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A Narrative Systematic Review of Sequential Mediation Models in Education: Linking School Principal Leadership and Parental Support to Student Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Background. This study stems from the urgent need to comprehensively understand the various contextual factors that contribute to student academic achievement, particularly through the synergy between school leadership and parental involvement within the framework of a sequential mediation model.

Purpose. This study aims to systematically synthesize and analyze various empirical findings related to the implementation of sequential mediation models in an educational context, linking school principal leadership, parental support, and student achievement.

Method. The approach used was a systematic narrative review involving the examination of relevant, reputable scientific articles, selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, which were then analyzed thematically to identify patterns of relationships among variables.

Results. The study findings indicate that effective school principal leadership serves as an independent variable that drives increased parental participation and support, which ultimately has a positive impact on student achievement as the dependent variable.

Conclusion. Therefore, it can be concluded that strengthening educational leadership integrated with parental involvement within a sequential mediation framework is an effective strategy for improving the quality of student learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Principal Leadership, Parental Support, Student Achievement

INTRODUCTION

Education is viewed as a cornerstone in developing high-quality, competitive human resources amid the tide of globalization. In this context, students' academic success is not determined solely by individual ability, but is also influenced by various external factors that interact in complex ways. The school and family environments are two crucial components that play a significant role in shape the quality of students' learning outcomes (Steinkamp, 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of student achievement is essential in contemporary educational research. Furthermore, dynamic

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social changes and technological advancements require a more comprehensive approach to analyzing educational success.

These conditions indicate that educational research can no longer be conducted in isolation but must integrate various interrelated variables (Larsen, 2025). Thus, a multidimensional approach is essential for explaining the relationships among the factors that influence students' academic achievement. In this context, studies examining the interaction between the school and family environments are becoming increasingly relevant. Therefore, research is needed that can systematically and thoroughly elucidate these relationships (Price, 2026).

One of the key elements in efforts to improve the quality of education is the presence of effective and visionary school leadership. In this context, the principal holds a strategic position in formulating policy direction, fostering a conducive school climate, and driving the participation of all education stakeholders. Strong leadership not only impacts the improvement of teacher performance but also influences student motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Additionally, the principal serves as a bridge connecting the school with the external environment, including students' parents (Kaur, 2025).

Therefore, the quality of a school principal's leadership is a crucial factor in fostering synergy between the school and families. However, in practice, this role is often not fully optimized. A number of studies still treat leadership as a single independent variable without considering its relationship with other factors. In reality, however, the influence of leadership operates through a more complex and layered process. Consequently, an analytical approach is needed that can represent these dynamics more comprehensively (Jürges, 2025).

In addition to the principal's leadership role, parental involvement is also a key factor in supporting students' academic success. Parental participation in their children's education can take various forms, such as providing emotional support, monitoring learning activities, and maintaining close communication with the school. A number of empirical studies indicate that students who receive a high level of parental support tend to demonstrate more optimal academic achievement. These findings underscore that the family institution holds a highly strategic and irreplaceable position in the educational process (Chen, 2025).

Nevertheless, the level of parental involvement is not uniform but is influenced by differences in social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These variations have the potential to create disparities in student learning outcomes. Therefore, efforts are needed to identify effective strategies for optimizing parental involvement through appropriate interventions. In this regard, schools play a crucial role as facilitators capable of encouraging active parental participation. Thus, the relationship between schools and families is an important aspect that needs to be examined more comprehensively and in depth (Yao, 2026).

Although school principal leadership and parental support have been the focus of various studies, most research still examines these two variables separately. This approach limits our ability to uncover the more complex causal relationships between them. In practice, the influence of school principal leadership on student achievement is not always direct; rather, it often occurs through other mediating variables, such as parental involvement (Clark, 2025). Therefore, an analytical model is needed that can explain the relationships between variables in a stepwise and hierarchical manner.

One relevant approach is the sequential mediation model. This model allows researchers to examine how one variable influences another through a series of mediating processes (Hulme, 2025). Thus, the relationship between school leadership, parental support, and student achievement can be understood more comprehensively. Furthermore, this approach also offers a new perspective

on the development of educational research. Therefore, the application of the sequential mediation model warrants further investigation (Lin, 2025).

Sequential mediation models in an educational context provide a more complex analytical framework than simple linear approaches. In this model, a variable does not merely exert a direct influence on another variable, but also operates through a series of interconnected mediating variables. This approach enables researchers to trace pathways of influence in a more structured, detailed, and systematic manner (Moberg, 2025). In this study, school principal leadership is identified as an initial variable influencing the level of parental support, which in turn leads to improved student achievement. Thus, the relationship among the variables is not linear but rather gradual and mutually reinforcing. This provides a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying improvements in students' academic achievement. Furthermore, this model also contributes to the formulation of more appropriate and effective educational intervention strategies. Therefore, the application of the sequential mediation model is highly relevant for use in this study (Adela, 2025).

This study is based on the urgent need for a comprehensive examination of the various contextual factors that influence student academic success, particularly through the integration of school principal leadership and parental involvement within the framework of a sequential mediation model (Mu'alimin, 2026). This approach is considered relevant because it can elucidate complex causal relationships more comprehensively than conventional methods, which tend to be linear. By combining these two variables, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the primary determinants of student achievement. In addition, this study also seeks to address the limitations of previous research, which has not systematically explored the multilayered relationships among variables (Putra, 2026).

Therefore, this study makes a significant contribution to both the theoretical framework and educational practice. Through a systematic narrative literature review approach, various relevant empirical findings were analyzed in depth. The results of this study are expected to serve as a strong conceptual foundation for future research. Thus, this study holds strategic value in supporting the development of more effective, evidence-based educational policies (Putra, 2026).

This research adopts a narrative systematic literature review approach as a strategy to examine, assess, and integrate various studies relevant to the topic being studied. This approach provides space for researchers to build a deeper understanding of the development of the sequential mediation model concept in the field of education (Guha, 2025). The scientific sources that were analyzed were selected through specific criteria to ensure the validity, quality, and suitability of the data with the research focus. The next stage was a thematic analysis to trace and identify patterns of relationships between variables that emerged in various research findings (Han, 2026). The advantage of this approach lies in its ability to present a synthesis of knowledge in a comprehensive and structured manner. In addition, this method is also effective in uncovering gaps in research that have not been widely explored. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide meaningful contributions to the development of educational science. Therefore, the choice of this method is considered relevant and appropriate to support the research objective (Şimşek, 2026).

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between school principal leadership, parental support, and student achievement, but using diverse approaches. Studies Robinson, (2025) shows that school principal leadership has a direct influence on students' academic achievement without involving intervening variables. Meanwhile, the study Sakyi, (2025) more highlights the central role of parental support as a key determinant in improving student learning outcomes. On the other hand, studies Schwartz, (2026) focusing on the relationship between school leadership and

parental involvement, but has not explicitly linked it to student achievement. The fundamental difference between these studies and this review lies in the application of a sequential mediation model that integrates the three variables into a single unified analytical framework. With this approach, this study presents a more comprehensive and integrative perspective. In addition, this study also provides a new conceptual contribution in explaining the gradual pattern of causal relationships. Therefore, this study is expected to be able to complement as well as enrich the body of research that has previously developed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applies a narrative systematic literature review approach with the aim of compiling and thoroughly analyzing various empirical findings related to the implementation of sequential mediation models in the educational context (Hamdeni, 2026). This approach was chosen because it has the ability to combine the results of previous research in a structured and in-depth manner. In this study, the main focus is on the relationship between school principal leadership, parental support, and student achievement as interrelated variables (Aslam, 2026). Through a systematic narrative literature review, the researcher not only compiles relevant literature but also conducts a critical analysis of the patterns of relationships among the variables found. In addition, this approach allows for the identification of trends, research gaps, and inconsistencies in previous studies. Therefore, this method is considered suitable to support research objectives aimed at synthesizing knowledge comprehensively. The analysis process is carried out systematically to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings. Thus, this study is expected to produce a more complete and integrated understanding of the application of sequential mediation models in the field of education (Zheng, 2025).

Data collection in this study was conducted through a systematic search of various relevant scientific literature sources, including reputable international journals, conference proceedings, and other academic publications. Each selected article was screened using strictly formulated inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the data to the study focus. The inclusion criteria encompassed studies that explicitly discuss school principal leadership, parental involvement, and student achievement in the educational context. Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate articles that did not have a direct connection to the variables under investigation (Ikeda, 2025). The selection stages are carried out in a tiered manner, starting from title review, followed by the abstract, and then a comprehensive evaluation of the article's content. Through this process, only sources that are truly relevant to the research objective are retained for further analysis. This approach is designed to reduce potential bias while enhancing the accuracy of the synthesis results. In addition, the selection of sources with high credibility is also a primary consideration in this study. Thus, the entire data collection process is carried out in a structured, systematic, and well-planned manner. The following is the research method:

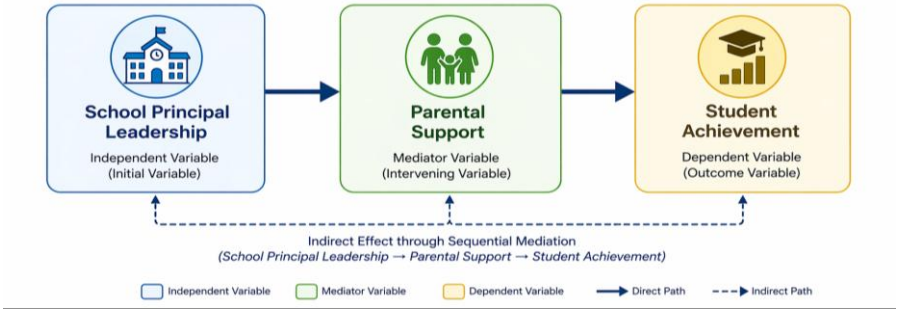


Figure 1. Cess is carried out in a structured, systematic, and well-planned manner

The illustration represents a conceptual model of sequential mediation in the field of educational research that links three key variables, namely school principal leadership, parental support, and student achievement. This model emphasizes that the relationships between variables do not occur directly, but rather through interconnected and continuous stages. In the initial stage, school principal leadership is positioned as the independent variable or the initial variable. This placement indicates that the role of the school principal becomes the main determinant influencing other variables in the education system. Effective leadership is believed to be capable of creating a conducive school climate, building productive communication, and encouraging active participation from various stakeholders, including students' parents (Depison, 2025).

Furthermore, parental support acts as a mediating variable or an intermediary variable. This indicates that the influence of school principal leadership on student achievement does not occur directly, but first affects the level of parental involvement. Such support can take the form of attention to the child's learning activities, intensive interaction with the school, as well as involvement in various educational activities (Edae, 2025). In this framework, parental support functions as an important link between leadership practices in schools and students' academic achievements. At the final stage, student achievement is placed as the dependent variable or outcome variable. This variable is influenced indirectly by the principal's leadership through the mediating role of parental support. This is clarified by the presence of a dashed line in the figure representing the indirect effect in the sequential mediation mechanism.

Overall, this illustration emphasizes that the improvement of student achievement cannot be explained by a single factor, but rather is the result of a gradual process involving the interaction between school leadership and family engagement. This model offers a more comprehensive perspective compared to a simple linear approach, as it is able to elucidate how one variable affects another through structured and systematic mediation stages (Mahlatji, 2026).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate the existence of a relatively consistent pattern of correlation between school principal leadership, parental support, and student academic achievement based on various reviewed literature. Effective school principal leadership has been shown to occupy the initial variable position that drives increased participation of various stakeholders in the educational process. In this context, the principal does not merely act as an administrative manager, but also as a transformation agent capable of building an inclusive and participatory school climate. These results further confirm that the quality of leadership has a broad impact on the entire education system. In addition, responsive and adaptive leadership also promotes the realization of more open communication between the school and parents. Thus, the position of the school principal becomes very crucial in creating effective educational synergy. This indicates that the leadership variable does not stand alone, but interacts with various other factors that influence student achievement.

Therefore, the relationships between variables need to be understood comprehensively and integratively. Further analysis reveals that parental support plays a role as an important mediating variable in improving students' academic achievement. High parental involvement, both through supervision of the learning process and active communication with the school, provides a tangible contribution to improving learning outcomes. These findings indicate that student success is not solely influenced by school factors, but is also greatly determined by the family environment. In addition, the level of parental support is also influenced by the quality of school leadership. The more effective the leadership is, the greater the parental participation in supporting their children's

education. This condition reflects the existence of a hierarchical relationship between variables. Therefore, parental support can be understood as a very important connecting element within the framework of a sequential mediation model. Below is a synthesis of findings from several studies that were analyzed:

Table 1. Summary of interrelationships between variables in previous research

Main Variable	Found Relationship	Impact on Achievement
School Principal Leadership	Affects parental involvement	Does not increase immediately
Parental Support	Increases motivation and learning discipline	Significantly increases
School-Parent Communication	Strengthens the relationship between variables	Moderately increases
Sequential Mediation Model	Connects all variables systematically	Optimally increases

The table indicates that each variable analyzed is closely related and cannot be understood separately. The relationships between variables show interactions that mutually influence each other within an integrated system. In this case, the principal's leadership does not have a direct impact on student achievement, but rather through an intermediary role in the form of parental support. This support becomes an important pathway that channels the influence of leadership into improved learning outcomes. In addition, communication between the school and families acts as a reinforcing element that strengthens this relationship. The presence of effective communication can enhance the quality of interaction and clarify the direction of the support provided. Thus, the interconnections between variables become stronger and more structured. This relationship pattern shows that the process of improving student achievement is gradual and not instant. Therefore, each variable has a complementary contribution within the system. The approach used in this model is able to accommodate the complexity of these relationships. The sequential mediation model provides a more complete depiction of the dynamics between variables. Thus, the existing interconnections can be explained more systematically and comprehensively.

The integration of findings shows that the communication interaction between the school and families acts as a key mediator in strengthening the link between school leadership and parental involvement. Effective communication creates opportunities for the exchange of constructive and continuous information. The process contributes to increasing trust between parents and the school in supporting the educational process. In addition, the high intensity of communication allows parents to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their child's academic needs. This understanding ultimately encourages an improvement in the quality of support provided to students. In other words, communication not only functions as a means of conveying information but also as a strategic instrument in strengthening relationships among educational actors. The existence of effective communication also creates alignment of goals between schools and families. This has an impact on creating a more conducive learning environment for students. In that context, communication becomes an element that strengthens the sequential mediation mechanism. Therefore, the quality of communication holds a very crucial position in explaining the relationships between variables in this model. Thus, optimizing communication needs to be a primary focus in educational practice.

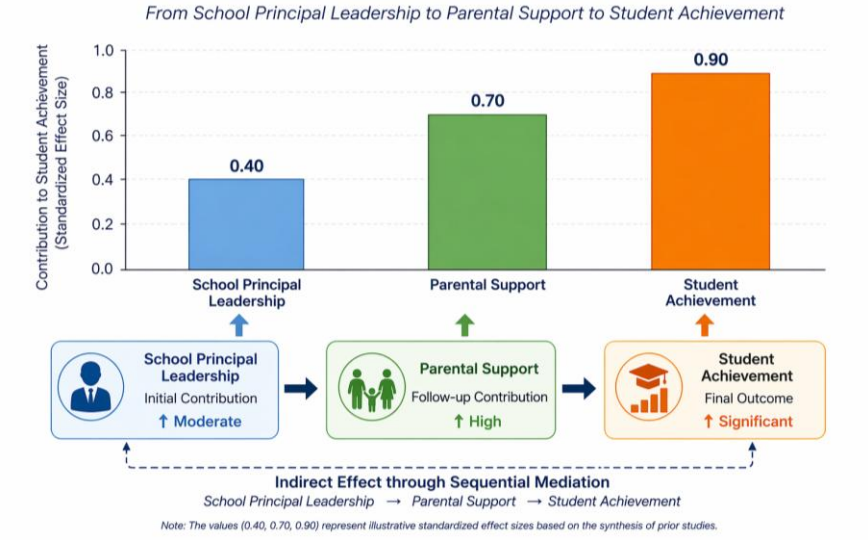


Figure 2. The effect of sequential mediation on student achievement

The graph shows that the contribution of school principal leadership to improving student achievement becomes stronger when mediated through the role of parental support. In other words, the influence transmitted indirectly through family involvement is proven to be more significant than the direct influence of the leadership itself. This finding indicates that the mechanism of relationships between variables in the educational context does not occur simply, but rather through a layered process. In addition, parental involvement serves as an amplifier that increases the impact of school leadership policies and practices on student learning outcomes.

This also suggests that the effectiveness of leadership is not only determined by internal actions within the school, but also by how well it can mobilize external participation (Wondim, 2025). Thus, the interaction between schools and families becomes a very decisive element in achieving optimal educational outcomes. Furthermore, this condition underscores the importance of a non-partial approach in understanding educational phenomena. Therefore, the sequential mediation model is considered more capable of representing complex causal relationships compared to a linear approach. This model provides a more comprehensive picture of the process of improving student achievement. Accordingly, sequential mediation-based analysis becomes relevant for explaining educational dynamics in a more realistic and in-depth manner (Motevalli, 2025).

Further discussion in this study emphasizes that the interrelationship among variables in the model used is gradual while simultaneously reinforcing each other. The relationships formed do not stand alone, but rather show a pattern of systematic and continuous interconnection. School leadership not only influences a particular aspect, but also triggers a series of impacts that extend to other variables. This phenomenon illustrates a chain effect that arises as a consequence of effective leadership practices (Vennegoor, 2025).

In this context, parental support acts as a mediating variable that strengthens and channels the influence of leadership on student achievement. This mediating role becomes key in explaining how the impact can be delivered optimally (Yang, 2025). These findings also indicate that a simple linear approach is still unable to capture the complexity of relationships within the education system comprehensively. Therefore, a more comprehensive and layered analytical approach is required (Legede, 2025). The sequential mediation model emerges as a more representative alternative in explaining these dynamics. In addition to providing conceptual clarity, this model is also capable of capturing a more realistic relational process. Moreover, the application of this model provides

added value in practical aspects. Thus, the results of this study have important implications for the management and development of more effective education policies (Zhou, 2025).

The implications of this research result emphasize that efforts to improve student achievement cannot be carried out partially, but rather require a collaborative approach involving schools and families simultaneously (Czerwinski, 2025). In this context, the principal is required to design and implement leadership strategies that can encourage active parental involvement in the educational process. Participative and inclusive leadership becomes the key in building harmonious relationships between the school and families (Chaturvedi, 2026). On the other hand, parents also need to be given ample opportunities to contribute to supporting their child's academic development.

This involvement can be realized through intensive communication, participation in school activities, and assistance with learning at home. With constructive interaction between the school and parents, a mutually reinforcing synergy in improving the quality of education will be formed (Mesas, 2025). In addition, educational policies should also be directed to facilitate effective and sustainable communication between both parties. This policy support is important so that the established relationship is not temporary, but can continue consistently. Thus, the continuity of students' learning outcomes can be maintained through solid collaboration between schools and families (Martin, 2025).

In general, the findings and discussion in this study confirm that effective school principal leadership acts as a key trigger in increasing parental involvement and support, which in turn has a positive impact on students' academic achievement. The relationships between these variables occur gradually and show a pattern that mutually reinforces each other, with communication as the most decisive mediating element (Çapar, 2026). With this mechanism, the process of influence does not occur directly, but rather through a systematic and continuous pathway. Therefore, the application of a sequential mediation model is able to provide a more comprehensive analytical framework in explaining the complexity of interactions in the world of education (Pontillo, 2025).

This model also provides a deeper understanding compared to conventional linear approaches, which tend to be simple. In addition, the results of this study also make a significant contribution to enriching the body of educational theory, particularly regarding the relationship between school leadership and family involvement (Balabanovska, 2025). Not only at the conceptual level, these findings also have important practical implications in the formulation of education policy. Policies that are designed can be more directed in encouraging collaboration between schools and parents. Thus, these research results are expected to be able to support efforts to improve the quality of education in a sustainable and more effective manner.

CONCLUSION

In general, this study confirms that students' academic success cannot be explained through a single dimension, but must be understood as the result of the interaction of various factors interconnected within a complex education system. Through a systematic narrative literature review approach, it was identified that school leadership plays an important role as an initial variable influencing the dynamics of relationships among actors in education. Effective leadership is able to create a conducive learning environment, strengthen collaborative values, and encourage active participation from students' parents. Within this framework, the role of the school principal is not limited to administrative aspects, but also encompasses transformational roles in driving all elements of education. In addition, parental involvement has been proven to play a significant role as a link between school leadership and student learning outcomes. This indicates that the

relationships between variables are systemic, integrated, and cannot be separated partially. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of these interconnections becomes a key factor in efforts to continuously improve the quality of education.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of a sequential mediation model is able to provide a more comprehensive analytical framework in explaining the cause-and-effect relationships between variables compared to a simple linear approach. Within this framework, school leadership does not have a direct influence on student achievement, but rather works through an intermediary variable in the form of parental support, which is reinforced by the quality of communication between the school and the family. This gradual relational pattern indicates the presence of a significant indirect influence mechanism in improving student learning outcomes. In addition, the results of this study also affirm that the quality of interaction between the school and parents is a crucial element in determining the success of the educational process. Thus, effective communication serves as a reinforcing factor that strengthens the interconnection between variables. Furthermore, the sequential mediation model provides a more comprehensive perspective in understanding the complexity of educational dynamics. This approach is able to reveal relationships that are not visible in simple models. Therefore, the use of this model emphasizes the importance of an integrative approach in modern educational research.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Google Assisted to assist inimproving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) Carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responbility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.
Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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