

Construction of Homeschooling Models in Families with Working Parents

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ABSTRACT

Homeschooling is becoming a more diverse form of family-based education. However, little research explains how families with working parents manage homeschooling while balancing job responsibilities and children's learning needs. This study aimed to develop a grounded theory model that explains how working-parent families adapt and coordinate homeschooling. This study employed a constructivist grounded theory approach following Charmaz. Ten homeschooling families with working parents participated through purposive and theoretical sampling. Data were collected through 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews, 20 systematic observation sessions, and document analysis of learning schedules, portfolios, learning logs, and digital progress reports. Data were analyzed using initial coding, focused coding, constant comparison, and memo-writing until theoretical sufficiency was achieved. The analysis generated an adaptive homeschooling model centered on adaptive coordination as the core integrating category. The model comprises four recursive stages: (1) mapping family conditions and learning needs, (2) designing flexible weekly learning plans, (3) implementing blended and distributed learning activities, and (4) conducting reflection and revision. Four supporting mechanisms—distributed roles, digital mediation, scaffolded autonomy, and reflective revision—enabled sustainable homeschooling within varying contextual conditions, including work patterns, family capacity, child characteristics, digital access, and support networks. The findings present a family-system model that brings together homeschooling, parental involvement, digital learning, and work-family conflict in one framework. The families in this study did not only manage work and family challenges, but also adjusted their time, relationships, and learning practices through flexible coordination. Although the model is based on ten self-selected families and is limited to a specific context, it can guide future research, policy, and support programs for homeschooling families with working parents.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Five key concepts structure this study and require clarification at the outset. First, homeschooling is understood here as a form of family-based education in which parents or guardians take primary responsibility for their children's learning outside conventional school settings. Rather than a single uniform practice, homeschooling encompasses a continuum of arrangements — from highly structured, curriculum-driven models to flexible, child-led approaches — shaped by different parental motivations, pedagogical preferences, and family circumstances (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, 2020; Neuman & Guterman, 2017b; Hamlin, 2024).

Second, working-parent families refers to households in which one or both parents or guardians are engaged in paid employment, whether full-time, part-time, remote, shift-based, or freelance. This category includes dual-earner couples and single working parents. The defining characteristic is that parents must fulfil substantial and ongoing employment obligations simultaneously with their role as primary educational providers for their children (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Liang & Chen, 2025).

Third, adaptive homeschooling refers to the process through which working-parent families continuously reorganize their educational routines, role distributions, and learning resources in response to the changing demands of work schedules, children's developmental needs, and household capacity. It is distinguished from idealized or fixed models of homeschooling by its emphasis on contextual responsiveness and iterative adjustment.

Fourth, family-based education refers to the broader ecosystem of learning that takes place within and through the household, including not only parent-led instruction but also self-directed learning, peer interaction, community participation, digital engagement, and experiential learning in everyday family life. This concept positions the household — rather than any single institution or curriculum — as the primary educational environment (Morris & Pannone, 2024; Cerqueira & Bianchi, 2025).

Fifth, distributed learning refers to an educational arrangement in which learning activities, resources, roles, and responsibilities are spread across multiple actors, times, platforms, and spaces rather than concentrated in a single instructional event or location. In homeschooling contexts, distributed learning encompasses parent-led sessions, independent child tasks, tutor support, digital platform engagement, and community-based experiential learning (Muller et al., 2023).

Homeschooling has moved from being a marginal educational alternative to becoming a more visible and increasingly diversified form of family-based education. Research on homeschooling has expanded substantially over the last two decades, covering demographics, parental motivation, curriculum, academic achievement, socialization, and relationships with formal schooling. Despite this growth, recent scholarship argues that the field still needs more refined conceptual models capable of explaining heterogeneous homeschooling practices across different social and family contexts (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, 2020; Hamlin, 2024).

A specific gap concerns families with working parents. Existing studies have explored how family and parental characteristics shape children's social encounters in homeschooling environments, and some have examined how homeschooled adolescents evaluate their educational experiences. However, the literature has been less explicit in theorizing how homeschooling is organized when parents must simultaneously fulfill substantial work obligations. What is missing is a process model — a theoretically grounded explanation of how working-parent families construct, coordinate, and sustain homeschooling over time under conditions of competing role demands (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b; Neuman, 2020; Hamlin, 2024).

This gap is consequential. The broader literature on parental involvement consistently demonstrates that family participation in children's learning matters for academic and psychosocial development. Meta-analyses show a positive overall association between parental involvement and student achievement, while also indicating that the quality of engagement — through expectations, communication, and autonomy-

supportive practices — matters more than mere presence or intensity (Fan & Chen, 2001; Castro et al., 2015; Barger et al., 2019; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2022). In homeschooling, where parental involvement is not peripheral but constitutive, the question of how this involvement is organized under work constraints becomes especially pressing.

A useful lens for understanding this challenge is the work–family conflict literature. Foundational theory defines work–family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Subsequent research shows that work–family conflict is associated with psychological strain, reduced family functioning, and impaired well-being, while teleworking and flexible arrangements offer only partial relief (Allen et al., 2000, 2013; Byron, 2005; Amstad et al., 2011; Liang & Chen, 2025; Parker et al., 2023). Applied to homeschooling, these findings imply that educational arrangements in working-parent families cannot be understood apart from employment structure, schedule flexibility, fatigue, and emotional spillover.

Evidence from home learning research during and after the COVID-19 period reinforces this point. Parents reported substantial burdens related to supervising learning, managing technology, sustaining children's motivation, and balancing educational responsibilities with employment and domestic duties. These studies repeatedly identified time scarcity, stress, unequal caregiving loads, and the need for adaptable routines as central themes (Bhamani et al., 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Sonnenschein et al., 2021; Rahmawati et al., 2022). Although elective homeschooling differs from emergency home learning, both contexts make visible the organizational and emotional demands that arise when work and education share the same domestic space.

Given that the field lacks a process model explaining how working-parent families organize and sustain homeschooling, an inductive, process-oriented methodology is required. Existing literature provides theoretical frameworks — parental involvement theory, work–family conflict theory, distributed learning — but no substantive theory has yet been developed to explain how these dimensions interrelate in working-parent homeschooling practice specifically.

Constructivist grounded theory following Charmaz (2020, 2024) is particularly suited to this purpose. It allows theoretical concepts to emerge from the lived experiences and social processes of participants rather than being imposed from pre-existing frameworks. Its emphasis on process, interaction, emergence, and contextual sensitivity makes it appropriate for studying adaptive homeschooling as a continuously negotiated, family-embedded practice. Furthermore, its recursive analytic logic — moving between data, codes, categories, and emerging theory — mirrors the adaptive, cyclical character of the phenomenon under investigation.

This study aims to develop a substantive grounded theory model explaining how families with working parents construct and sustain homeschooling through adaptive coordination of work schedules, learning needs, family roles, digital tools, and learner autonomy. In doing so, it connects the homeschooling literature, parental involvement research, digital learning scholarship, and work–family negotiation theory within a single analytical frame — an integration that, to the authors' knowledge, has not previously been achieved through grounded theory methodology (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Neuman & Guterman, 2017b; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2022; Allen et al., 2013; Morris & Pannone, 2024).

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative constructivist grounded theory approach following Charmaz (2020, 2024) to develop a substantive model of homeschooling among families with working parents. Constructivist grounded theory was selected because the study sought to understand how participants interpreted, negotiated, and organized homeschooling practices within the context of employment

demands, family routines, and digital learning environments. Rather than assuming a fixed social reality, this approach viewed homeschooling practices as socially constructed through ongoing interaction, adaptation, and reflection within everyday family life. The emphasis on process, emergence, and interpretive flexibility made this tradition particularly well suited to studying adaptive homeschooling as a lived and continuously negotiated phenomenon.

The researchers acknowledged that data interpretation was co-constructed through interaction with participants. Reflexive memo-writing was therefore used throughout the study to examine emerging assumptions, analytic decisions, and the researchers' positionality in relation to homeschooling and family-based education.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The study involved ten homeschooling families consisting of dual-earner households, single working parents, and families with flexible or hybrid employment arrangements. The participating families had implemented homeschooling for between two and seven years. Children's ages ranged from approximately 7 to 17 years. Most families utilized digital learning platforms regularly to support communication, asynchronous learning, monitoring, and instructional delivery. Family identities were protected through pseudonymous family codes.

Table 3. Participant profiles

Code	Parent Employment	Family Structure	Years HS	Children	Age Range	Digital Use
F1	Dual-earner	Two-parent	3 years	2	8–13	High
F2	Single working mother	Single-parent	4 years	1	10	Moderate
F3	Dual-earner (shift work)	Two-parent	2 years	3	7–14	High
F4	Remote-working father, part-time mother	Two-parent	5 years	2	9–15	High
F5	Dual-earner (flexible schedule)	Two-parent	6 years	1	12	Moderate
F6	Single working father	Single-parent	3 years	2	8–11	Low
F7	Dual-earner (one freelance)	Two-parent	7 years	3	7–17	High
F8	Full-time mother, part-time father	Two-parent	2 years	1	9	Moderate
F9	Dual-earner (both remote)	Two-parent	4 years	2	10–13	High
F10	Single working mother	Single-parent	3 years	1	11	Moderate

The study used a combination of purposive and theoretical sampling. Initial participants were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) at least one parent was employed full-time or part-time; (2) the family had practiced homeschooling continuously for a minimum of two years; and (3) digital tools formed part of the family's learning routines. Initial recruitment occurred through homeschooling communities and parent networks.

As data collection progressed, theoretical sampling was employed to refine emerging categories and explore variations in homeschooling organization. Additional participants were selected to capture differences in employment patterns, caregiving arrangements, levels of digital reliance, and family support structures. Sampling continued until theoretical sufficiency was reached, meaning that additional data no longer contributed substantially new conceptual insights to the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2020).

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary methods — in-depth interviews, systematic observations, and document analysis — to ensure triangulation across perspectives and data sources.

2.3.1 In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with parents and, when appropriate, with homeschooling children. A total of 18 interviews were conducted across the ten participating families. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 120 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet, depending on participant availability and work schedules.

The interview protocol explored several themes, including homeschooling motivations, daily learning routines, role distribution, time management, digital platform use, emotional challenges, learning supervision, and strategies for balancing work and educational responsibilities. Follow-up interviews were conducted with several participants to clarify emerging categories and deepen theoretical interpretation. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim prior to coding and analysis.

2.3.2 Observations

Observational data were collected through both synchronous and asynchronous observation sessions. A total of 20 observation sessions were conducted across the participating families, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 180 minutes depending on the family's schedule and learning activities.

Synchronous observations involved direct observation of homeschooling activities; including parent-child instructional interaction, learning supervision, family coordination practices, and the use of digital learning tools during study sessions. These observations were conducted either in person or through live virtual access. Asynchronous observations involved the examination of recorded learning artifacts, digital communication exchanges, weekly schedules, learning management applications, progress tracking systems, and shared educational documentation. The researchers observed the use of several digital platforms commonly utilized by participating families, including WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom, YouTube learning channels, and digital worksheet applications. The observations focused on how families organized learning routines, coordinated educational responsibilities, managed interruptions caused by work demands, and supported children's autonomous learning practices.

2.3.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis included the review of weekly learning schedules, children's portfolios, digital progress reports, reflective notes, task checklists, learning contracts, and communication records shared by participating families. These documents were used to triangulate interview and observation findings and to examine how homeschooling routines were organized and revised over time (Green-Hennessy & Hennessy, 2023).

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the constructivist grounded theory procedures proposed by Charmaz (2020, 2024). Analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection through an iterative process of constant comparison. The researchers moved recursively between interviews, observations, field notes, and emerging interpretations.

Initial coding was conducted line-by-line to identify actions, processes, and meanings embedded in participants' experiences. Focused coding was then used to synthesize the most significant and recurring codes into broader conceptual categories. Through constant comparison across families and data sources, relationships among categories were examined and refined. Memo-writing was conducted throughout the

analytic process to document conceptual reflections, theoretical questions, and emerging connections among categories. Through this recursive analysis, "adaptive coordination" emerged as the core category integrating the broader homeschooling process. The final model was constructed by linking the recursive stages, supporting mechanisms, and contextual conditions shaping homeschooling sustainability in working-parent families (Birks & Mills, 2023).

2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethics

Several strategies were employed to establish trustworthiness. Member checking was conducted whereby participants reviewed interim findings and the emerging model to confirm accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Prolonged engagement across multiple data collection phases strengthened credibility. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents ensured convergence of findings. Reflexive memo-writing supported dependability by documenting analytic decisions throughout the process.

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Family identities were protected through pseudonymous codes used consistently across all data sources and reporting.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This section presents the empirical findings generated from constant comparison across interview, observation, and document data. The findings show that among the participating families, homeschooling was sustained not by the uninterrupted availability of parents, but by the intentional reorganization of family routines, roles, and learning resources. The section is organized around the core category, the conceptual figure, four recursive stages, supporting mechanisms, and contextual conditions.

3.1.1 Core Category: Adaptive Coordination

The core category that emerged from selective coding and integrated all other categories was adaptive coordination. This refers to the continuous and recursive effort by participating families to align work schedules, children's learning needs, household rhythms, and available technological supports into a workable daily and weekly educational arrangement. Adaptive coordination emerged as the central organizing process that explained how families continuously negotiated competing demands between employment responsibilities and homeschooling continuity.

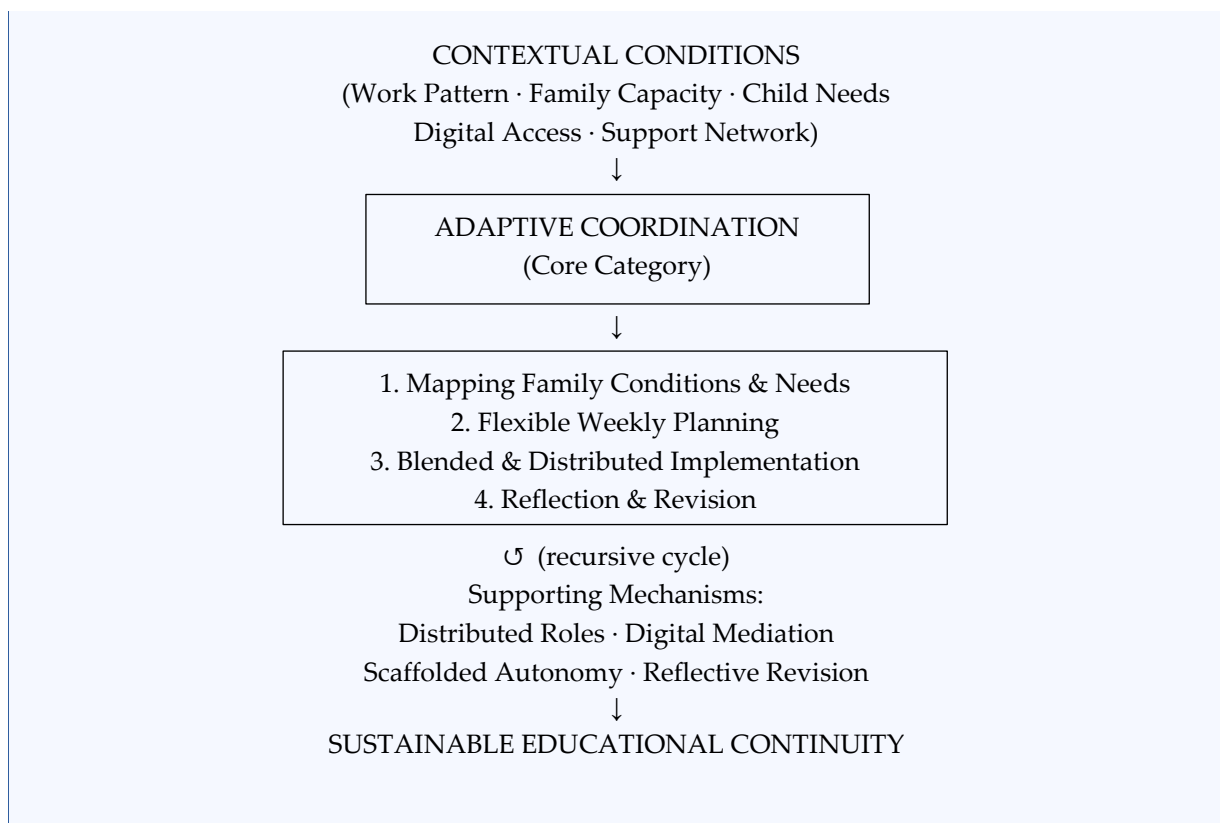
Rather than treating homeschooling as a fixed pedagogical format, the findings suggest that it functioned as a negotiated family practice that must remain responsive to changing conditions. All other substantive categories — distributed roles, digital mediation, scaffolded autonomy, reflective revision, and contextual conditions — connected to and were organized around this core category. Adaptive coordination thus linked work obligations, learning continuity, emotional care, temporal negotiation, and digital mediation into a coherent explanatory framework.

Table 1. Key Categories Emerging from the Adaptive Homeschooling Model

Category	Substantive Meaning	Contribution to Sustainability
Adaptive coordination	Continuous alignment of work schedules, children's needs, and household rhythms	Makes homeschooling feasible under changing family conditions
Structured flexibility	Weekly target-based planning with adjustable daily timing	Preserves continuity without rigid school-like timetables
Distributed roles	Complementary responsibilities across parents, children, tutors, and communities	Reduces overload and clarifies accountability
Digital mediation	Use of platforms for content access, communication, and progress monitoring	Bridges work obligations and learning continuity
Scaffolded autonomy	Gradual transfer of responsibility to the child within guided routines	Strengthens independent learning and resilience
Reflective revision	Ongoing review of goals, workload, and implementation quality	Allows the model to remain adaptive over time

3.1.2 The Conceptual Figure

The conceptual figure below presents the overall architecture of the adaptive homeschooling model, illustrating how contextual conditions, adaptive coordination, the four recursive stages, supporting mechanisms, and educational continuity are interrelated:

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of the Adaptive Homeschooling Model for Working-Parent Families

3.1.3 Four Recursive Stages of the Adaptive Homeschooling Model

The analysis organized the adaptive homeschooling process into four interrelated stages. Crucially, these stages did not operate sequentially in a fixed linear order. Instead, they formed a recursive cycle in which each stage continuously informed and reshaped the others. Decisions made in one stage were continually tested and adjusted in the next, making the model iterative and cyclical rather than sequential. This recursive structure reflects the processual orientation of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2024; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

a. Stage 1: Mapping Family Conditions and Learning Needs

Before instructional routines could be established, among the participating families there was a diagnostic process through which they identified constraints and possibilities within the home. This mapping included at least four dimensions: parental work schedules, children's developmental characteristics and interests, the material and digital resources available at home, and the extent of possible support from relatives, tutors, or homeschooling communities. In practical terms, this meant that educational planning began not from an ideal curriculum sequence but from the ecology of family life.

The findings suggest that when parents tried to reproduce school-like routines without accounting for work rhythms, fatigue, and domestic responsibilities, implementation became fragile. Conversely, when the family openly acknowledged its limits and resources, educational planning became more sustainable. This finding aligns with the broader literature on flexible learning, which argues that educational effectiveness derives from the quality of learning design, clarity of structure, and appropriateness of support mechanisms (Muller et al., 2023).

b. Stage 2: Designing a Flexible Weekly Learning Plan

After family conditions had been mapped, parents translated broad educational aspirations into attainable weekly goals, selected learning resources, and distributed roles among adults and children. A key finding is that planning was predominantly target-based rather than time-based. Instead of insisting that learning happen at one fixed hour each day, families organized the week around a set of learning outcomes, project tasks, reading expectations, household responsibilities, and enrichment activities. Time and sequence could shift according to work obligations, children's energy levels, or unforeseen events, but goals remained visible.

This target-based planning demonstrates how flexibility can coexist with educational intentionality. In the participating families, flexibility was effective precisely because it was anchored in explicit goals, routine check-ins, and negotiated expectations. This pattern is compatible with research on online and blended learning showing that autonomy becomes productive when learners are supported by clear task structures, guidance, feedback, and opportunities for interaction (Muller et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

c. Stage 3: Implementing Blended and Distributed Learning

Implementation produced the richest set of findings. Among the families studied, homeschooling was enacted through a blended pattern of activities that combined direct parent guidance, self-directed child tasks, online learning, offline project work, and external assistance from tutors, communities, or peers. Implementation was not dominated by one instructional format. Instead, parents selected modes of learning according to the purpose of the activity: new or difficult concepts often required direct explanation, while routine exercises and digital modules were more likely assigned for independent completion.

This blended implementation model expands the meaning of homeschooling from home-based instruction to distributed learning. Children learned not only from parent-led lessons but also from curated digital platforms, video resources, virtual classes, social interaction, and experiential engagement in everyday family life. The result supports recent work showing that digital technologies in homeschooling can foster self-directed and collaborative forms of lifelong learning when used constructively rather than passively (Morris & Pannone, 2024).

d. Stage 4: Reflection, Assessment, and Revision

Within the studied families, evaluation did not occur solely through formal tests. Instead, multiple indicators were used: task completion, portfolio work, conversational understanding, observed confidence, emotional readiness, and the child's ability to apply learning in real situations. Parents also evaluated the educational process itself — whether the weekly load had been realistic, whether digital tools were helpful or distracting, whether work schedules had disrupted continuity, and whether the child needed more direct instruction or more independence.

This finding is theoretically important because it positions assessment as adaptive regulation rather than terminal measurement. Reflection generated revision, and revision preserved sustainability. This cyclical quality supports the claim that among the participating families, homeschooling functioned as a dynamic family learning system rather than a static delivery model (Charmaz, 2024; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Table 2. Operational Stages of the Adaptive Homeschooling Model

Stage	Main Actions	Primary Outputs	Risk if Weakly Managed
Mapping	Identify work patterns, child needs, resources, and support networks	Realistic picture of family capacity	Plans become idealized and unsustainable
Design	Set weekly targets, choose resources, allocate roles	Structured flexibility and role clarity	Ambiguity, overload, and inconsistent routines
Implementation	Combine guidance, independent tasks, digital learning, and external support	Continuity of learning across varied schedules	Fragmented learning and parent exhaustion
Reflection	Review outcomes, adjust goals, refine routines and tools	Adaptive improvement and long-term sustainability	Repeated errors and declining motivation

3.1.4 Supporting Mechanisms of the Adaptive Homeschooling Model

The adaptive homeschooling model was sustained through four supporting mechanisms that cut across all four recursive stages. These mechanisms functioned simultaneously and interactively rather than independently.

a. Distributed Roles

Across the participating families, homeschooling responsibilities were rarely symmetrical, but they were often complementary. One parent might focus on morning check-ins and academic monitoring, while another might supervise evening discussion, project review, or emotional support. Grandparents, tutors, and community members served as supplementary actors, allowing parents to fulfil work obligations without abandoning educational oversight. In single-parent or highly constrained households, similar functions were redistributed across time, technology, and support networks. The data suggest that the viability of homeschooling does not require equal parental participation in every task; rather, it requires role clarity, communication, and consistency. Such role negotiation reduced friction and prevented the burden of education from becoming attached to one idealized caregiver role.

b. Digital Mediation

Digital platforms fulfilled at least three functions in the model. First, they acted as instructional repositories, providing videos, worksheets, learning applications, and asynchronous materials that children could access independently. Second, they worked as communication channels through which parents, tutors, and children coordinated tasks, clarified expectations, and maintained continuity despite

differing schedules. Third, they served as monitoring devices that allowed parents to review completed tasks, check progress, and decide when intervention was needed. This triadic function of technology — as content provider, Communication Bridge, and monitoring mechanism — helps explain why digital mediation became central to the sustainability of homeschooling in the participating households. Critically, digital tools did not replace parents; they functioned as enabling infrastructure that widened access to content and supported continuity when parents were working.

c. Scaffolded Autonomy

Across the data, the development of child independence appeared not as a secondary benefit but as a functional requirement. Children gradually learned to read instructions, manage checklists, complete tasks without immediate supervision, use digital resources responsibly, and report progress to adults. Autonomy was both an outcome and a mechanism of the model: the more children became capable of self-direction, the more workable the family system became. Autonomy developed within a scaffolded structure in which adults sequenced tasks, clarified expectations, selected resources, and monitored completion. This gradual release of responsibility — guided independence rather than unstructured freedom — reflects the principle of scaffolded autonomy (Wang et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2022).

d. Reflective Revision

The model renewed itself through reflective revision. Each week, parents reviewed not only children's learning outcomes but also the educational process itself. They asked whether the workload had been manageable, whether particular routines needed adjustment, and whether children's emotional states indicated changes in approach. Emotional review, workload revision, and adaptive regulation were thus embedded in the routine operation of the model. This mechanism ensured that the homeschooling arrangement did not solidify into an unsustainable form but remained responsive to lived experience.

3.1.5 Contextual Conditions Shaping Adaptation

The adaptive homeschooling model did not operate in a vacuum. Its effectiveness was shaped by contextual conditions that were identified through axial coding as the background factors within which adaptive coordination occurred. Five key contextual conditions were identified among the participating families.

a. Work Pattern

The nature of parental employment — whether remote, shift-based, flexible, or dual-earner — directly influenced when and how educational coordination could occur. Families in which at least one parent had flexible or remote work arrangements were better positioned to integrate direct instruction into the day. Dual-earner households with rigid schedules faced greater strain and relied more heavily on digital mediation and distributed roles.

b. Family Capacity

Parental education level, emotional energy, and available time resources shaped how elaborate and intentional the educational design could be. Families with higher parental education tended to engage in more explicit goal-setting and curriculum sequencing. Emotional energy — the capacity to sustain motivation and engagement in caregiving — was repeatedly identified as a limiting or enabling factor.

c. Child Needs

Each child's learning style, developmental characteristics, and special interests shaped which components of the model required greater attention. Children with particular learning differences required more individualized scaffolding. Children with strong intrinsic motivation were able to benefit more rapidly from scaffolded autonomy.

d. Digital Access

The availability of reliable internet connection, appropriate devices, and parental digital literacy determined how extensively digital mediation could function as a supporting mechanism. Families with limited digital access faced greater pressure on direct parental involvement and were less able to deploy asynchronous learning effectively.

e. Support Network

The presence of tutors, grandparents, homeschooling communities, and faith-based groups extended the capacity of the family as a coordinating center. External support reduced the intensity of parental burden, broadened children's learning experiences, and offered social reinforcement. The model is therefore better understood as a layered support system in which the family remains the coordinating center but is not the sole educational actor (Cerqueira & Bianchi, 2025).

3.2 Discussion

This section interprets the empirical findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, examines their critical implications, and discusses practical directions for policy and parent support. The discussion deliberately separates interpretive analysis from the empirical descriptions presented in the previous section.

3.2.1 Contribution to the Homeschooling Literature

The adaptive homeschooling model extends the existing literature in several respects. First, it provides an empirically grounded substantive theory of how homeschooling is organized under conditions of competing role demands — a gap that recent literature reviews have explicitly identified (Hamlin, 2024; Valiente et al., 2022). Second, the model captures the diversity and hybridity of contemporary homeschooling, supporting recent scholarship that portrays it as highly varied in form and motivation, and cautions against overly uniform assumptions (Hamlin, 2024). Third, the model adds to growing recognition that digital technology in homeschooling can nurture self-directed and lifelong learning dispositions when used constructively (Morris & Pannone, 2024); the present findings add that technology becomes especially meaningful when it helps families synchronize educational goals with fragmented daily schedules.

3.2.2 Contribution to Work–Family Conflict Theory

Foundational work–family conflict theory conceptualizes role incompatibility primarily in terms of conflict, strain, and overload — a condition in which the demands of employment and family life are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Allen et al., 2000; Byron, 2005). The present findings extend this theoretical tradition by showing that among the participating families, role incompatibility was not merely experienced as strain but was actively responded to through adaptive reorganization.

Specifically, the model extends work–family conflict theory by demonstrating that families do not merely cope with role incompatibility; they actively reconstruct temporal, relational, and instructional arrangements through adaptive coordination. The core mechanisms identified — distributed roles, digital mediation, scaffolded autonomy, and reflective revision — function as what this study terms coordination mechanisms: practices through which families reduce conflict through redistribution rather than elimination. Digital mediation, in particular, emerged as a conflict-buffering mechanism, allowing educational continuity to persist during periods when parental presence was unavailable.

This interpretation suggests that future theoretical development in the work–family conflict field should attend more carefully to the range of adaptive strategies that families deploy — not only coping responses to conflict, but proactive reorganization of educational and household systems. The adaptive homeschooling model may thus offer a transferable analytical framework for studying family adaptation in other domains of work–family interface.

3.2.3 Gender and Power Dynamics in Educational Labor

Although homeschooling responsibilities were frequently described by participants as collaborative or shared, the findings suggest that educational coordination and emotional monitoring remained disproportionately concentrated among mothers in the participating families. This indicates that adaptive homeschooling may reproduce gendered patterns of care work even within flexible family arrangements.

Mothers more frequently carried the invisible coordination work: scheduling, reminding, troubleshooting, and sustaining children's motivation. This constitutes what family sociologists have termed invisible labor — the cognitive, organizational, and emotional work involved in maintaining household systems that is rarely recognized or counted (Hochschild, 1989). Fathers' contributions tended to be more episodic and supplementary often oriented toward specific tasks or subject areas rather than the overall management of the educational process.

This gendered distribution has important implications. It suggests that adaptive homeschooling, despite its flexibility, does not automatically challenge existing caregiving asymmetries within households. Indeed, when homeschooling is added to pre-existing domestic labor patterns, it may intensify the demands placed on mothers — particularly in dual-earner households where mothers are simultaneously managing professional obligations. Future research should more explicitly examine how the gendered division of educational labor is constructed, negotiated, and potentially contested within homeschooling families (Liang & Chen, 2025; Parker et al., 2023).

3.2.4 Digital Mediation as a Theoretical and Practical Resource

The findings confirm and extend existing scholarship on parental involvement in digital learning. Research has shown that parental involvement in digital learning is mediated by parents' confidence, knowledge, and access to support and those families often need assistance in using technology educationally rather than merely functionally (Szabo et al., 2024). The present study adds that in homeschooling contexts — where orchestration responsibility falls more directly onto the household — digital mediation must be actively designed into the educational arrangement rather than assumed as automatic. The triadic function of digital tools identified in this study (content provision, communication, and monitoring) provides a more precise framework for understanding how technology supports family-based education.

3.2.5 Policy Implications

The findings carry implications for homeschooling policy, particularly in regulatory contexts that are moving toward greater recognition of diverse educational arrangements (Cerqueira & Bianchi, 2025). Among the participating families, the diversity of organizational strategies and the heterogeneity of contextual conditions suggest that compliance-oriented regulation — which applies uniform standards across all homeschooling households — may not adequately capture the adaptive and varied nature of homeschooling practice.

Policy frameworks should move beyond compliance-oriented regulation and provide institutional support for adaptive and digitally mediated homeschooling practices. Concretely, this could include recognition of heterogeneous family structures in homeschooling regulation; provision of digital infrastructure and device access to lower-income households; flexible assessment alternatives that recognize portfolio-based and project-based evidence of learning; support for community-based homeschooling networks; and recognition of blended learning models that integrate formal, informal, and digital components. The model may be relevant for informing policy in contexts where family-based education is increasingly prevalent alongside significant parental employment.

3.2.6 Implications for Parent Support Programs

The study's findings also suggest specific directions for programs designed to support homeschooling parents. Among the participating families, the sustainability of the educational arrangement depended not only on curriculum access but on organizational capacity, emotional regulation, and adaptive planning skills. Support programs should therefore focus not only on curriculum provision but also on caregiver sustainability, emotional regulation, and adaptive planning skills.

Practically, this implies programs that provide digital literacy training for parents managing technology-mediated learning; time-management and educational planning coaching; peer support groups and collaborative homeschooling communities; asynchronous learning design resources accessible outside standard working hours; and coaching in role distribution and communication strategies for dual-caregiver households. Such programs should be designed with recognition that educational sustainability in working-parent households is a systemic challenge, not an individual failing.

3.2.7 Limitations

The model presented here should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Because the findings are grounded in the experiences of working-parent families who had already chosen and implemented homeschooling, the model should not be generalized to all working-parent households, all homeschooling families generally, or all regulatory settings. The participating families represent a particular, self-selected group. Differences in income, parental education, digital access, children's special needs, and local legal environments may shape how such a model operates in different contexts.

Moreover, as Hamlin (2024) and Valiente et al. (2022) remind us, homeschooling research frequently faces limitations related to sample heterogeneity and evidence quality. The current model should therefore be understood as a substantive, context-sensitive framework that invites further testing, adaptation, and comparison across diverse settings. Future research might examine how the model applies in lower-resource families, in regulatory environments with stricter oversight, or in contexts where gender dynamics in caregiving take different cultural forms.

4. CONCLUSION

This study showed that, among the participating families, homeschooling with working parents was sustained through an adaptive learning system rather than through the constant availability of adults. The emergent model integrated four recursive stages: mapping family conditions and learning needs, designing flexible weekly targets, implementing blended and distributed learning activities, and conducting ongoing reflection and revision. Across these stages, continuity depended on adaptive coordination as the core integrating process, alongside distributed roles, purposeful digital mediation, and scaffolded learner autonomy.

The discussion situated these findings within work–family conflict theory, extending that tradition by showing that families actively reconstruct temporal, relational, and instructional arrangements rather than merely coping with conflict. The model also drew attention to the gendered distribution of educational labor within participating households, a dimension that deserves more sustained attention in both homeschooling research and family sociology. Implications were identified for policy frameworks and parent support programs that seek to move beyond compliance-oriented approaches. The findings imply that a viable homeschooling model for working-parent families must be context-sensitive, organizationally realistic, and family-system oriented. Among the participating families, sustainable practice was most evident when educational goals were aligned with work rhythms, support networks, and children's growing capacity for self-regulated learning. The model may be relevant in other contexts, though further testing across diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and regulatory settings is needed before broader applicability can be claimed.

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