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 Parent Involvement in Head Start Programs

Hannah Elmore

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Abstract

There is a frequent concern that children who are enrolled in Head Start programs in rural areas do not get adequate parent involvement. Additionally, the lack of parent involvement means that children might not get the proper care and discipline children need in order to grow up and be successful. Children enrolled in Head Start programs come from low income families, and parents may not have the time and energy to spend with their children due to heavy work schedules. The purpose of this study is to research whether take home activities will increase parent involvement for students ages 3-5 in rural counties Head Start programs. A survey that included both open and closed ended questions was sent home to parents along with the last activity. Parents were asked to return the surveys completed, and the surveys were analyzed. The study completed was a mix-methods, and the qualitative data was the open-ended questions and the quantitative data consisted of the closed-ended questions from the survey. Results indicated take home activities enhance team building, having fun while learning, and the importance of family time. A negative correlation between parent involvement and parent’s age and work hours were found. A total of 86 surveys were sent home to parents, only 44 surveys were returned with students completed.

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 **Introduction**

 Families with low incomes are able to enroll their children into Head Start programs so they do not have to pay for preschool or a daycare. Due to parents having long work hours there is a lack of parent involvement in children's lives who attend Head Start. Several studies have been done in regards to parent involvement and why it is important and what can happen if a child does not receive adequate parent involvement. In one particular study it was found that both parents and children can benefit from parent involvement (Ansari, & Gershoff. 2016). Another study looked at the significance of parent-teacher collaboration in regards to parent involvement. Deficiencies of the study included the unwillingness of parents to participate in take home activities, lack of survey responses, or vague survey answers which in return made the analyzation and results of the data harder to make exact. Through research on parent involvement, researchers gain a better understanding of how to help increase involvement, or come to a solution as to why there is a lack of it within certain families. More studies would help the advancement of ideas to boost parents to be involved in their child’s life, also helping the child to grow up disciplined and successful. The purpose of the study was to examine whether or not take home activities increase parent involvement with students age 3-5 in rural counties Head Start programs.

**Literature Review**

 Through research and discussion over parent involvement, theories have been formed to help try and explain why it is important for parents to be involved in their children’s lives (Newman. 2018). The question remains: Could take home activities increase parent involvement

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with students age 3-5 in some rural counties Head Start programs? Indirect effects through parent involvement in Head Start, as well as parenting gains in the program will be discussed as well as some theories to try and answer this question.

 The norm that parents should be involved in their children's lives is very common. Parents can be involved in their children’s lives in many different ways. When parents become involved in their children’s lives starting at a young age, it is more likely that the child will end up having strong skills in areas of literacy, math, and social (DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey, & Sundman-Wheat. 2015). Also, children whose parents become involved in their lives at a young age tend to have more positive attitudes towards school. In a study, parent involvement was tested through three different characteristics. The three different characteristics of parent involvement that were tested were home-based, school-based, and home-school conferencing. The results of the study showed that home based activities within families in head start programs are effective in giving children a jump start in literacy.

 Vygotsky’s (2018) sociocultural theory proposes that parents along with other influences in children’s lives play a key role in their psychological development. A child who is abused when they are younger is more likely to end up with emotional and psychological damage. Many studies have proved this so Vygotsky’s theory has support. Some assume that if their own empirical observations than Vygotsky’s theory can be accepted.

 Many studies center their focus on why parent involvement in head start program is beneficial for the children, not including what parents could gain. One study was done that looked at how both parents and children could benefit from parent involvement (Ansari, &

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Gershoff. 2016). Parents who have children in head start programs and are involved in their children's lives are more likely to use cognitive practices instead of controlling ones. An example of this would be a parent reasoning with their child when they have done something they should be punished for. The study also found that if parents are committed to being involved in their child’s lives, they will benefit in both academics and behavior.

 Another study that was conducted looked at whether a year of head start benefited parents initial parenting behaviors (Ansari, Purtell, & Gershoff. 2016). The majority of parents improved their reading and cognitive stimulation. Parents who had recently spanked their kids and showed depressive symptoms benefited from head start only if their depressive symptoms were relatively high. This could be because parents were stressed out by their children, and head start allows time for the parents and kids to be apart.

 The inequality of educational opportunity was discussed in a report (Harris, Robinson. 2016). The inequality of educational opportunity is found to originate from a child’s home. Parent involvement is not just important because both children and parents can gain from it, but it can also allow schools and families to reinforce one another. Parents who are involved in their kids life will also have a better understanding of what is going on within their kids education and the social aspect of the school their child attends as well.

 In summary, parent involvement in Head Start programs can be beneficial for both parents and students. Sending home take home activities with children will allow parents to engage with their children and this will help build a foundation for parent involvement to grow within their homes starting when their children are young.

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**Data and Method**

**Study Design and Sample**

The study included 86 families that had a child in a Head Start program in one of the following counties: Cumberland, Prince Edward, and Nottoway County. All families with a child enrolled in either of the three Head Start programs from the three different counties were included in the study. The study was a mix-method procedure including both quantitative and qualitative data, and the type of research implemented was evaluation. Research groups were put together and had to come up with one activity that could be sent home with the children. Each group was given smart objectives that were goals of the study and the activities they created needed to fulfill their smart objectives. A smart objective is something that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-oriented. Within a week’s time frame, each night a different activity was sent home with every child. Each research group was also tasked with coming up with questions for a survey that would help get answers for the smart objectives of the study. After questions were edited and narrowed down by the classes, the survey was put together. The survey contained both open and close-ended questions. The overall compliance rate was 51 percent.

**Procedure**

After the survey was complete and all edits were made to the questions, they were then distributed to all three Head Start programs. The surveys were sent home by teachers to the children along with the last activity, and parents had the weekend to complete it and send it back

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to school with their children on Monday. At the top of the survey there were instructions as well as information that allowed the parents to know their answers would be anonymous and they could stop completing the survey at any time if they wished to do so. A five dollar gift card was attached to it as an incentive for parents to fill out the survey and send it back to school with their children.

**Quantitative*.***

For quantitative data collection, questions will be pulled from the survey like: “On a scale of 0-10, how much did your family enjoy this activity?” Zero being not at all, and then being very much. The parents were asked to circle one of the numbers from zero to ten. Using numbers to get the parents to rate how well they enjoyed the activity is an easy way to collect quantitative data. The dependent variable in the study is parent involvement. Independent variables include things like parent’s work hours, education, race, and who lived within each family household.

**Qualitative.**

For qualitative data collection, the questions from the survey that will be used to collect data include open-ended questions. The open ended questions on the survey included: “The Family Fun Times Activities included a Thankful Turkey Activity, an Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar Tray Writing Activity. What was your favorite activity and why?” “Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?” “Do you think that being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time you got to spend with your family after

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school? Please explain.” “If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?” The answers to all of these questions provided by the parents on the survey will help with the qualitative data collection of the study.

**Analysis**

**Quantitative.**

Survey responses from the closed-ended questions will be examined through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences(SPSS), issue 25.

***Qualitative***.

Qualitative data pulled from the open-ended questions will be coded for recurring themes.

**Qualitative Findings**

The last take home activity sent home with the head start children included a survey that parents or guardians were encouraged to fill out. The survey included both open and closed ended questions. The surveys were sent back to school with the children and then the responses to the survey questions were collected and analyzed. Through the analyzation of the surveys three major themes were identified based on the overall responses of the parent’s answers to the open ended questions. The three themes that emerged from the answers to the open ended questions were: team work, having fun while learning, and the importance of spending time with family.

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Many parents who completed the survey wrote about how their children enjoyed putting the activities together with them. Respondent one said “We learned to do team work.” On another survey respondent fifteen wrote, “We all gained experience in following directions and working together.” Both of these responses show that the children learned the beginning of teamwork. In another case, respondent sixteen wrote “We gained that we can work together and have fun.” This is similar to the second theme that was identified: having fun while learning, because in both cases the families had fun. This is important because it shows what children can gain from just a little parent involvement.

Another important theme that was evident through the responses on the survey was the idea that you can have fun while learning. Respondent four wrote about how their child enjoyed the Animal Dice activity the most and had fun while playing it, and then specifically stated that their child “learned to take turns.” In this response it is clear that the child had fun, but also learned an important lesson children should be taught to practice. In another case, respondent five wrote “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” It is apparent that the majority of the take home activities allowed parents to be involved with their children, and that the involvement will continue through the activities because respondent eleven suggested that the activities were “fun learning activities that we can keep playing in the future.”

The third theme that appeared through the responses to the open ended questions on the survey was the importance of spending time with family. Many respondents said that they gained family time through the activities and were thankful they did not have to plan the activities.

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Respondent thirteen wrote, “We were together doing these activities; my brother, me, and my son. We don’t usually do these kinds of things together. I want to continue doing things together. My son was happy and it was fun.” A number of parents who have busy work schedules forget the importance of spending time with their family. When children are young, it is important for them to have the support and involvement of their family. Through these activities this parent was able to acknowledge how much fun it is to spend time with their family, and that they wanted to continue doing so.

In summary, three very important themes were discovered through the answers to the open ended questions of the survey. The three themes that were established through the responses of the survey were all important for children to learn at a young age. Overall, parent involvement occurred and it was evident that a lot of families gained many different things from the activities. Whether it was simply having fun, or being able to teach their child an important lesson the purpose of the take home activities was accomplished.

**Quantitative Findings**

 Following the analyzation of the qualitative data, the closed-ended questions were used to analyze the quantitative data of the surveys. As discussed previously in the data and methods sections, the dependent variable for this study is parent involvement and the independent variables include: parent’s work hours, education, race, and those who live in each child’s household. The closed-ended responses to the survey from the parents were coded, and then manually put into an excel data sheet. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences(SPSS), issue

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25 was then used to create both univariate and bivariate analysis so data could be summarized and compared.

 My dependent variable was analyzed through a question pulled from the Animal Dice Activity from the survey. The parents were asked to circle on a scale of one through ten how much the activity helped to improve their relationship with their children or child. Using the response from this question of the survey the mean and median were calculated. The mean of the dependent variable was 8.38 and the median was 10.

 The fact that 55% of parents circled ten on the survey, meaning that the parents felt the activity helped improve their relationship with their child one hundred percent, suggest that these activities helped increase their parent involvement in their kids' lives. It is important to note that this is over half of the parents who completed the survey and benefited significantly from completing just one of the five activities that their child was sent home with.

 There were multiple independent variables of the study, but the age of the parents was analyzed to see the parent’s different ages of those who completed the survey. The parents were asked to circle where their age fell between from the following: less than 20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, or 41 or older. 

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As shown in the pie chart above the majority of the parents who completed the survey were between the ages 26-30.

 The last analysis that was done in this study of the closed-ended questions was a bi-variate analysis. The dependent and independent variables were analyzed to try and find any correlation between them through the data that was generated from the surveys. The table below compares the amount of enjoyment families received from the Animal Dice Activity and the typical work week hours for the parents.

 

In summary, the dependent variable was achieved as seen in the bar graph because 55% of parents circled that they felt one hundred percent closer to their child after completing the Animal Dice Activity. Parents who typically work more hours a week received more enjoyment completing the activity than those parents who work less hours. This proves that even parents

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with busy work schedules can find time to be involved in their child’s life and get enjoyment out of doing so.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the main purpose of this study was to research whether take home activities do help enhance parent involvement for families with children in rural Head Start programs. Important themes were found from the analysis of the qualitative data. Team work, having fun while learning, and the importance of family time were all relevant themes pulled from the open-ended questions. An important result that was found after the analysis of the quantitative data was that middle aged parents seem to benefit the most from take home activities. This study is significant because it is important that parents are involved in their children’s lives, especially for children who are between the ages of 3-5. This is the primary age where children need their parents to begin teaching them discipline, and different skills to help them become successful. Further research on this would only help researchers better understand why there is a lack of parent involvement, and in what families it occurs most, and how to help parents who feel like they do not have enough time to spend with their children, be more involved in their children’s lives regardless of heavy work schedules

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