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## AN INVESTIGATION OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS EARLY CHILDHOOD COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Early childhood cognitive development is considered an important driver for a child's future academic success and overall well-being. The present study aims to explore and understand the parental perspectives of parents about their children's cognitive development. Based on the qualitative exploratory research paradigm, the study adopted phenomenology as the underpinning research philosophy. 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with parents located in Karachi, Pakistan. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. The participants' narratives emerged four themes which were then further elaborated in sub-ordinate themes. The study found that parents are aware and conscious of their child's physical development, however, there is a considerable gap in understanding of cognitive development, especially socio-emotional milestones. The study found that there is a massive influence of traditional practices, healthcare professionals' influences, and social media platforms in framing parental knowledge and perspectives about their child's cognitive development. The study also found parents' educational level, and parenting style, further determine their success in school settings. Finally, it was found*

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*that parents association with school activities exhibits a positive influence on their child's early childhood cognitive development.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Cognitive Development, Early Childhood, Parents, Karachi, Pakistan*

**INTRODUCTION**

A child's early life is very critical for their cognitive development, this early age determines their future academic successes as well as their overall well-being. Around the world, more than 43% (nearly 250 million) of children aged between 2 to 5 years are at high risk of not achieving appropriate physical and cognitive development. This high risk of not getting the required development can be attributed to various factors such as poverty, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of other necessities that are essential for their development (World Bank Group, 2021). Consequently, children who are deprived of fundamental facilities care, protection, health, nutrition, early stimulation, learning opportunities, etc., have a high tendency to struggle with lowered cognitive, language psychosocial, and executive functioning challenges., which in turn can lead to poor academic performances during pre-primary and primary schooling. Henceforth, and, in many cases, children with developmental challenges are being dropped out of school.

Pakistan the world's 5<sup>th</sup> most populous country with more than 220 million population is struggling with a very low Human Capital score i.e., 0.4. This shows that the productivity of a normal child born in Pakistan child is around 41% if he or she is given appropriate access to education and health. In children most of the risks to development emerge during the first 5 years of their lives, this is a stage when the brain begins to develop rapidly with its full potential (Gilmore et al., 2018). During early life, our brain and memory grow faster, physical growth also fastens, and intellectual and social-emotional development also begins to develop during early childhood. In their early years, children need appropriate nurturing which comes not only from proper nutrition and health care but also from a safe and peaceful environment where kind and experienced caregivers engage with their children more actively and provide them with psychosocial support. This support involved a range of treatments such as sensitive, responsive, and developmentally appropriate play and interactions. This treatment is given routinely such as regular talking and playing (Bendini, & Devercelli, (2022).; World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund; Yousafzai et al., 2014).

Studies have emphasized the role of parent engagement, psychosocial skills, and educational support in enhancing children's cognitive growth in rural Pakistan (Rasheed et al. (2020) and Oliveira et al., 2022). Furthermore, understanding how

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parents perceive and support children with intellectual disabilities in Pakistan is essential for designing effective educational programs (Bashir, 2024). Due to rapid changes in the socioeconomic system, limited parental involvement and traditional beliefs emerged as major impediments to optimal cognitive development in children in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2020; Kamal et al., 2022). Recognizing the interplay between socioeconomic factors, parental engagement, and children's foundational learning skills is crucial for addressing cognitive disparities in Pakistan (Hammad, 2024). Therefore, the. Research has consistently shown that parental presence and involvement are key factors in fostering optimal cognitive development in children (Chen et al. 2022). The literature demonstrates that cognitive skills development is a comprehensive concept that entails the maturation of a diverse array of abilities and is defined by the American Psychological Association (VandenBos, 2015) as “the skills involved in performing the tasks associated with perception, learning, memory, understanding, awareness, reasoning, judgment, intuition, and language” (p. 202). In this process, as Bandura highlighted in 1993, parents can play a crucial role in stimulating and supporting children’s self-regulatory and cognitive development (Bandura, 1993).

The research stressed that parents play a crucial role in developing cognitive abilities in early infancy. Various studies highlight the significance of parenting styles, interactions, and behaviours in shaping children's cognitive abilities. For instance, research indicates that parenting styles significantly impact the cognitive development of young children (Fadlillah & Pangastuti, 2022). In addition, parental expectations and behaviors can influence the development of anxious cognitions in children, emphasizing the importance of parental support for positive cognitive outcomes (Emerson et al., 2019). Moreover, parental scaffolding during activities like book-sharing can predict a child's general intelligence, showcasing the role of parent-child interactions in cognitive skill development (Forest et al., 2023). Perhaps, parents who are involved in verbal interactions, activities, and games with their children allowed them to enhance their children’s linguistic skills and shared attention and meanings. Such parental active engagement can enhance children’s creativity and engagement with their environments which in turn improve their academic performances and successes (Grossmann et al., 1999). From the theoretical perspective, parental involvement is a concept that is included in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1979). This theory emphasizes the importance of considering both proximal factors (such as paternal involvement) and distal factors (such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and school context) to fully understand the impact of fathers on the cognitive development of children.

In the Pakistani context, societal attitudes, gender norms, and cultural beliefs can significantly influence women's personal and professional activities, underscoring the

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broader influences on children's cognitive development (Nasir et al., 2021). Moreover, the necessity for context-specific measures to evaluate children's cognitive abilities in Pakistan due to outdated assessment tools highlights the importance of cultural relevance in cognitive assessments (Shuja et al., 2022). The influence of parental support, self-esteem, and sports participation on academic achievement in Pakistan further underscores the multifaceted nature of factors influencing cognitive development (Aboud, & Yousafzai, 2015; Roomi et al., 2018).

Despite the importance of the parental role in early children's cognitive-related development, there is a gap in understanding the specific parental factors influencing early childhood cognitive development in Pakistan. The literature witnessed the series of factors that influence on and influence by cognitive development of children. In this context, healthcare professionals, researchers, and academicians have their distinct explanations that undervalue the perspectives of parents. Henceforth, there are contradictions in the research on the phenomena. Therefore, more comprehensive studies are needed to explore diverse aspects of cognitive development, moving beyond specific areas like healthcare professionals (Khalid & Iraqi, 2022). Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring parental perspectives regarding early children's cognitive development in Malir, Karachi, Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood cognitive development is critical in shaping a child's growth and future success. Research consistently demonstrates that cognitive development during early childhood is essential for various aspects of a child's life. Parents, educators, and policymakers must acknowledge the importance of early childhood cognitive development to offer the necessary support and interventions to facilitate optimal development.

The recent studies e.g., Adhani, Anshori, & Nasution, (2024) and Zamzam et al., (2023) put emphasized the importance of a child's early cognitive abilities in day-to-day activities and functions. Cognitive skills developed during early childhood can form the learning base and problem-solving. Early exposure to cognitive stimuli and learning opportunities enhances the cognitive development of a child and paves the way for achievement in academics and life. In addition, research conducted by Kyriazopoulou et al. (2022) and Yasrab & Shah (2022) has underpinned that good quality early childhood education leads to a positive influence on cognitive development.

Quality early childhood education programs harness cognitive skills while promoting social and emotional development, thus laying a strong base for future learning and well-being. Cognitive development-oriented interventions have a range

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of benefits such as improving academic performance and developing socio-emotional skills. In addition to this, Mustikawati et al., (2023) and Fadlillah & Pangastuti (2022) focused on the integration of cognitive development activities like educational games and literacy programs into early childhood education curricula. These interventions aim to boost cognitive abilities, language skills, and problem-solving capabilities, which will result in academic success.

The recent research also emphasized parenting styles as an important factor significantly shaping children's development and their behaviors. Different parenting styles affect the cognitive, emotional, and social growth of children. Moreover, the other set of research studies such as those by (Hidayat et al., 2023), (Rahimah & Sukiman, 2020), and Kilic, Var, & Kumandas, (2015) have revealed different parenting styles such as positive, permissive, authoritarian, democratic, and neglectful styles. These parenting styles have a considerable influence on children's independent character development and their social attitudes (Hidayat, 2023; Rahimah & Sukiman, 2020; Kilic, Var, & Kumandas, (2015).

To comprehend the key implications of different parenting, styles are highly essential for fostering positive child outcomes and promoting their mental health. In addition, as He et al (2023) argue, other studies by (Hughes et al., 2008) and Lim & Ong, (2024) showed that there is a relationship between social-emotional development, emotional warmth, rejection, indulgent feeding styles, and authoritative parenting styles, children's weight status and their socio-emotional skills. These research studies are focusing the role of parent's emotional responsiveness and their engagement in fostering children's cognitive growth. In addition, the relationship between parenting styles socio-emotional skills, and interpersonal conflict is highly researched by (Velasco-Rauda, 2024; Nie et al., 2023; Ren & Edwards, 2014). These researchers call for the long-term effects of parenting styles on children's cognition, behaviour, and social competence. This underscores the need to adopt effective and supportive parenting practices.

The literature shows studying connection between cognitive development and school performance is a highly critical topic which has substantial implications for the academic success of children and well-being. Understanding the role of the influence of cognitive development throughout early infancy on school performance is a highly critical research area. This area can help educators, parents, and policymakers in devising and implementing effective interventions and support mechanisms. Several researchers have explored this connection and found prediction by early cognitive skills of later school attainment. Thus, Duncan et al., (2008), and Campbell et al., (2001), in their studies demonstrated the correlations between school readiness dimensions, including academic, attentional, and socioemotional-related skills, with

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later school success in reading and math.

These researchers underscore on role of early cognitive and socioemotional skills that make children prepared for academic success and help them to adapt school's environment. In addition, researchers such as Liu et al. (2003) and Knag et al. (2023) have studied the impact of a child's nutrition, resilience profiles, and function skills. These researchers postulated the long-term effects of early childhood experiences, such as nutrition, resilience, and executive function on a child's cognitive development. Moreover, motor competence skills, playful learning, and executive function skills in early childhood may further serve as precursors to school readiness that would advance academic success in school, according to Willoughby & Hudson, 2021; Solis, 2019. These, therefore, point to a multi-dimensional cognitive development that has different effects on children's learning and school performance. In this way, early childhood cognitive development in Pakistan is a very critical area of focus that has important applications in children's academic success and well-being. We need to understand the underlying factors behind cognitive development in early childhood so we can propose positive outcomes in children's learning and development. It is to acknowledge that several research studies have investigated early childhood cognitive development and various factors that affect this development in the context of Pakistan. For example, JECCE (2023) conducted a situational analysis of early childhood education in Pakistan. They highlighted key challenges and proposed solutions. Hence, this underlying study investigates early childhood education development in Pakistan, it attempts to address challenges faced and proposes solutions to enhance quality early childhood education in the country. Furthermore, in other research, Rafiq et al. (2023) have explored the professional motivation challenges of early childhood teacher education, and Ahmad (2011) has investigated the situation of early childhood education in Pakistan. These studies identified challenges faced by early childhood teachers and proposed solutions for enhancing training, professional development opportunities, and national attention.

In addition to this, Yasrab (2022) accessed the effectiveness of childhood education-related projects working in the province of Punjab. They investigated how these projects enhanced students' cognitive development in this province. Their findings study emphasized on development of early childhood education and urged for additional funding and teacher training. In this way, the role of early childhood cognitive development is highly essential for shaping children's academic performance, social skills, and overall development. The present study attempts to identify key challenges and suggest solutions essential for the development of cognitive skills of Pakistani children to help them achieve future academic success and well-being.

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To investigate the relationship between socio-economic factors and parental influence on cognitive development in pre-primary children.
2. To examine the impact of parental support on cognitive abilities, including language development, problem-solving skills, and attention span, during the pre-primary years.
3. To evaluate the long-term effects of early childhood experiences, facilitated by parental involvement, on cognitive outcomes.
4. To assess the significance of parental involvement in shaping cognitive development in pre-primary children.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. How do parental attitudes influence cognitive development in early childhood?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY****Research Paradigm**

This study follows the qualitative exploratory research paradigm. In this way, the phenomenological approach was used to address the main research objective(s). Qualitative inquiry adds depth and meaning to phenomena that otherwise might remain ignored by survey-based approaches (Punch, 2013). The phenomenological approach was used to elicit rich experiences from parents whose children are in the early development phase. The chosen approach allows researchers to explore and understand the phenomenon's lived experiences (Salmon, 2012).

**Study Population**

The population of the study is the parents, including fathers and mothers, whose children were studying in pre-primary schools (Grades 1 to 4) in Karachi, Pakistan. For this study, the participants were chosen regardless of their socioeconomic and cultural status, as well as their children's affiliation with the private and public school system. Data collected from Karachi of cosmopolitan country's largest city with 30 million population can help us explore parental perspectives on children's cognitive development in Pakistan.

The researchers initially contacted participants via text messages to ask them about feasible interview times when they were conveniently available. The researchers assured the participants that they participated in the study voluntarily and were free to forgo the research at any stage without giving any reason. In addition, they were guaranteed that their answers would remain anonymous, and the results of the research would be presented collectively.

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**Data Collection Process and Sampling**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the parents using interview protocols, which were structured and devised based on an extensive literature review. The study follows theoretical sampling, for instance, the researchers stopped further interviews when we attained a point of saturation i.e., where no new themes emerged from interviews. Hence, we reached a saturation point at 16 interviews; however, to confirm that our sample was appropriate we conducted two more interviews to observe if there is any novel themes were obtained (Creswell and Poth, 2016). To gather a wide range of experiences, both purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to reach the participants of the parents on their child's early cognitive development. The participants were first communicated via SMS/WhatsApp without direct phone calling to ensure their privacy and willingness.

During the first message exchange, we had a brief introduction and said the primary reason behind our outreach. We also asked for a mutually agreed time for the interview. Having made the first contact, we opened the phone call with pleasantries, thanking them for their important time, even in the face of demanding schedules. We also re-communicated the purpose of our study with them to assure them that their personal information and responses are kept strictly confidential. In addition to this, we also informed them that the record of the interview would be kept for our analytical purposes. However, the audio file will be promptly destroyed once the completion of the study. In the end, we conveyed our gratitude to them for their exceptional and unparalleled commitment to sharing sensitive information about themselves and their children. Finally, we thanked them for sharing their important insights with us. We reiterated and guaranteed them once again that all discussions would remain secret, and we confirmed our accessibility by furnishing our contact information for any further inquiries or concerns. Every interview was conducted in Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, and had a minimum duration of 30–40 minutes. Subsequently, it was translated into English for analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were analyzed by utilizing Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis method. The interviews were transcribed into Urdu and then translated into English. Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection, and interview transcriptions were done within one day of the interviews. The transcriptions then were imported to ATLAS.ti 22 for analysis.

**FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

A total of 26 parents were approached based on set-inclusive criteria. Of the total 26 parents, three of them were excluded because they did not meet the specified criteria to be included in the study. Of the remaining 23 eligible parents, two refused to



participate in the study. In the end, 21 parents had given their consent to participate in the study. However, after the 16<sup>th</sup> interview, researchers reached the point of saturation. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the Parents and their children.

**Table 1: Participants Profile**

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<i>Parents (both Mother and Fathers)</i>	11
<i>Single Parents</i>	5
<i>Schools (Located in Malir Region, Karachi)</i>	
<i>Government-run Schools</i>	9
<i>Private Schools</i>	7
<i>Children Grade Levels</i>	
<i>Grade 1</i>	3
<i>Grade 2</i>	2
<i>Grade 3</i>	5
<i>Grade 4</i>	6

The findings show all participants were concerned about their child's cognitive development and showed a strong intention to improve further. However, there were many challenges were delineated. Table 2 shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participant's narratives.

**Table 2: Themes and Sub-Themes Emerged**

	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
1	Parental Knowledge and Awareness of Early Childhood Development (ECD)	Knowledge Levels Sources of Knowledge Barriers to Knowledge
2	Attitudes and Beliefs About Child Development	Perception of Developmental Milestones Cultural Beliefs and Practices: Role of Caregivers
3	Influence of Socioeconomic and Educational Backgrounds	Education Level Socioeconomic Factors
4	Parental Concerns on Academic Performance	Role of Reading and Language Skills School's Role in Enhancing Parenting Skills Expectations and Home Environment. Mothers Narratives

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**Theme 1: Parental Knowledge and Awareness of Early Childhood Cognitive Development**

The study revealed that parents in Pakistan generally understand developmental milestones related to physical and motor skills, such as crawling, walking, and speech development.

*I do not know what to look for in terms of cognitive growth. I assume my child will pick things up naturally. P1*

These milestones are apparent and are frequently discussed in routine pediatric visits, making them easily recognizable to parents. However, there is a notable gap in knowledge regarding cognitive and socio-emotional development. While parents know basic concepts like learning and intelligence, they often lack a deeper understanding of nurturing these areas. This gap extends to socio-emotional development, where parents may recognize basic emotional expressions but are less informed about the importance of emotional regulation and social skills. The following are the sub-themes that emerged from participants' views.

**Sources of Knowledge**

The study found that parents obtain information on child development from a variety of sources, including family members, including grandparents and extended family, who are significant contributors to parental knowledge and often share traditional practices and experiences.

*I have relatives and my grandmother whenever I ask questions and get immediate answers. However, he sometimes worries that the information is sometimes outdated and traditional. P2, P9*

In addition, the study found that pediatricians and healthcare providers also play a critical role, in providing professional guidance during regular medical check-ups. Early childhood educators and childcare providers contribute insights based on their professional expertise.

*The doctor gives me pamphlets, but I also like to read blogs and join online parenting forums,' she says, appreciating the mix of professional and peer advice." P6*

Moreover, the study explored that parents consulted some printed materials such as books, pamphlets, and booklets are valuable resources for parents seeking in-depth knowledge. Parenting books are particularly popular, offering comprehensive information on various developmental aspects. Additionally, healthcare providers often distribute pamphlets and handouts that cover essential milestones and health-related topics. Similarly, the research found the Internet, specifically social media in Pakistan has emerged as a predominant source of information for parents. Websites, blogs, and online forums are frequently utilized for advice and peer support. Social

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networks, especially parenting groups, provide a platform for sharing experiences and seeking diverse perspectives. Online videos and articles also offer accessible information on a range of developmental topics.

*'There are so many parenting groups on Facebook where I can ask questions and get immediate answers from other parents,' he explains. However, he sometimes worries about the accuracy of the information." P11*

Television and radio programs focused on parenting are another source of information. These media outlets often feature experts discussing child development and providing practical tips and educational content.

### **Barriers to Knowledge**

Although parents provided sufficient information, we identified several barriers that hindered parents' accessibility to reliable knowledge related to cognitive and socio-emotional development. For instance, variability in the quality of information, primarily online, poses a significant challenge. While some sources are accurate and evidence-based, others disseminate misinformation or outdated practices, causing confusion among parents. Moreover, the study found the vast amount of information available can overwhelm parents, making it difficult to filter and prioritize reliable advice. This information overload has created decision paralysis or reliance on less credible and readily available sources.

## **Theme 2. Attitudes and Beliefs About Child Cognitive Development Perception of Developmental Milestones**

In this study, we have found that parents associated child development with the achievement of physical activities, such as walking, talking, and other motor skills. These perceptions have overshadowed less visible aspects, such as cognitive and socio-emotional growth. One example is a parent, (P3), who says she mainly checks that her children's physical state is progressing well, by saying, *"If they're walking and talking on time, I think everything is okay,"* in effect by focusing on that as a sign the rest is likely okay.

### **Cultural Beliefs and Practices**

Cultural norms and beliefs also have a profound influence on shaping parent's attitudes and practices regarding child-rearing. In Pakistan, traditional practices are deeply rooted in cultural fabric. The culture in Pakistan places centers on ancestral knowledge and traditional healthcare approaches passed from generation to generation. These traditional approaches are very ineffective and are also culturally revered. This has created an inclination towards natural and home-based treatments over modern medical interventions.

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Based on the parental perspectives, the Pakistani social system, there are many traditional practices, for instance, *ghutti* which is a traditional herbal concoction that is normally provided to newborns. Another desi practice is *malish* which is an oil massage given to infants), and another traditional approach is dietary restrictions during pregnancy. These practices are believed to promote physical well-being and are often endorsed by elders in the family. These cultural traditions reflect our study's findings, for instance in an interview we found that parents namely Shirin always prefer traditional over modern approaches. This reflects a cultural trend where traditional wisdom is deeply rooted and is deemed trustworthy compared to contemporary medical practices.

It is found that these cultural beliefs sometimes also support but other times contradict the current child development theories. For instance, a mother of one, Shirin, once said how she goes back to old remedies in dealing with her child: "*My mother always said these things work better than medicine.*" (P5), such reliance denotes the use of inherited cultural wisdom. Such beliefs tend to co-exist with, and may at times contradict, contemporary scientific advice.

### **Role of Caregivers**

It is also revealed that Pakistani Parents acknowledge the roles of different caregivers, including themselves, grandparents, and early childhood educators. There is a realization that these individuals play a unique role in the development of a child. (P8) who has two children, argued, "*It's important that my kids understand our heritage,*" and in this regard, caregivers avail, not just the physical needs but cultural and moral education. However, different stakeholders underline the role of the caregiver to varying extents, with some parents prioritizing family influence over other formal educational settings.

### **Theme 3 Influence of Socioeconomic and Educational Backgrounds**

#### **Education Level**

When it comes to a parent's education level our findings reveal that a parent's educational levels have a considerable influence on the quality of child-rearing and their development. Parents with higher education can access more detailed and research-based information. For example, university-educated parents (P7) like Salman said, "*I believe in staying informed,*" justifying their proactive approach to finding the latest research in the field of child psychology. In contrast, parents who had comparatively lower formal education, like Nahid, tend to make more judgments based on their instinct and traditional knowledge; she said that it was hard to comprehend difficult issues in development: "*I mostly go by instinct and what my mother taught me.*" (P15)

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**Socioeconomic Factors**

Socioeconomic status is also an important factor that determines resource availability and opportunities essential for child development. For instance, financial hindrances that limit educational materials accessibility, enrichment activities, and provision of professional guidance. In an interview with Ali who is a father of two children encountered key challenges of provision educational resources: He said, "*We can't afford fancy toys or books, so we make do with what we have,*" indicating a reliance on free community resources. Another interview with, Laila, who had more resources said that "*We can afford to buy educational toys and attend classes,*" thereby explaining how socio-economic advantages could serve in improving the developmental environment for a child.

**Theme 4. Concerns on Academic Performance**

Parents emphasized devising clear educational goals and plans to give clear direction for the child's learning. This priority can motivate children and help them to direct their efforts toward specific objectives. In this manner, this approach can boost both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

*"We set clear educational goals for our children at the beginning of each school year. It helps them understand what they are working towards and keeps them motivated. For instance, aiming for a science fair project or a reading challenge gives them something tangible to strive for." P13*

**Role of Reading and Language Skills**

Moreover, we have found that parents put significant importance on enriching reading habits and developing language skills, parents consider them as essential elements for their child's cognitive abilities. Parents have realized that children's engagement in regular readings and conversations are highly effective ways to improve vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking.

*"Every evening, we spend time reading together. It is not just about the stories; it's about discussing them and learning new words. I can see how this practice has helped my child think critically and express themselves better." (P2)*

**School's Role in Enhancing Parenting Skills**

In addition to the above-explored factors, the role of schools also plays an important role in boosting parenting skills. The school usually offers parents guidance and resources on how to support their child's learning at home. The support is quite important for parents, as it equips them with the necessary skills to create a conducive learning environment.

*"The workshops offered by the school have been incredibly helpful. They taught me how to support my child's learning process effectively, like creating a quiet study space and establishing a consistent homework routine." (P14)*

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These feedbacks underscores school-led initiatives's positive influence on parental practices. This indicates how school efforts can empower parents to better support their children's academic achievement.

### **Expectations and Home Environment**

Aspirations parents hold for their children often express themselves in specific actions and attitudes that bring about a positive and motivating home environment. The children are guided by their parents to dream big, and they support their achievements.

*"I always encourage my children to aim high in their studies. We talk about their ambitions and how their current efforts can lead them there. This has created a positive, goal-oriented atmosphere at home." (P7)*

The above underlying response from parents talks about children's future ambitions and their academic goals to motivate them to hard work. This in return fosters a goal-oriented mindset.

### **Mothers Narratives**

The participants specifically Mothers in this study have shown support for their child's cognitive development and academic success. These narratives from mothers call for personal insights into day-to-day activities and challenges they have encountered.

One mother said, *"Reading together has been our special time; it helps improve vocabulary and strengthens our bond. I believe these small practices go a long way in improving the academic journey of my child."* P13

Another commented, *"The workshops on child development at school were a real eye-opener. They taught me how to set realistic academic goals and support my child's learning in a structured way."* P12.

### **DISCUSSION**

The underlying findings of this study which centers on Pakistani parents' knowledge of cognitive `child development reveal a considerable gap in comprehending cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of a child's physical and motor skills. Although some parents have shown some familiarity with children's physical health and activities i.e., crawling and walking, however, there is a lack of proper understanding of the child's cognitive growth and socio-emotional development. This discrepancy in knowledge could show its consequences on the matter of parenting and support provided to children in these important areas of development. Literature supports the influence of child outcomes and parent-child relationships by way of parental knowledge about development. Some of the important studies in this area such as Sullivan et al., (2021), Rikhy et al. (2010) postulated a strong link between knowledge of a child's development and cognitive outcomes. Another

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important study by Cote, & Bornstein, (2021) and Aldayel et al. (2020) studied parents' knowledge of child development essential for enhancing children's quality of life. In addition to this, Kiran et al., (2023) discussed how parental knowledge of child development is important for cognitive structure that can be adapted to developmental changes.

The sources of knowledge identified in this study about parental knowledge of child development in Pakistan were also indicative of those found in existent literature on how parents obtain information regarding child development, with a focus on family members, especially grandparents, and members of the extended family, as big contributors to parental knowledge by way of sharing traditional practices experiences. This familial influence on parenting practices is supported by studies such as those by September et al. (2015) and Rikhy et al. (2010), which emphasize the role of family in shaping parental knowledge of child development.

Similarly, the present research emphasized the role of healthcare providers who are providing professional guidance during medical check-up visits. This can supply valuable insights into child development and their well-being. Additionally, Chaudhry (2023) highlighted the roles of healthcare professionals who can assist in boosting parental knowledge of child development. In addition to familial and medical sources, the study emphasizes the contributions of early childhood educators, childcare providers, and printed materials like books and pamphlets in enhancing parental knowledge. Literature by Bhutta & Hafeez (2015) supports the significance of early childhood education and printed materials in promoting child health and well-being in Pakistan. Moreover, the study highlights the increasing reliance on the Internet, particularly social media, as a major source of information among parents. Concerning this, the research work of Mohiuddin et al. (2018) argues that the increasing use of social media in spreading information is changing the level of practice of parenting and the issue of setting norms in Pakistan society.

The researchers such as Rakotomamonjy et al., (2015) and Neill et al. (2014) acknowledge that although information available to parents about child development may be accurate, however, it is not sufficient, unclear, and not easily accessible. This lacking clarity and lower accessibility have impeded parents' ability to gain complete and reliable knowledge required for effectively supporting their children's holistic development. In contrast, Hansen et al., (2023) highly acknowledged the significance of easily available, clear, and professionally validated sources. They proposed a range of frameworks for addressing underlying barriers faced by parents. These barriers range from low levels of literacy to limited accessibility of information. When parents are properly trained with accurate and up-to-date resources, this will empower them with the knowledge needed to effectively support their children's

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development. Furthermore, Ndugga et al. (2023) study also argued and Lee & Moon (2016) that it is important to reduce the barriers that revolve around limited knowledge and understanding and poor access to mental health or health information services. In this manner, by making sure that parents have easy access to reliable information, stakeholders can provide support in overcoming barriers. This will ensure easy access to resources needed for the development of children's cognitive and socio emotional. In conclusion, removing barriers that restrict access to reliable knowledge of child development will empower parents with accurate and comprehensive information to be effective agents in the development of their children in a holistic manner. With accessible, clear, and professionally validated resources, stakeholders can further help parents handle the complexities associated with variability, overload, and credibility of information, in the process creating positive child outcomes in cognitive and socio-emotional development.

The literature consistently emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in cognitive development, particularly through activities like setting educational goals and fostering reading habits. Studies have shown that when parents actively engage in their children's education, it leads to higher academic achievement and better cognitive outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). The findings of this study corroborate this, as parents identified goal setting and reading as crucial components of their involvement. However, the study adds depth by highlighting the specific ways in which these activities are implemented and perceived by parents. For instance, the emphasis on reading together not only as an educational activity but also as a bonding experience was a unique insight. The narrative of a mother stating, "Reading together has been our special time; it not only helps in improving vocabulary but also strengthens our bond," underscores a dual benefit of cognitive and emotional development, which is less frequently discussed in the literature.

The literature often highlights the positive impact of strong school-parent partnerships on students' academic success. Research indicates that when schools provide resources and foster open communication with parents, it enhances parents' ability to support their children's learning (Epstein, 2001). This study's findings align with this perspective, as parents expressed appreciation for school workshops and regular communication that equip them with effective parenting strategies. The role of parental expectations and the home environment in shaping children's academic aspirations is well-documented. Studies suggest that high parental expectations positively correlate with children's academic achievement and motivation (Epstein, 2001). This study supports these findings, as parents expressed a strong desire for their children to excel academically and actively fostered a goal-oriented home environment. While much of the literature focuses on the positive aspects of high parental expectations, this study also touches on the potential challenges and stress

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it can impose on children. The narrative around parents setting realistic goals and providing support rather than pressure is crucial. The inclusion of a parent's reflection on the need for realistic goal-setting—"The school's workshops on child development were eye-opening. They taught me how to set realistic academic goals"—provides a nuanced understanding of the balance parents strive to maintain between aspiration and pressure.

This study contributes to the literature on early childhood development in Pakistan by providing an in-depth understanding of parental knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to cognitive and socio-emotional development. The research highlights the significant role that cultural beliefs and traditional practices play in shaping parental perceptions and behaviours. Moreover, it elucidates the importance of accessible and accurate information, showing that variability in information quality and overwhelming volumes of advice can hinder parents from making well-informed decisions. In this manner, the present study uniquely contributes by supplying novel insights on educational interventions, such as school workshops, and how these interventions positively impact parental practices. The present research attempts to provide practical and culturally sensitive guidance.

Despite comprehensive attempts, few limitations have been identified in this study. These limitations include such as we have a relatively small sample size in this study as we only focused on one city, Karachi. This can result in geographical biases i.e.; our chosen sample may not fully represent the country's diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts embedded in other provinces. Moreover, our interviews with parents located in urban settings can limit the generalizability of our findings to rural areas. Finally, the qualitative nature of our study provides rich narrative data but may not accommodate the full spectrum of quantitative differences across parental knowledge and practices.

Future studies should include a wider sample, covering regional and socioeconomic differences, for a better general understanding of parental knowledge and practices on a larger scale throughout Pakistan. Quantitative studies and longitudinal research that could be important about the possible ways in which parental knowledge and practices change, and the possible long-term effects on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, could make important contributions. Additionally, this could be complemented by research on the use of digital media and social platforms to disperse information regarding child development to understand modern influences on parenting practices better.

In conclusion, our underlying study underscores the essential role of parent's knowledge and their engagement in a child's initial cognitive and socio-emotional

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development. The present research attempts to identify key challenges that parents are encountering in accessing reliable and comprehensive information. Furthermore, this study also investigates the influence of cultural beliefs on parental practices in Pakistan. By identifying the underlying gaps in parental knowledge and key barriers that hinder the accessibility of quality information, this study calls for the need to devise targeted educational interventions and resources. These important initiatives should be tailored to be culturally sensitive and accessible to all parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, which can provide support to a child's holistic development.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Parenting style plays a vital role in shaping early childhood cognitive development. To address this important issue here are some recommendations:

1. Encourage parent-teacher partnerships to support cognitive development.
2. Ensure accessible resources for vulnerable populations like the Malir area of Karachi.
3. Allocate resources/funds for parents' support services.
4. Educate parents by conducting fruitful sessions on the above topic.
5. Considering the importance of this topic, further and in-depth research is recommended.

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