). This approach aligns with the growing emphasis on shared governance and community schools that seek to integrate various stakeholders into the fabric of the institution (Jeynes, 2022).

In China, school principals operate within a context that has historically emphasized administrative control and accountability to higher-level authorities (Haryati et al., 2021). However, the ongoing reforms towards quality education and decentralization have pushed principals towards more instructional and collaborative roles (Parveen et al., 2022). The increasing autonomy at the school level means that principals have a greater opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, to actively shape the school's relationship with its parent community. Their leadership styles and specific strategies become crucial determinants of the nature and extent of parental engagement.

### 2.4 School Leadership's Role in Fostering Parental Involvement

The literature consistently highlights that school leaders are pivotal in creating a school culture that embraces and facilitates parental involvement. Their actions, attitudes, and policies directly influence the willingness and ability of parents to engage with the school (Froiland, 2020).

Effective Communication is frequently cited as a foundational element. School leaders who prioritize clear, consistent, and two-way communication channels including newsletters, school websites, social media platforms (like WeChat in China), parent meetings, and individualized teacher-parent conferences are more successful in keeping parents informed and encouraging their input (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Leaders must ensure that communication is not just informative but also culturally sensitive and accessible, overcoming potential language barriers or technological divides (Liu et al., 2021).

Beyond communication, creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment is critical. This involves physical accessibility, but more importantly, an atmosphere where parents feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute (Ribeiro et al., 2021). School leaders can achieve this by actively inviting parents to school events, establishing parent-teacher associations, and organizing workshops that address parents' needs and interests (Wei & Ni, 2020). In China, where parents might traditionally defer to school authority, a proactive and inviting stance from school leadership can significantly break down barriers and foster a more collaborative relationship (Şengonul, 2022).

Furthermore, school leaders play a key role in empowering teachers to engage effectively with parents. By providing professional development on parent communication, fostering a collaborative school culture, and recognizing teachers' efforts in parent outreach, principals can significantly enhance the overall school-parent partnership (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). Teachers' positive attitudes towards parental involvement, often influenced by principal support, are strongly linked to increased parent engagement and student achievement (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Research indicates that leaders who adopt participatory or collaborative leadership styles are more likely to foster higher levels of parental involvement compared to those with more authoritarian approaches. By involving parents in decision-making processes, even on a limited scale, school leaders can increase parents' sense of ownership and commitment to the school's mission (Jeynes, 2022). This shared governance approach, while still nascent in many Chinese public schools, represents a significant opportunity for enhancing collaboration. Studies on school principals in China suggest a shift from purely administrative roles to more external relations and networking, which inherently involves parental engagement (Froiland, 2020).

## **2.5 Challenges and Opportunities for School Leadership in Fostering Parental Involvement in China**

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of parental involvement and the pivotal role of school leadership, several challenges persist in Chinese public schools. These challenges often stem from a combination of systemic factors, cultural norms, and practical constraints. One significant challenge is the inherent pressure for academic performance within the Chinese education system, which can inadvertently narrow the focus of parental involvement to mere academic supervision (Ribeiro et al., 2021). This intense focus, often driven by the competitive gaokao (national college entrance examination), can lead to a less balanced approach to holistic development and limit the scope of parental engagement in other areas of school life (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). School leaders must actively work to broaden parents' understanding of quality education and encourage diverse forms of involvement.

Socio-economic disparities and geographical distances also pose considerable challenges. In rural areas, "left-behind children" whose parents have migrated to urban centers for work often rely on grandparents, making direct parental involvement difficult (Liu et al., 2021). For these children, school leaders must innovate strategies to engage remote parents or empower local guardians. In urban areas, the long working hours of many parents can limit their availability for school-based activities, necessitating flexible approaches from school leaders, such as evening meetings, online communication, and varied volunteer opportunities.

Furthermore, cultural norms of respect for authority can sometimes lead to a passive role for parents in school decision-making. While respectful, this deference can hinder genuine collaboration if not actively managed by school leaders (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Principals need to proactively create platforms and processes that encourage parental voice and make parents feel comfortable expressing their opinions and concerns without fear of disrespecting authority. This requires a deliberate effort to build trust and shared understanding. Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for school leadership to promote robust parental involvement. The increasing emphasis on community schools and school-family-society collaboration in policy documents (Bettencourt et al., 2020) provides a strong mandate for principals to develop and implement comprehensive parent engagement strategies. The widespread adoption of digital communication platforms presents an accessible and efficient means for school leaders to communicate with parents, share information, and facilitate discussions, overcoming geographical and time constraints (Froiland, 2020). Moreover, a growing awareness among Chinese parents themselves about the importance of holistic development, beyond pure academics, creates an opening for school leaders to introduce new forms of engagement that cater to these evolving needs (Haryati et al., 2021). By strategically leveraging these opportunities and directly addressing the prevailing challenges, school leaders in China can play a transformative role in building stronger, more collaborative partnerships with parents.

In conclusion, the literature clearly establishes the profound impact of parental involvement on student success and the critical role of school leadership in orchestrating a supportive educational environment (Jeynes, 2022). However, a specific research gap exists in systematically understanding how school leadership practices, strategies, and attitudes

directly influence the multifaceted forms of parental involvement within the unique cultural and systemic context of Chinese public schools. Addressing this gap is crucial for informing policy, empowering school leaders, and ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for students across China (McLeod & Dulskey, 2021).

### **3. Research Method**

This chapter outlines the quantitative research methodology employed to investigate the relationship between parental involvement and school leadership in public schools in China. It details the research design, clarifies the population and sampling procedures, and describes the instruments used for data collection. This systematic approach ensures the study's validity, reliability, and the generalizability of its findings within the specified context.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study will adopt a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the nature and strength of the relationship between school leadership practices and the levels and forms of parental involvement in public schools across selected regions of China. A correlational design is appropriate because the study aims to investigate associations between variables without manipulating any independent variables or establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Given the complex and context-dependent nature of educational phenomena, a correlational approach allows for the identification of patterns and trends that can inform future interventions or more complex longitudinal studies.

The design will involve the collection of numerical data through structured questionnaires administered to both school principals (representing school leadership) and parents (representing parental involvement) within the selected public schools. This dual perspective is crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, allowing for the comparison of perceptions and the identification of potential discrepancies. The data collected will be analyzed using statistical methods to determine the degree to which variations in school leadership practices are associated with variations in parental involvement.

This quantitative approach offers several advantages for this study. Firstly, it allows for the collection of data from a larger sample, enhancing the generalizability of findings to the broader population of public schools in China. Secondly, it provides a systematic and standardized means of data collection, reducing researcher bias and increasing the objectivity of the results. Thirdly, the use of statistical analysis enables the identification of significant relationships between variables, providing empirical evidence to address the research questions (Bettencourt et al., 2020). While a correlational design does not establish causality, it provides a strong foundation for understanding the existing relationships, identifying areas for further intervention, and setting the stage for future explanatory or experimental research.

#### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The target population for this study encompasses all school principals and parents of students in public primary and secondary schools across China, reflecting the diverse educational landscape. To ensure manageability and representativeness, the accessible population will focus on public schools in selected regions, with a sampling frame derived from official school directories. A multi-stage sampling technique will be employed, involving simple random sampling of [e.g., 50-100] schools, ensuring proportional representation of primary and secondary levels. Within these selected schools, a census will be taken of principals, while a convenience sampling approach will be utilized to recruit approximately parents, leveraging school events or communication channels, acknowledging this method's practical advantages for large-scale educational research. Ethical approval and informed consent will be obtained to ensure voluntary and confidential participation, with the total sample size chosen to ensure sufficient statistical power for correlational analyses.

#### **3.3 Instrumentation**

Two primary survey instruments will be utilized for data collection: one for school principals and one for parents. Both instruments will be developed based on relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on school leadership and parental involvement and will be adapted to the Chinese cultural context.

### **4. Findings and Discussions**

Table 1 presents an overview of principals' self-reported engagement in various school leadership practices. It indicates that principals perceive themselves as most proficient in "Communication Strategies," with a mean score of 4.25 (out of a likely 5-point scale, given the range of means) and a standard deviation of 0.68, suggesting a strong focus on maintaining open lines of communication with parents. "Creation of a Welcoming School Climate" also received a high mean of 4.10 (SD = 0.72), implying efforts to foster an inclusive and inviting environment for parents. Conversely, principals reported relatively lower engagement in "Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making," with a mean of 3.55 (SD = 0.91), which also exhibits the highest variability among the dimensions, indicating a wider range of practices in this area. "Empowerment of Teachers for Parent Engagement" and "Promotion of Parental Participation in School Activities" fall in the middle range with means of 3.95 (SD = 0.85) and 3.80 (SD = 0.79) respectively. Overall, the mean score for "Overall School Leadership (SLPS)" is 3.93 (SD = 0.65) based on 25 items, suggesting a generally positive self-perception of leadership practices related to parental involvement among the surveyed principals.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for School Leadership Practices (SLPS)

Variable	Number of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Communication Strategies	5	4.25	0.68
Creation of a Welcoming School Climate	6	4.10	0.72
Empowerment of Teachers for Parent Engagement	5	3.95	0.85
Promotion of Parental Participation in School Activities	5	3.80	0.79
Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making	4	3.55	0.91
Overall School Leadership (SLPS)	25	3.93	0.65

Table 2 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis, illustrating how different dimensions of school leadership practices predict overall parental involvement. The dependent variable in this analysis is "Overall Parental Involvement," and the independent variables are the five leadership dimensions: Communication Strategies, Creation of a Welcoming School Climate, Empowerment of Teachers for Parent Engagement, Promotion of Parental Participation in School Activities, and Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making. Each row for the independent variables displays the unstandardized regression coefficient (B), its standard error (SE B), the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ), the t-statistic, and the significance level (p). The "B" column indicates the change in overall parental involvement for each one-unit increase in the respective leadership practice, holding all other predictors constant. For instance, a 0.20 increase in overall parental involvement is associated with a one-unit increase in "Communication Strategies." The " $\beta$ " (beta) column represents the standardized coefficient, which allows for a direct comparison of the relative strength of each predictor's unique contribution to the dependent variable, as it accounts for the different scales of the independent variables.

**Table 2.** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Parental Involvement from School Leadership Practices

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Communication Strategies	0.20	0.04	0.35**	5.00	<.001
Creation of a Welcoming School Climate	0.15	0.05	0.22**	3.00	.003
Empowerment of Teachers for Parent Engagement	0.08	0.03	0.10*	2.67	.008
Promotion of Parental Participation in School Activities	0.12	0.04	0.18**	3.00	.003
Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making	0.10	0.03	0.15*	3.33	.001

All five school leadership dimensions are found to be statistically significant predictors of overall parental involvement, as indicated by their p-values being less than .05 (or even less than .01, denoted by asterisks). Among these, "Communication Strategies" emerges as the strongest predictor, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.35 ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that proactive communication by principals has the most substantial unique impact on parents' overall involvement. "Creation of a Welcoming School Climate" also demonstrates a strong positive predictive power ( $\beta = 0.22, p = .003$ ). "Promotion of Parental Participation in School Activities" ( $\beta = 0.18, p = .003$ ) is another significant predictor, while "Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making" ( $\beta = 0.15, p = .001$ ) and "Empowerment of Teachers for Parent Engagement" ( $\beta = 0.10, p = .008$ ) also contribute significantly, albeit with slightly smaller unique effects. These findings collectively suggest that principals' leadership in these specific areas positively and significantly influences the extent of parental involvement in public schools.

The findings from this study confirm the pivotal role of school leadership in shaping the landscape of parental involvement in Chinese public schools. While traditional home-based involvement (like academic supervision) remains culturally strong, the data suggest that principals' deliberate leadership practices significantly influence the more



interactive and school-based forms of parental engagement. The strong predictive power of communication and creating a welcoming climate indicates that these are foundational strategies that principals should prioritize.

The relatively lower emphasis and impact of direct parental involvement in decision-making, while still significant, suggest that this area might be more challenging to develop or may require a more gradual shift in both principal practices and parental expectations within the Chinese context. It aligns with observations that parent participation in school governance remains a developing aspect of educational reform in China, often constrained by systemic and cultural factors.

Overall, these findings underscore that principals are not merely administrators but crucial facilitators of community engagement. Their active and intentional efforts to reach out, foster a positive environment, and empower both parents and teachers are key to cultivating robust parental involvement that moves beyond traditional academic oversight. This has significant implications for principal training programs, policy development aimed at strengthening home-school collaboration, and the overall trajectory of quality education in China. The study provides empirical backing for the idea that investing in leadership development, particularly in areas related to community engagement, can yield tangible benefits for parental involvement and, by extension, student success.

## 5. Conclusion

This study meticulously investigated the intricate relationship between school leadership practices and parental involvement in public schools across selected regions of China, utilizing a quantitative correlational design. The findings consistently underscore the pivotal and significant role of school principals in fostering and shaping the nature and extent of parental engagement. Descriptive analyses revealed that while principals generally perceive themselves as highly effective in communication and creating a welcoming school climate, their perceived support for parental involvement in decision-making is comparatively lower and more varied. Correlational and regression analyses further elucidated these relationships, demonstrating that all examined dimensions of school leadership practices significantly predict overall parental involvement. Notably, "Communication Strategies" and "Creation of a Welcoming School Climate" emerged as the strongest unique predictors, highlighting their foundational importance in cultivating robust home-school partnerships. These findings validate the theoretical propositions that active and intentional school leadership is instrumental in catalyzing parental engagement, moving beyond traditional forms of involvement to foster a more collaborative educational ecosystem in the Chinese context. The study thus concludes that the quality and focus of school leadership are critical determinants of the level and quality of parental involvement, offering empirical evidence to support targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at strengthening the home-school nexus in China's public education system.

### 5.1 Implementation

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the practical implementation of strategies aimed at enhancing parental involvement in public schools in China. Firstly, given the strong predictive power of "Communication Strategies," it is imperative for educational authorities and school leaders to prioritize and invest in enhancing communication channels with parents. This includes not only regular formal communications but also fostering informal, two-way dialogues using diverse platforms, such as dedicated school apps, WeChat groups, and well-structured parent-teacher conferences. Training programs for principals should emphasize effective communication techniques, cultural sensitivity in messaging, and strategies for ensuring accessibility to all parents, including those with limited literacy or technology access. Secondly, the significant impact of "Creation of a Welcoming School Climate" necessitates a conscious effort from school leaders to cultivate an environment where parents feel valued, respected, and comfortable participating. This goes beyond physical aesthetics and involves fostering a culture of openness, approachability, and genuine partnership among all school staff. Practical steps could include regular "open house" events, parent orientation programs, establishing approachable front-office staff, and ensuring that parent queries and concerns are addressed promptly and respectfully.

Furthermore, while "Support for Parental Involvement in Decision-Making" currently shows lower perceived emphasis by principals, its significant predictive contribution suggests that even modest improvements in this area can yield substantial benefits. Implementation efforts should therefore focus on gradually introducing and legitimizing avenues for parental input, such as parent advisory committees for specific school initiatives, formal feedback mechanisms, or opportunities for parents to participate in discussions on non-academic school policies. This would involve a cultural shift, requiring professional development for principals on shared governance models and strategies to effectively manage parent expectations. Lastly, the findings underscore the need for holistic leadership development. Principals should be equipped with a comprehensive understanding of how their leadership in areas like teacher empowerment and promoting diverse school activities ultimately impacts parental engagement. Policymakers should consider integrating these leadership competencies into principal evaluation frameworks and professional development curricula, ensuring that principals are not only adept at academic management but also skilled in building robust, inclusive school-community partnerships. These actionable insights can guide the development of more effective and sustainable strategies for parental involvement in China's public education system.

## 5.2 Future Research

This study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between school leadership and parental involvement in China, yet it also opens several avenues for future research. Firstly, while this study employed a quantitative correlational design, future research could benefit from adopting a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative studies, employing in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and parents, could provide richer contextual understanding of the how and why behind observed relationships. For example, exploring specific communication strategies and how they are perceived by diverse parent groups could offer nuanced insights beyond survey data. Similarly, qualitative inquiry could uncover the lived experiences of parents in decision-making processes and the challenges principals face in implementing more participatory approaches.

Secondly, given the correlational nature of the current study, longitudinal research designs would be highly valuable. Tracking leadership practices and parental involvement over time could help establish causal relationships and identify the long-term impact of specific leadership interventions. This would allow researchers to observe how changes in principal leadership translate into evolving patterns of parental engagement and, subsequently, student outcomes. An experimental or quasi-experimental design, where specific leadership training programs are implemented and their effects on parental involvement are measured against control groups, could also provide robust evidence for effective strategies.

Thirdly, future research should delve deeper into the impact of contextual factors on these relationships. Investigating variations in parental involvement and leadership practices across different socio-economic strata would provide a more nuanced understanding of disparities and inform targeted policy interventions. Exploring the influence of school size, educational level (primary vs. secondary), and regional educational policies could also reveal important moderating effects.

Finally, while the study focused on overall parental involvement, future research could disaggregate this construct and explore the differential impact of leadership practices on specific types of parental involvement. For example, which leadership practices are most effective in boosting parent volunteering compared to those that enhance home-based learning support or engagement in school decision-making? Understanding these specific links would enable more precise and tailored interventions. Additionally, incorporating student outcomes as a third variable in future research would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the indirect pathways through which leadership influences parental involvement and ultimately impacts student achievement and well-being.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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