

Parental Involvement and Academic Success among Students with Special Educational Needs

Siti Quayume Azira Binti Aziz¹, Nur Muneerah Binti Kasim², Siti Aminah Binti Harun³

¹Unitar International University

²University Selangor (Unisel)

³Universiti Malaya-Wales (IUM WALES)

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing the academic success of students, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN). This qualitative study explored the experiences, perceptions, and practices of 10 parents and 5 teachers in inclusive school settings to understand how parental engagement supports learning outcomes. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in four major themes: home-based engagement, school-based collaboration, barriers and contextual factors, and advocacy and informed engagement. Findings indicate that effective parental involvement is multidimensional and context-dependent, combining structured support at home, active participation in school-based planning, and informed advocacy to align home and school practices. Socio-economic constraints, time pressures, and limited knowledge of special education processes were identified as challenges that may influence the quality of engagement. The study underscores the importance of structured programs, accessible resources, and collaborative policies to strengthen family–school partnerships and enhance academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students with SEN.

Keywords: Special educational needs; Academic success; Inclusive education; Family–school collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement has long been recognized as a central factor in shaping children's educational experiences, yet its role becomes even more pronounced when considering students with special educational needs (SEN). Research over the past decade consistently highlights that family engagement is not merely supplementary but foundational to academic success for learners who require personalized support and instructional adaptations (Mokhtar et al., 2024). In inclusive educational settings, active parental participation fosters a supportive learning environment bridging home and school contexts, which can significantly influence performance outcomes for students with disabilities or learning challenges (Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025). Such involvement spans a range of activities, from collaboration with educators in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to monitoring homework and reinforcing learning strategies at home.

Contemporary studies emphasize the multifaceted nature of parental involvement, encompassing emotional support, communication with educators, and advocacy on behalf of the child (Mokhtar et al., 2024). According to recent systematic reviews, students with SEN demonstrate higher academic achievement and socio-emotional development when parents and families engage collaboratively with schools and teachers (Mokhtar et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with broader parental involvement research, which shows positive correlations between family engagement and students' motivation, engagement, and academic success across grade levels (Yang et al., 2023). For students with SEN, the alignment of home-based support with school learning goals often determines the degree to which instructional strategies translate into measurable academic gains.

The effect of parental involvement on student outcomes is neither uniform nor static; it is influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and systemic variables (Hernawati et al., 2025). Barriers such as limited parental understanding of special education processes, resource constraints, and time pressures can attenuate the positive impact parents aspire to make (Mokhtar et al., 2024). Conversely, when schools implement structured programs that facilitate parent-school partnerships, the potential for academic growth among SEN students increases. Such programs include regular parent-teacher communication channels, workshops that build parental competencies, and inclusive policy frameworks that value family input in educational decision-making.

Recent empirical research specific to SEN learners underscores that family stability and consistent involvement strongly predict favorable academic outcomes (Bendijo et al., 2025). In the Philippines, for example, descriptive correlational findings suggest that emotional support, routine structures, and active family engagement are significantly associated with better academic performance among SEN students (Bendijo et al., 2025). These insights point to the importance of considering family dynamics, not solely parental attendance at school functions as part of a broader construct of meaningful involvement. Effective academic support for SEN learners therefore emerges from a combination of home-based encouragement and coordinated school efforts.

Moreover, the literature indicates that the form of parental involvement matters; not all engagement practices yield equal benefits (Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022). Parental educational level and awareness of their child's specific learning needs may moderate how involvement translates to academic results, suggesting that quality and relevance of engagement are critical dimensions (Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022). For instance, active participation in curriculum-related discussions and individualized planning has been shown to relate more strongly to academic gains than mere attendance at school events. These nuances highlight the importance of equipping parents with targeted knowledge and skills that address the unique educational profiles of SEN students.

In sum, current literature from 2020 to 2026 affirms that parental involvement remains a pivotal determinant of academic success for students with special educational needs, albeit one shaped by contextual and relational factors. Interdisciplinary research advocates for an inclusive framework that integrates family engagement into school systems, supporting both academic and socio-emotional development outcomes (Mokhtar et al., 2024; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025). By fostering genuine partnerships between parents, educators, and policymakers, educational stakeholders can better ensure that students with SEN receive not only access to learning opportunities but also the sustained support necessary for achieving their full academic potential.

Problem statement

Despite consistent recognition of the value of parental involvement, significant disparities remain in how effectively families of students with special educational needs (SEN) can engage with schools. In many educational contexts, parental participation is still limited to peripheral activities rather than meaningful collaboration in instructional planning and decision-making processes. Research indicates that although inclusive policies encourage family-school partnerships, implementation gaps persist, particularly in coordinating home-based support with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and classroom interventions (Gonzalez & Walton, 2025). This inconsistency raises concerns about whether current school structures adequately empower parents to contribute in ways that directly enhance academic outcomes for SEN learners. As a result, the potential benefits of parental involvement may not be fully realized across diverse educational settings.

Furthermore, socio-economic and contextual factors continue to shape the degree and quality of parental engagement, often disadvantaging families with limited resources or knowledge of special education systems. Studies have shown that parents may experience barriers such as insufficient understanding of disability-specific instructional strategies, time constraints, and limited access to school communication channels (Hernawati et al., 2025; Mokhtar et al., 2024). These constraints can weaken the alignment between home support and school expectations, thereby affecting students' academic progress. While parental involvement is frequently promoted as a universal solution for improving achievement, there is insufficient clarity regarding how contextual variables moderate its effectiveness for students with SEN.

In addition, existing research highlights variability in the forms of parental involvement that produce measurable academic gains, yet empirical evidence remains fragmented. Some studies suggest that targeted engagement such as active participation in curriculum discussions and individualized planning, yields stronger academic outcomes than general school-based involvement (Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022). However, there is a lack of comprehensive models that differentiate between types, intensity, and quality of parental engagement specifically within SEN populations. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into which dimensions of parental involvement most significantly predict academic success, and how schools can systematically structure partnerships that are responsive to the diverse profiles of students with special educational needs.

Research objective

- 1) To explore parents lived experiences and perceptions of their involvement in supporting the academic development of children with special educational needs in inclusive school settings.
- 2) To examine how parents and educators collaboratively engage in academic planning and support processes, including communication practices and participation in individualized educational planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a key factor in students' academic development, particularly within special educational needs (SEN) contexts. In inclusive education, family engagement goes beyond basic support at home; it serves as a bridge connecting learning experiences between school and home (Mokhtar et al., 2024). For students with SEN, whose learning often depends on structured accommodations and individualized strategies, consistent parental participation helps reinforce what is taught in the classroom. Families are therefore not merely supportive figures but active partners in shaping their children's educational progress.

Recent research conceptualizes parental involvement as a multidimensional construct that includes emotional support, academic guidance, communication with teachers, and advocacy. A meta-analysis by Mokhtar et al. (2024) found that sustained and structured parental engagement is positively linked to both academic achievement and socio-emotional development among students with disabilities. These benefits operate through multiple pathways: emotional support enhances motivation and resilience, while academic supervision strengthens continuity between school instruction and home practice.

Effective collaboration between parents and educators is especially important in inclusive settings. Gonzalez and Walton (2025) highlight that strong parent-school partnerships improve the implementation of individualized education plans and support shared responsibility in tracking student progress. Key elements of successful collaboration include open communication, clear goal setting, and regular feedback. When these partnerships are genuinely reciprocal, students with SEN are more likely to receive consistent and well-coordinated support across learning environments.

However, the extent and effectiveness of parental involvement are shaped by socio-economic and contextual factors. Hernawati et al. (2025) note that access to resources, financial stability, and institutional support can influence parents' ability to engage in their children's education. Families from disadvantaged backgrounds may face barriers that limit their participation, even when they are highly committed. This suggests that parental involvement should be understood within broader systemic conditions that can either enable or constrain meaningful engagement.

Studies from Southeast Asia further emphasize the role of family dynamics in supporting students with SEN. Bendijo et al. (2025), in a study conducted in the Philippines, found that structured routines, emotional support, and consistent home-based involvement were associated with better academic performance. Their findings indicate that effective parental involvement extends beyond school-related activities and includes everyday interactions that reinforce learning behaviors. Such consistency at home can enhance students' persistence and ability to complete tasks.

Importantly, the quality of parental involvement also matters. Wahyuni and Mangunsong (2022) argue that not all forms of engagement are equally beneficial. Their study shows that involvement grounded in understanding the child's learning needs such as participating in curriculum discussions and engaging in informed advocacy has a stronger impact on academic outcomes than general forms of participation. This highlights the need for schools to provide parents with relevant knowledge and practical strategies tailored to their child's specific needs.

Recent research conducted in Malaysia continues to deepen understanding of inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SEN). For example, a case study by Ghazali et al. (2024) suggests that participation in higher education is increasingly viewed as a basic right for students with special needs, even though various structural and social barriers still exist. The study highlights how factors such as parental acceptance, strong institutional support, and well-implemented inclusive policies contribute significantly to students' ability to engage successfully in academic settings. This reinforces the idea that inclusive education must extend beyond the classroom by involving families and ensuring that institutions are adequately prepared to support diverse learners.

Similarly, findings presented at the **International Conference on Education (INCOED 4.0)**, hosted by UNITAR International University, underline the importance of social dimensions in learning. Zhou (2024) reports that students who perceive higher levels of social support tend to demonstrate stronger engagement in their studies. This indicates that inclusive education is most effective when it is supported by a network of collaboration among educators, families, and institutions, creating a supportive learning environment for SEN students.

In addition, research focusing on early childhood education highlights the role of awareness and attitudes in shaping inclusive practices. Lim (2024) points out that increasing awareness of special educational needs among educators and peers can foster more accepting and supportive classroom environments. Such early exposure not only promotes inclusion at the foundational level but also contributes to more positive long-term educational outcomes. Together, these findings suggest that early intervention, combined with continuous support from families and institutions, is essential for sustaining inclusive education across all stages of learning.

Overall, the literature consistently identifies parental involvement as a crucial, yet context-dependent, factor in the academic success of students with SEN. While its positive impact is well established, differences in resources, knowledge, and the quality of collaboration continue to influence outcomes (Mokhtar et al., 2024; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025). These findings point to the importance of developing integrated approaches that strengthen parent school partnerships, address systemic barriers, and support meaningful, sustained engagement.

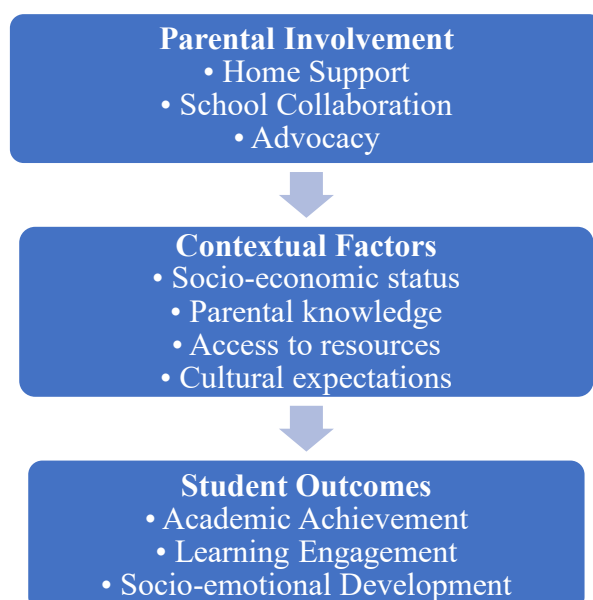


Figure 1.1 A proposed conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

Participants will be selected using purposive sampling, targeting parents of students with SEN enrolled in inclusive schools, as well as educators involved in individualized educational planning. This approach is intentionally chosen to ensure that all participants have meaningful, first-hand experience with the phenomenon being explored. Selection criteria will include factors such as the child's educational placement, type of support received, and the participant's level of involvement in the child's learning process. Efforts will also be made to include a diverse range of participants in terms of background and experiences, so that multiple perspectives on parental involvement can be captured.

The sample size will not be fixed in advance instead, recruitment will continue until data saturation is achieved. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new themes, insights, or patterns emerge from the data, indicating that the phenomenon has been sufficiently explored. This ensures that the findings are rich, comprehensive, and reflective of participants' shared and varied experiences.

Data will be collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility for participants to openly share their experiences while allowing the researcher to guide the discussion around key themes aligned with the research objectives. Interviews will be audio-recorded with informed consent and supplemented by observational notes where relevant. These notes will capture contextual details and non-verbal cues, helping to deepen the understanding of participants' perspectives and the meanings they attach to their experiences.

The collected data will be analysed using thematic analysis, following an iterative and reflective process of coding, categorizing, and identifying patterns and themes that address the research objectives. NVivo software may be employed to organize and manage the data systematically, enhancing transparency and efficiency during analysis.

To strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, several strategies will be implemented. Member checking will be conducted by sharing interpretations or summaries with participants to ensure that their views have been accurately represented. In addition, peer debriefing will be used, allowing independent researchers or colleagues to review and challenge the emerging themes, which helps reduce potential bias. The study will also maintain an audit trail documenting key decisions made throughout the research process, further enhancing dependability and transparency.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, will be strictly observed throughout the research process, in accordance with institutional guidelines for studies involving human participants. Participants will be assured that their identities will remain confidential and that they may withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of interviews with 10 parents and 5 teachers revealed four major themes related to parental involvement and academic success among students with special educational needs (SEN): home-based engagement, school-based collaboration, barriers and contextual factors, and advocacy and informed engagement. Each theme reflects participants' experiences and a perception regarding the ways parental involvement supports learning outcomes and the challenges that may influence its effectiveness.

Home-Based Engagement.

Parents consistently emphasized the importance of structured routines, homework supervision, and emotional support in reinforcing their children's learning. One parent stated, "I make sure my child studies at the same time every day and provide help with subjects he struggles with." Teachers corroborated these accounts, observing that students whose parents actively monitored homework and provided encouragement demonstrated higher task completion and engagement during lessons. Emotional support, including praise and reassurance, was also noted to enhance students' motivation and self-confidence, which teachers reported as positively influencing classroom participation and persistence.

School-Based Collaboration.

Collaboration between parents and educators emerged as a critical factor in academic support. Parents described participating in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, attending school events, and maintaining regular communication with teachers. A teacher highlighted, “Parents who regularly update us about their child’s progress help reinforce learning strategies, making the student’s experience consistent between home and school.” These collaborative efforts facilitated shared goal setting, monitoring of academic progress, and alignment of instructional strategies, contributing to better educational outcomes for students with SEN.

Barriers and Contextual Factors.

Participants identified several challenges that constrained effective parental involvement. Socio-economic limitations, time pressures, and limited understanding of special education processes were frequently cited. One parent noted, “Sometimes I cannot attend meetings because of work, and I do not fully understand all the learning strategies.” Teachers similarly observed that such constraints occasionally reduced the quality of engagement, particularly for families with limited resources or familiarity with school procedures. These findings suggest that contextual factors play a moderating role in the effectiveness of parental involvement.

Advocacy and Informed Engagement.

Parents who actively sought information about their child’s learning needs and advocated for individualized accommodations reported more effective alignment of home and school support. A parent explained, “I learn about my child’s strengths and weaknesses and discuss them with the teacher so we can plan together.” Teachers indicated that students benefited academically and socio-emotionally when parents participated in informed decision-making and reinforced strategies recommended by the school. This theme underscores the significance of targeted, knowledge-based engagement in promoting academic success.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, the findings indicate that parental involvement is multidimensional and context dependent. Effective engagement combines consistent home-based support, collaborative school practices, and informed advocacy. While barriers such as socio-economic constraints and limited knowledge can reduce engagement, parents who actively participate and align home and school support contribute positively to the academic and socio-emotional outcomes of students with SEN. These results corroborate previous research highlighting the central role of structured and meaningful parental involvement in inclusive education settings (Mokhtar, Karim, & Aziz, 2024; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025; Bendijo, Ramos, & Villanueva, 2025).

Theme	Sub Themes	Verbatim
Home-Based Engagement	Homework supervision; Routine and structure; Emotional encouragement	P2: “I make sure my child studies at the same time every day and provide help with subjects he struggles with.” T1: “Students whose parents supervise homework consistently show higher task completion and engagement.”
School-Based Collaboration	Participation in IEP meetings; Regular communication; Monitoring academic progress	P5: “I attend all IEP meetings and discuss strategies with the teachers to help my child improve.” T3: “Parents who communicate regularly help reinforce strategies, making learning consistent at home and school.”
Barriers and Contextual Factors	Socio-economic constraints; Limited knowledge; Time pressures	P7: “Sometimes I cannot attend meetings because of work, and I do not fully understand all the learning strategies.” T2: “Families with limited time or resources

		may find it challenging to participate consistently.”
Advocacy and Informed Engagement	Understanding child’s learning profile; Requesting accommodations; Aligning home and school support	P1: “I learn about my child’s strengths and weaknesses and discuss them with the teacher so we can plan together.” T5: “Students do better when parents actively advocate and implement strategies suggested by the school.”

Figure 1.2: Themes, Sub-Themes, and verbatim from Parents and Teachers

Participant codes : P = Parent, T = Teacher. **

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that parental involvement in supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) is not a single, uniform practice, but a combination of interconnected roles shaped by both family and school contexts. In particular, parental engagement can be understood through four key dimensions: home-based support, school-based collaboration, advocacy, and contextual influences.

Home-based engagement emerged as the most immediate and consistent form of support. Parents in this study played an active role in reinforcing learning at home by establishing routines, assisting with tasks, and offering emotional encouragement. These everyday practices helped sustain students’ motivation and engagement, especially for those who require more individualized approaches to learning. This finding is consistent with earlier studies indicating that structured and supportive home environments contribute positively to task completion and learning engagement (Bendijo, Ramos, & Villanueva, 2025; Mokhtar, Karim, & Aziz, 2024). From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with ecological views of learning, where the home acts as a critical microsystem shaping children’s educational experiences. It also reflects models of parental involvement that emphasize the importance of learning activities beyond the classroom.

Equally important is school-based collaboration, which strengthens the connection between what happens at home and in school. Parents who participated in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, maintained regular communication with teachers, and monitored their child’s progress contributed to more consistent and coherent support strategies. Teachers in this study observed that students performed better when parents reinforced school-recommended interventions at home. This supports previous research highlighting that strong family school partnerships enhance the effectiveness of individualized support and improve student outcomes (Gonzalez & Walton, 2025; Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022). These findings can be situated within theories of collaborative and inclusive education, which stress that shared responsibility between families and schools is essential for meeting diverse learning needs.

At the same time, the study highlights that parental involvement is influenced by various contextual and structural factors. Challenges such as limited time, financial constraints, and a lack of familiarity with special education processes can restrict parents’ ability to engage consistently. This is in line with prior research showing that socio-economic and systemic barriers often shape the extent and quality of parental participation (Hernawati, Rahman, & Sutanto, 2025). These findings resonate with broader debates in inclusive education, which argue that inclusion is not only about classroom practices but also about addressing inequities that affect family participation.

Despite these barriers, the role of parental advocacy stands out as particularly impactful. Parents who developed a clearer understanding of their child’s needs and actively sought appropriate accommodations were better able to align home and school support. This informed involvement was associated with improvements not only in academic performance but also in students’ socio-emotional development. This reflects theoretical perspectives that position parents as active agents rather than passive supporters, emphasizing empowerment and knowledge as key components of effective involvement.

Taken together, the findings suggest that parental involvement in SEN education is both multidimensional and context-dependent, requiring on going interaction between families, schools, and broader social conditions. The study contributes to existing literature by reinforcing the idea that effective inclusion depends on meaningful family school partnerships, while also highlighting the need to address barriers that may limit such collaboration.

In terms of practical implications, the findings point to the need for more structured and accessible approaches to supporting parental engagement. Schools could implement targeted programs such as regular parent workshops on SEN strategies, hands-on training sessions on how to support learning at home, and simplified guides to understanding IEP processes. Establishing dedicated communication platforms such as scheduled check-ins, digital apps, or parent support groups can also help sustain on going collaboration. In addition, schools might consider mentorship programs where experienced parents support those who are less familiar with SEN processes, fostering a sense of community and shared learning.

At the policy level, providing flexible meeting schedules, offering multilingual resources, and ensuring access to school-based support services can reduce participation barriers. These concrete measures would not only enhance parental confidence and capacity but also strengthen the overall ecosystem of support for SEN learners. Ultimately, promoting structured, inclusive, and well-supported parental involvement is essential for translating the principles of inclusive education into meaningful practice.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practice, particularly in inclusive settings. First, the results highlight the need for schools to actively facilitate structured home-school partnerships. By providing parents with clear guidance on homework supervision, learning routines, and emotional support strategies, educators can help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and home-based reinforcement. Structured programs, such as parent workshops or training sessions focused on supporting SEN students, can enhance the effectiveness of parental involvement and ultimately improve student outcomes (Mokhtar, Karim, & Aziz, 2024; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025).

Second, the study underscores the importance of collaborative planning and communication between parents and teachers. Schools should prioritize mechanisms that allow regular dialogue, joint progress monitoring, and meaningful participation in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) processes. Facilitating ongoing collaboration not only ensures that parents are informed about instructional strategies but also empowers them to advocate effectively for their child's needs. Such collaboration can help mitigate the influence of contextual barriers, such as limited parental knowledge or socio-economic constraints, thereby enhancing the quality and impact of engagement (Hernawati, Rahman, & Sutanto, 2025).

Finally, the findings point to broader policy and systemic implications. Educational policymakers should recognize that parental involvement is not uniform and is often moderated by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Policies that provide resources, flexible engagement opportunities, and accessible information for families can reduce inequities in participation and support consistent involvement. By integrating parental engagement into inclusive education frameworks, schools and policymakers can ensure that students with SEN benefit from coordinated support both at home and in the classroom, contributing to improved academic achievement and socio-emotional development (Bendijo, Ramos, & Villanueva, 2025; Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022).

CONCLUSION

To build on these findings, schools can move beyond general encouragement of parental involvement by introducing practical, structured initiatives that make engagement easier and more meaningful for families of students with SEN. For instance, schools could implement parent training workshops that focus on simple, hands-on strategies such as guiding homework routines, using visual schedules, or supporting emotional regulation at home. These sessions can be offered both in-person and online to accommodate parents' time constraints, ensuring accessibility for working families. In addition, establishing regular, structured

communication channels such as weekly progress updates through digital platforms or communication logs can help parents stay informed and aligned with teachers' instructional approaches.

Another effective strategy is the development of parent support groups or peer networks, where families can share experiences, challenges, and practical solutions. Such communities not only build confidence but also reduce the sense of isolation often experienced by parents of children with SEN. Schools might also consider appointing a parent liaison or SEN coordinator who can guide families through processes like IEP planning, helping them better understand their roles as advocates and collaborators. Furthermore, offering flexible scheduling for IEP meetings including virtual participation options can significantly improve parental attendance and engagement.

From a policy perspective, education authorities can support these efforts by providing clear guidelines and funding for family engagement programs, as well as developing resource hubs that include multilingual materials, instructional videos, and toolkits tailored to different types of special needs. Policies that encourage schools to track and reflect on parental engagement practices can also promote continuous improvement. Altogether, these concrete approaches reinforce the idea that when schools actively create opportunities and reduce barriers for involvement, parents are better equipped to contribute to their children's academic success and well-being, as highlighted in prior research (Mokhtar, Karim, & Aziz, 2024; Gonzalez & Walton, 2025; Bendijo, Ramos, & Villanueva, 2025; Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022).

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