



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Exploring UK parents' experiences of home-schooling during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to educational systems worldwide, compelling schools in the United Kingdom to close temporarily and shift learning activities into the home environment. This sudden transition placed significant educational responsibilities on parents, thereby increasing the importance of parental involvement and home-school relationships. This study explores UK parents' perspectives on home-schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular emphasis on parental involvement, the challenges associated with supporting children's learning at home, and the effectiveness of home-school partnerships during the crisis. Drawing upon existing literature and empirical studies, the research examines how parents adapted to their new educational roles while balancing work, family, and emotional responsibilities. The study also highlights the inequalities exposed by the pandemic, particularly differences in access to digital resources, learning support, and educational opportunities among families from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Evidence from previous studies indicates that while some parents were able to actively support their children's academic progress, others faced barriers such as limited time, inadequate technological resources, financial pressures, and insufficient guidance from schools. Furthermore, the research evaluates the role of schools in fostering communication and collaboration with parents during periods of remote learning. Findings suggest that strong home-school relationships contributed positively to children's educational engagement and emotional well-being during lockdowns. However, disparities in parental capacity and institutional support significantly influenced the overall home-schooling experience. The study concludes that parental involvement remains a critical determinant of children's academic success and that future educational policies should strengthen support systems for families, particularly during emergencies that disrupt traditional schooling.

Keywords: Lockdown; Covid-19; Pandemic; Home Schooling; Learning

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated unprecedented disruptions to education systems worldwide, with the United Kingdom experiencing significant challenges in maintaining educational continuity. As schools closed and learning shifted to homes, parents suddenly found themselves at the forefront of their children's education, highlighting the critical importance of parental involvement and home-school relationships. This study aims to examine UK parents' perspectives on home-schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on evaluating parental involvement in education, analysing the role of parents in home-schooling, and assessing the importance of home-school relationships during this critical period. Research has shown that the pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities in the UK, with children from higher-income families more likely to receive active homeschooling and better access to resources (Andrew et al., 2020; Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). The sudden transition to home-schooling exposed the diverse experiences of UK parents as they navigated the challenges of balancing work responsibilities with educational support (Montacute & Cullinane, 2020).

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2. Review of related literature

This section will concentrate on understanding the intricacies of homeschooling and grasping the underlying situations and happenings during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure a better and clearer understanding of the subject matter, and in turn, enable a critical evaluation of the standpoints of other scholars.

2.1. Parents' Involvement in Schooling in the UK

Parental involvement has long been recognised as an important factor influencing children's academic and social development within the UK educational system. It refers to parents' active participation in their children's education both at home and in school activities, including assisting with homework, attending school events, and participating in decision-making processes (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Research consistently shows that parental involvement positively affects students' academic performance and behaviour (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Children whose parents actively support their education often achieve higher grades and demonstrate stronger motivation toward learning. However, the level of parental engagement differs across socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Jeynes (2018) and Jerrim and Sims (2019) found that higher-income families generally have more time and resources to support children's education compared to lower-income families, who may face financial pressures and work-related constraints. Cultural differences also influence how parents engage with schools and educational support (Crozier & Davies, 2016).

Strong school-parent partnerships are essential in promoting effective parental involvement. Schools play a major role in creating inclusive environments that encourage communication and collaboration with parents (Harris & Goodall, 2015). According to Hornby and Lafaele (2016), effective partnerships empower parents to contribute actively to their children's education. Despite this, barriers such as time limitations, language differences, and lack of confidence continue to affect parental participation (Vincent, 2017). To address these challenges, UK educational policies and initiatives, including Family-School Partnership programmes, have aimed to strengthen communication and provide parents with the resources needed to support their children's learning (Kim & Hill, 2015; Lynch et al., 2020).

2.2. Home-School Relationship in the UK

The home-school relationship is a key aspect of the UK education system, focusing on collaboration between parents and schools to improve students' academic success and well-being. Research suggests that strong home-school relationships positively influence students' behaviour, motivation, and academic achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This partnership allows parents to support schools through active participation and communication. Effective home-school relationships are built on mutual respect, open communication, and shared educational goals. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) emphasise the importance of moving beyond simple parental involvement toward genuine parental engagement, where parents are viewed as equal partners in education. However, socioeconomic and cultural factors can affect the quality of these relationships. Jerrim and Sims (2019) argue that schools must adopt inclusive strategies, such as flexible communication methods and culturally sensitive practices, to support diverse families. Teachers and school administrators also play a significant role in encouraging parental engagement by creating welcoming environments and maintaining effective communication with families (Harris & Goodall, 2015). Nevertheless, challenges such as time constraints, language barriers, and differing expectations between schools and parents can hinder collaboration (Hornby & Lafaele, 2016). In response, UK educational policies have increasingly promoted programmes that encourage stronger partnerships between families and schools to support children's educational development (Vincent, 2017).

2.3. Effects of the Pandemic on Schooling in the UK

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to education in the UK and increased existing educational inequalities. Andrew et al. (2020) found that higher-income families were more likely to provide active home-schooling support and access to learning resources. Similarly, Bayrakdar and Guveli (2020) reported that children from lower-income families spent less time on schoolwork during lockdowns. The transition to online learning also revealed inequalities in digital access and teacher preparedness (Ofsted, 2021). Mental health became another concern, with Mansfield et al. (2021) identifying increased anxiety and depression among students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sharp et al. (2020) estimated that students fell behind academically during school closures, particularly those from low-income families. In higher education, Watermeyer et al. (2021) noted increased workloads and stress among university lecturers due to online teaching. To address learning loss, the Education Endowment Foundation (2021) recommended evidence-based interventions and targeted support programmes.

2.4. UK Parents' Participation in Home-Schooling During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, UK parents played a central role in supporting children's learning at home. Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020) found that parents with better financial resources, flexible work schedules, and access to technology were more able to support home-schooling effectively. Andrew et al. (2020) also reported that many parents, particularly mothers, experienced increased stress while balancing work responsibilities with teaching duties.

Socioeconomic inequalities strongly influenced parental participation. Montacute and Cullinane (2020) found that disadvantaged families faced barriers such as poor internet access and limited digital devices. Despite these challenges, schools that maintained effective communication and provided accessible resources were more successful in encouraging parental involvement (Jæger & Blaabæk, 2020). Technology became essential for communication and learning, although unequal access to digital resources remained a major issue (Sefton-Green et al., 2020). In response, the UK government introduced policies aimed at improving access to digital devices and internet services for disadvantaged families (Department for Education, 2020).

2.5. Importance of Parents' Involvement and Home-School Relationships During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of parental involvement and strong home-school relationships in maintaining educational continuity. Garbe et al. (2020) found that active parental engagement positively influenced children's academic achievement and motivation during home-schooling. Parents who maintained routines, supported schoolwork, and provided emotional support helped children cope more effectively with remote learning.

Communication between schools and families was essential during this period. Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020) noted that schools with clear and regular communication achieved better parental engagement and student progress. However, socioeconomic inequalities affected families' ability to support learning, especially where access to digital resources was limited (Andrew et al., 2020). Despite these difficulties, the pandemic strengthened collaboration between many parents and schools. Montacute and Cullinane (2020) found that increased parental involvement improved parents' understanding of their children's learning needs and strengthened relationships with teachers. Technology also supported communication and access to learning materials, although some families struggled with digital literacy and limited resources (Jæger & Blaabæk, 2020). Government support programmes aimed to reduce these inequalities by providing digital access and educational support for disadvantaged families (Department for Education, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study will employ a secondary data collection approach using a systematic review method to examine UK parents' perspectives on homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research design is justified by the need to synthesize existing knowledge from multiple studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon across diverse UK contexts.

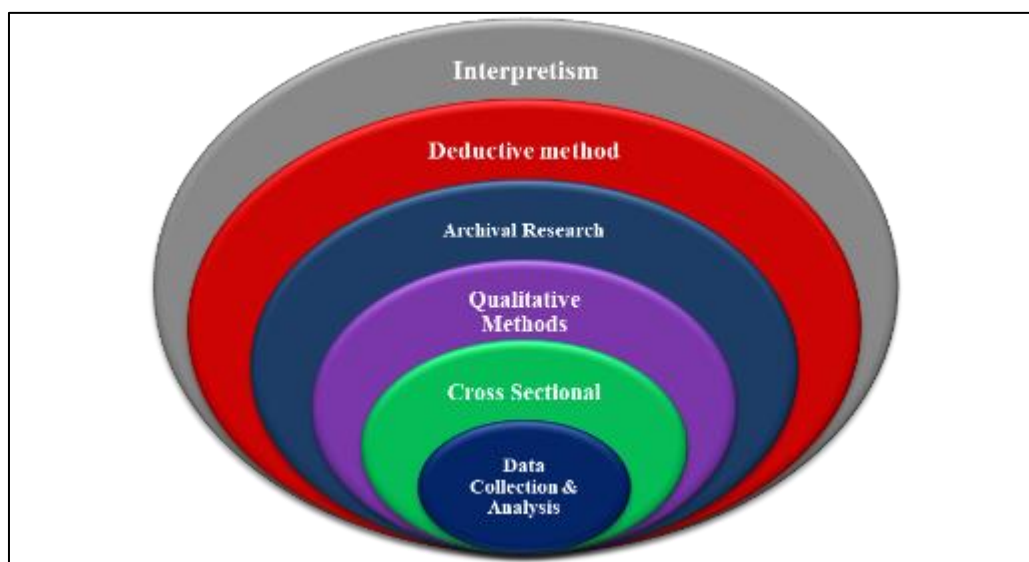


Figure 1 An Onion Chart simplifying the methodology of this research.

The study will adopt an interpretivist paradigm, recognizing that parents' experiences and perspectives are subjective and shaped by their unique circumstances (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach aligns with the research aim of exploring the nuanced realities of UK parents during the pandemic-induced home-schooling period. A deductive method will be utilized, applying existing theories on parental involvement and home-school relationships to the specific context of pandemic homeschooling in the UK. This approach will allow for the testing and refinement of established concepts within the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis (Bryman, 2016). The study will employ archival research using secondary data, reviewing 40 papers focused on UK parents' experiences during the pandemic. This method is particularly suitable given the rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic and the wealth of research produced in response to it. As noted by Bowen (2009), archival research allows for the examination of how the phenomenon has been interpreted by various researchers over time. A qualitative approach will be adopted to capture the rich, descriptive data needed to understand the complexities of parents' experiences. This method is particularly effective in exploring the "how" and "why" of parental involvement and home-school relationships during the pandemic (Yin, 2018).

The study will be cross-sectional, examining data from various points throughout the pandemic period. This approach will allow for the identification of trends and changes in parental perspectives and experiences over time, providing a more comprehensive picture of the homeschooling phenomenon in the UK (Levin, 2006). Data collection will involve a systematic search of academic databases, including ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "UK," "parents," "homeschooling," and "COVID-19." The 40 selected papers will be chosen based on relevance, methodological rigour, and focus on the UK context. Data analysis will employ thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method will allow for the identification of recurring themes and patterns across the reviewed studies, providing a structured approach to synthesizing the diverse experiences of UK parents.

This methodological approach is particularly suited to addressing the research questions, as it allows for a comprehensive examination of existing literature on UK parents' roles in homeschooling, the importance of home-school relationships, and how these relationships evolved during the pandemic. By synthesizing findings from multiple studies, this approach will provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, contributing to the development of evidence-based strategies for supporting UK parents and strengthening home-school partnerships in future crises.

3.1. Search Strategy and Terms

The search strategy for this systematic review has been carefully developed to address the research questions focusing on UK parents' perspectives on homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the time constraints and the specific focus on the UK context, the primary database chosen for this review is ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), which provides comprehensive coverage of education-related research and literature. The search terms have been selected and refined based on the key concepts within the research questions, ensuring a targeted approach to identifying relevant literature. The following concepts and related search terms have been identified:

- **Geographic focus:** United Kingdom" OR UK OR England OR Scotland OR Wales OR "Northern Ireland" OR Britain OR British
- **Population:** parent* OR family OR families OR guardian* OR caregiver*
- **Educational context:** home-school* OR "home school*" OR "home educat*" OR "remote learn*" OR "distance education*" OR "online learn*"
- **Pandemic context:** COVID-19 OR coronavirus OR pandemic OR lockdown
- **Parental involvement:** "parental involvement" OR "parental engagement" OR "parent participation" OR "parent role"
- **Home-school relationship:** "home-school relationship" OR "home-school partnership" OR "family-school collaboration" OR "parent-teacher communication"

The search strategy employed Boolean operators (AND, OR) to combine these concepts effectively. Truncation (*) will be used to capture variations of terms. The final search string will be structured as follows:

(("United Kingdom" OR UK OR England OR Scotland OR Wales OR "Northern Ireland" OR Britain OR British) AND (parent* OR family OR families OR guardian* OR caregiver*) AND (homeschool* OR "home school*" OR "home educat*" OR "remote learn*" OR "distance educat*" OR "online learn*")) AND (COVID-19 OR coronavirus OR pandemic OR lockdown) AND ("parental involvement" OR "parental engagement" OR "parent participation" OR "parent role" OR "home-school relationship" OR "home-school partnership" OR "family-school collaboration" OR "parent-teacher communication"))

This search strategy is designed to capture a wide range of relevant literature while maintaining a focus on the UK context and the specific aspects of parental involvement and home-school relationships during the pandemic. The use of quotation marks for phrases ensures that these concepts are searched as complete units, improving the precision of the results.

To further refine the search, inclusion criteria will be applied:

- **Publication date:** 2020-2023 (to capture literature specific to the COVID-19 pandemic period)
- **Language:** English
- **Geographic focus:** United Kingdom and its constituent countries
- **Study type:** Empirical studies, including both qualitative and quantitative research

The initial search was conducted in the ERIC database. This yielded 20 document results. The search was expanded to include additional databases such as ScienceDirect, ProQuest, ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, using the same search strategy. The search results were exported to EndNote for deduplication and initial screening. Titles and abstracts were screened independently by two reviewers using RAYAN AI tool and at the end, 15 papers were screened out, leaving us with 5 document results selected for analysis on the subject matter. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. This search strategy aligns with best practices in systematic reviews, as outlined by Booth (2016) and the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (Higgins et al., 2019). This process was followed to provide a comprehensive yet focused approach to identifying relevant literature on UK parents' perspectives of homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing the specific research questions of this study.

3.2. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To ensure a focused and relevant systematic review of UK parents' perspectives on homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria have been established:

3.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

- **Geographic Focus:** Studies conducted in the United Kingdom, including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This criterion ensures that the review captures the specific context of UK education systems and policies (Jerrim & Sims, 2019).
- **Time Frame:** Papers published from January 2020 onwards. This start date coincides with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures in the UK (Department for Education, 2020).
- **Language:** Studies published in English, as this is the primary language of academic discourse in the UK.
- **Study Design:** Primary research studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches. This includes surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies that directly capture parents' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- **Participant Focus:** Studies that primarily focus on parents' or primary caregivers' perspectives and experiences of homeschooling during the pandemic.
- **Educational Context:** Research focusing on homeschooling, remote learning, or distance education implemented as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Thematic Relevance:** Studies addressing at least one of the following themes:
 - Parental roles in homeschooling during the pandemic
 - Importance of home-school relationships
 - Evolution of home-school relationships during pandemic homeschooling
- **Publication Type:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and pre-prints from reputable sources.

3.3. Exclusion Criteria

- **Geographic Focus:** Studies conducted outside the United Kingdom or those that do not specifically differentiate UK data in multi-country studies.
- **Time Frame:** Papers published before January 2020 or focusing on pre-pandemic homeschooling practices.
- **Language:** Studies published in languages other than English.
- **Study Design:** Opinion pieces, editorials, or non-empirical studies that do not present original research data on parents' perspectives.

- **Participant Focus:** Studies that primarily focus on teachers', students', or school administrators' perspectives without substantial input from parents.
- **Educational Context:** Research on regular school-based education or non-pandemic related home-schooling practices.
- **Thematic Relevance:** Studies that do not address parental roles, home-school relationships, or parental experiences of pandemic homeschooling.
- **Publication Type:** Non-peer-reviewed articles, blog posts, or news articles.

These criteria was followed to ensure that the review captures relevant, high-quality research that directly addresses the research questions (Booth et al., 2016). By focusing on UK-based studies published since the onset of the pandemic, the review will provide a comprehensive and current understanding of parents' experiences with homeschooling in the UK context. The inclusion of various research methodologies allows for a nuanced exploration of parents' perspectives, while the focus on peer-reviewed literature ensures the quality and reliability of the included studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). These criteria will guide the screening process, ensuring that the selected papers align closely with the aims of the study and contribute meaningfully to addressing the research questions.

3.4. Screening and Selection

The screening and selection process for this systematic review followed a rigorous and transparent approach to ensure that only the most relevant and high-quality studies addressing UK parents' perspectives on homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic are included. This process was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

3.5. PRISMA Flow Diagram and Included Studies

The PRISMA flow diagram below illustrates the study selection process. A total of 20 records were initially identified, and after screening and eligibility assessment, 5 studies were included for analysis.

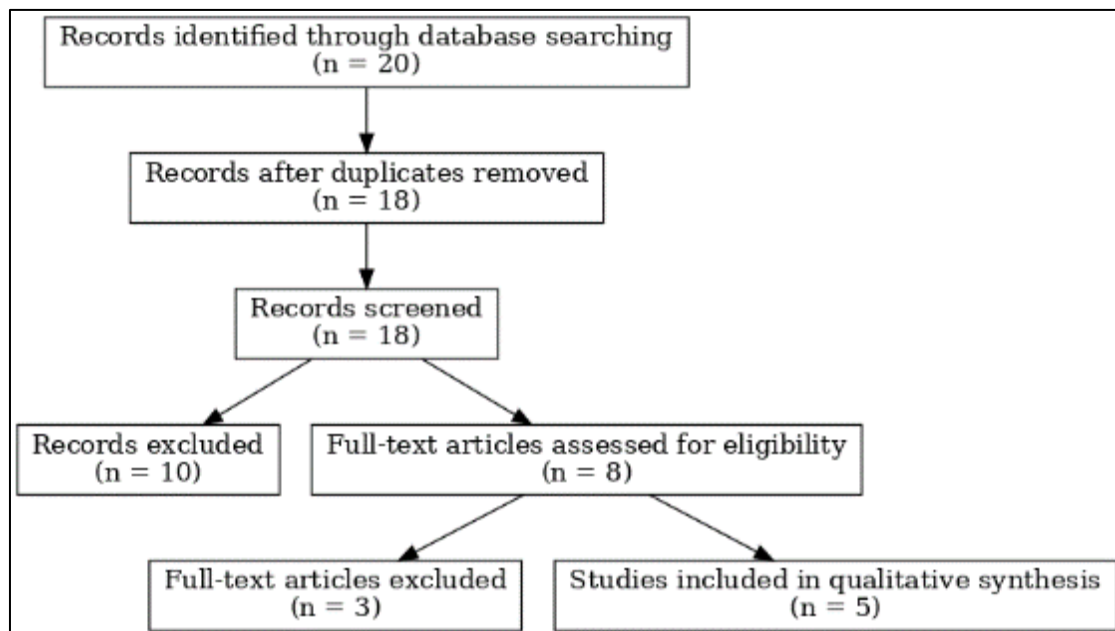


Figure 2 Study selection process

3.6. Quality Assessment

The quality of included studies was assessed using appropriate tools depending on the study design. For qualitative studies, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist will be used (CASP, 2018). For quantitative studies, the Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies developed by the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) was employed (Thomas et al., 2004). Mixed-methods studies will be assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018).

3.7. Data Analysis

For this systematic review focusing on UK parents' perspectives of home-schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to analyze the extracted data. This method, as described by Thomas and Harden (2008), is particularly suitable for synthesizing qualitative research in systematic reviews and aligns well with the exploratory nature of our research questions.

4. Results

Table 1 Five studies resulted from the search as presented below with their characteristics

Sn	Study	Focus
1	Brett et al. (2026), <i>Parental involvement and engagement during COVID-19 lockdowns</i>	Parents' and school staff reflections on learning at home in England
2	Weaver et al. (2025), <i>Home-schooling and parent-child relationships during lockdown in England</i>	Impact of home-schooling on parent-child relationships
3	Khan (2022), <i>Parents' experiences of home-schooling amid COVID-19 school closures, in London</i>	Well-being and stress of parents of 5-8-year-olds
4	Villadsen et al. (2020), <i>Parental involvement in home schooling and developmental play during lockdown</i>	National survey of parental activities and home-schooling
5	Kallitsoglou & Topalli (2021), <i>Home-schooling and caring for children during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK</i>	Working mothers' emotional states, support and coping

5. Findings

Five themes were generated from the analysis of the 5 selected papers in this study. The themes are:

5.1. Parental involvement versus parental engagement

Description: Brett et al. (2026) distinguish between involvement (supporting school-set tasks) and engagement (parents taking autonomous, broader responsibility for learning at home). Across studies: Villadsen et al. (2020) show wide variation in how often parents supervised schoolwork versus engaging in developmental play, while your dissertation notes that "some parents were able to actively support their children's academic progress, others faced barriers such as limited time, inadequate technological resources, financial pressures, and insufficient guidance from schools."

Insight: The pandemic pushed many parents along Goodall & Montgomery's continuum; from passive helpers to co-educators, but this shift depended heavily on confidence, time and school guidance.

5.2. Emotional strain, especially on mothers

Description: Khan (2022) reports that home-schooling was "physically and emotionally challenging" and that stress intensified in the second major home-schooling period. Across studies: Kallitsoglou & Topalli (2021) find working mothers felt "overly stressed trying to balance work and family responsibilities, guilty for not meeting their child's needs, and worried over their child's well-being and academic progress." Weaver et al. (2025) also identify home-schooling as a source of psychological stress and conflict in some families.

Insight: Emotional load was not a side-issue; it directly shaped how much support parents could offer. Maternal well-being became a hidden determinant of children's learning opportunities.

5.3. Inequalities and digital divide in home learning

Description: Villadsen et al. (2020) show that time spent on home-schooling and access to learning activities varied by socioeconomic status.

Across studies: Brett et al. (2026) identify “equitable access” as a core theme, highlighting differences in devices, internet, and quiet space for learning. Your dissertation similarly notes that “the pandemic...highlight[s] the inequalities exposed...particularly differences in access to digital resources, learning support, and educational opportunities among families from varying socioeconomic backgrounds.”

Insight: The shift to home-based and digital learning amplified pre-existing inequalities; parental motivation alone could not compensate for structural resource gaps.

5.4. Home-school communication and partnership quality

Description: Brett et al. (2026) identify “contact” and “participation” as key areas; how schools communicated and how they facilitated parents’ involvement.

Across studies: Khan(2022) shows that clarity (or lack of it) in expectations from schools shaped parents’ stress and sense of competence. Your study concludes that “strong home-school relationships contributed positively to children’s educational engagement and emotional well-being during lockdowns.”

Insight: Where communication was regular, empathetic, and flexible, parents felt like partners; where it was sparse or rigid, parents felt abandoned or judged, which undermined both learning and relationships.

5.5. Re-negotiation of roles and family relationships

Description: Weaver et al.(2025) describe home-schooling as simultaneously “a bonding experience” and “the cause of new conflicts,” and identify new “parent-teacher” and “child-pupil” roles emerging in the home.

Across studies: Kallitsoglou & Topalli (2021) show mothers adopting coping strategies such as flexible routines and “negotiating alternative partnership models” at home. Villadsen et al. (2020) highlight increased developmental play and shared activities in some families.

Insight: The home became a hybrid space; school, workplace, and family site at once. For some, this deepened connection and understanding of children’s learning; for others, it blurred boundaries and intensified conflict.

5.6. Cross-cutting insights

Parental capacity is multi-dimensional: Time, emotional energy, digital access, and pedagogical confidence all interact. High engagement requires more than goodwill; it needs supportive conditions.

Gendered burden: Across Khan(2022) and Kallitsoglou & Topalli (2021), mothers disproportionately carried the teaching and caregiving load, even in middle-income households, revealing persistent gendered expectations beneath the “we’re all in this together” narrative.

Engagement can be transformative: Where schools trusted parents and encouraged broader learning (family projects, play, everyday literacy), parents reported stronger relationships and better insight into their children’s needs; echoing your emphasis that “increased parental involvement improved parents’ understanding of their children’s learning needs and strengthened relationships with teachers.”

But engagement is fragile: Without clear guidance, realistic expectations, and emotional support, the same shift can feel like failure and overwhelm, especially for parents juggling precarious work or caring responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

Across these five studies, a consistent picture emerges: UK parents became central actors in their children’s education during COVID-19, but their experiences were profoundly unequal. Strong home-school relationships, adequate digital resources, and supportive work conditions enabled some families to turn home-schooling into a period of growth and bonding. Others, constrained by poverty, limited support, and gendered labour patterns, experienced it as exhausting, guilt-laden, and sometimes damaging to well-being and relationships. Parental involvement remains a critical determinant of children’s academic and emotional outcomes, but it is only as strong as the systems that scaffold it.

Recommendations

For schools:

- **Prioritise relational communication**
- Action: Maintain regular, two-way contact (phone, text, online platforms) focused on encouragement, realistic expectations, and problem-solving rather than surveillance.
- **Support parental engagement, not just involvement**
- Action: Offer simple ideas for everyday learning (talk, play, routines) alongside formal tasks, validating parents' own knowledge and culture.
- **Plan for equity in remote provision**
- Action: Design low-tech and offline options, lend devices, and stagger deadlines to accommodate families with limited access or shared devices.
- **For policymakers:**
- **Invest in digital and learning infrastructure for families**
- Action: Make device and broadband access a basic educational entitlement, with rapid-response schemes ready for future disruptions.
- **Embed family-friendly work policies**
- Action: Encourage flexible working, protected caregiving time, and emergency leave so parents can realistically support learning during crises.
- **Targeted support for vulnerable parents and carers**
- Action: Fund local hubs (schools, children's centres, community groups) to provide coaching, mental-health support, and practical guidance on supporting learning at home.

For future research and practice:

- **Centre parental voices in policy design**
- Action: Use co-design workshops with diverse parents to shape contingency plans for remote or hybrid schooling.
- **Monitor long-term impacts on relationships and attainment**
- Action: Track how pandemic-era home-schooling has affected parent-school trust, children's progress, and gendered divisions of labour over time.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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