Parental Involvement in Head Start Programs

Will Gill

Longwood University

**Abstract**

The issue that lead to this research was the concern of parents not having the quality time be involved with their child/children’s school work. Parental involvement has been proven to improve education outcome, especially in households that are racially or ethnically different (Day & Dotterer, 2018). In the three Virginia counties of Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Nottoway, Head Start had a need to interact with their child/children’s educational development. The purpose of this study was to induce parental involvement with their child/children by assigning five-take home activities. The central phenomenon being explored in this research is that many times after work, there is little to no quality time spent between parents and children. There were 86 families that participated in this research who have three to five-year-old children in three rural counties in southern Virginia. These programs “promote school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by supporting the development of the whole child” (Head Start Programs, 2019).

When conducting this research, a mixed methods study was used. The qualitative data collected will be a set of themes that are presented in the open-ended responses in the survey. The quantitative data were the closed-ended multiple choice questions. Themes that arose included the enjoyment and fun of activities along with the togetherness between the child/children and their parent. Statistical results that arose in the study included the hours worked weekly along with the time spent completing the activities. The practical implications are that the take home activities provide more opportunity for parent and children to spend quality time together with no stress or hassle.

**Introduction**

Through research, it had been proven that parental involvement has a significant influence in relation to education results, especially in households that are either racially or ethnically different (Day & Dotterer, 2018). This research analyzed how influential and significant parental involvement is to a child’s performance through the take home activities. According to statistics based from the research, there are several factors that contribute to differences in the amount of parent involvement. This includes socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic groups, gender, and working parents/guardians (Robinson & Harrison). Parent involvement in itself along with becoming more academically social, has ultimately improved the GPA of high schoolers of all ethnicities (Day & Dotterer, 2018). In relative to the gender gap, it has been found that employed mothers face particularly strong pull toward school engagement given gendered associations with the activity (Lock & Maddox, 2016, p.304).

Through the research that was conducted, activities were sent home with children from a program known as Head Start which focuses to create intervention programs for families and their children. In the study, deficiencies that were found were that there was no pre-test nor post-test. In the study, there were no deficiencies that were found which ultimately was viewed positively when conducting social research. The audiences that were specifically focused on were the parents and the administration of the schools. The key significance of this study was to prompt parental involvement with their child/children by assigning five-take home activities.

**Literature Review**

Some of the factors that contribute to the differences in parent involvement are socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic groups, gender, and working parents/guardians (Robinson & Harrison, 2014). Parental involvement has been proven to improve education outcomes, especially in households that are racially or ethnically different (Day & Dotterer, 2018). Typically, socioeconomic backgrounds and racial/diverse ethnic groups fall hand in hand when it comes to lack of parent involvement with their children’s schooling. To combat this, Head Start programs were created. Head Start programs were a product of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, and “is a federally funded comprehensive early intervention program for low-income families and their young children” (Clark, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Lamb-Parker, Peay, & Piotrkowski, 2000, p.35). To understand the lack of parent involvement, it is important to understand how race and ethnicity have an effect on this issue, as well as socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Backgrounds**

Research suggests that when it comes to strategies and approaches for getting parents more involved with their children, different strategies work for different ethnicities. For example, home based involvement was more beneficial for African American and Hispanic kids, but not white kids (Day & Dotterer, 2018). Parent involvement, as well as becoming more academically social, improved the GPA’s of high schoolers of all ethnicities. (Day & Dotterer, 2018). Parental involvement was hindered in many instances of because of both parents being employed. In terms of ethnically diverse families, lack of parental involvement was due to having a language barrier between them and staff at schools or Head Start programs (Clark et al., 2000). Hispanic families take academic success more seriously, so as a result, they attend more parent-related school events (Bower & Griffin, 2011). When it came to race and ethnicity, it was found that the Social class/ethnicity one was born into not only affected the relationship with parental involvement, but also the likelihood of outcomes in future occurrences related to education, health, relationships, etc. (Robinson & Harrison, 2014, p.121).

In relation to socioeconomic backgrounds, research suggested that the disadvantages associated with economic capital constrain parents’ ability to supply and intervene in their children’s education (Robinson & Harrison, 2014, p.29). It was found that middle-class families have more of a reliable private transportation and flexible work schedules which ultimately results in their ability to interact with authority figures in their children’s lives. In comparison to the middle and upper class, parents who have a socioeconomic hardship are found the “primary targets” of parental involvement initiatives since they are less “visible” in schools. Consequently, their inability to be involved with their children is restrained due to a lack of flexibility, lower likelihood of paid child care and economic isolation from school efforts designed to ultimately promote participation (Robinson & Harrison, 2014, p.29)

**Gender Gap**

A stereotypical gender norm is that women are the ones who should assume the role of being involved with their children’s schooling. Today, there are many mothers who work, and there are many single moms. It was found that “employed mothers face a particularly strong pull toward school engagement given gendered associations with the activity” (Lock & Maddox, 2016, p.304). Mothers with professional occupations are more inclined and capable of being more involved with schooling because they have more flexible hours, but mothers who do not are not as involved because they cannot take off work (Lock & Maddox, 2016). In a typical middle-class household, the mother spends much more time with organized activities for their children than the father does (Lareau & Weininger, 2008). Mothers are more inclined to make scheduling conflicts work, and those scheduling conflicts are typically their children’s organized activities interfering with their work schedules (Lareau & Weininger, 2008).

**Data and Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

The sample, participants in this study were low-income families who had 3 to 5-year old children in three rural counties in southern Virginia. There were 86 families in the study total. The families had children who were in a Head Start program; these programs “promote school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by supporting the development of the whole child” (Head Start Programs, 2019). To conduct this study, a survey was given out to each family that participated in Head Start in a three-county region. The survey consisted of questions that pertained to activities that the parents did with their child/children; these activities included Thankful Turkey, Animal Dice, Noodle Necklace, Stress Ball Balloon, and Sugar Writing. Each activity had their own section. The other section was family characteristics. The parent(s) were asked questions regarding their age, how many children they have their household that attend Head Start, how many hours they typically work in a week, the amount of education they completed, their ethnicity, and their relationship with their children. The survey was given out to all 86 families, but the survey was optional, and participants were free to skip any questions. The questions were either multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank.

**Procedure**

In compliance to the Institutional Review Board along with Longwood University’s ethical guidelines for research, each survey started with a question that pertained to the understanding of the survey directions along with the consent for participation. As an incentive for the parent’s completion of the surveys, a $5 gift card to Walmart was individually attached. The returned surveys were collected by the teachers at Head Start.

**Quantitative Data**

Quantitative data that would be used are the statistics from the survey. Another form of quantitative data would be the 86 families that the surveys were handed out to; quantitative data would also be how many families actually participated in the survey. This data would be used to understand how many families participated in the survey. To evaluated parent involvement, two of the following questions were asked: “How long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?” During a typical day, how many hours do you get to spend interacting with your child/children?” The first question was measured through multiple choice answers whereas the second question was measure on a 10-point scale (0= not at all to 10=very much). The dependent variable is the study is parent involvement. This data would be codes so it would make better sense and gain a new understanding of the data. The independent variables in the study were the activities sent home with the children. This data would be coded into statistics to make better sense of the data. By coding both the independent and dependent variables to make sense, they would correlate to each other. By coding and identifying the data, the data would be organized in a way that makes sense.

**Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data in the study was evaluated by the four open-ended questions at the beginning of the survey. Some of these questions were the following: “The Family Fun Time Activities included a Thankful Turkey Activity, an Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress 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 school? Please explain. If you could change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?

**Analysis**

**Quantitative responses.**

The data from the survey responses were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 25 (SPSS 25).

**Qualitative responses.**

The four open-ended questions were analyzed and written out. For this section, a form of open axial coding was performed solely based on the themes that were revealed.

**Mixed Method analysis.**

We used a mixed-methods evaluation research of both quantitative and qualitative measures to predict one another.

**Quantitative Findings**

In order to compute the data, I used IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences Statistics. The data that was computed was retrieved from surveys that were handed back from the respondents from Head Start Programs.

In table 1, my independent variable was, *how long did it take you and your child/children to complete this activity?* For this particular question within the response, it pertains to the animal dice activity. The data showed that there were thirty-three valid response out of thirty-six. From the data, five respondents said that it took them 0-10 minutes to complete the activity. There were 9 respondents that mentioned that it took eleven to twenty minutes to complete the activity. In the table, it showed that nine respondents took twenty-one to thirty minutes to achieve and finish this particular activity. In comparison to the other answer choices, it was showed that 10 respondents took longer than thirty minutes to complete the animal dice activity.

Table 1

*How long it takes you and your child/children to complete the activity?*

Time (min) Count (respondents) %

0-10 5 15.2

11-20 9 27.3

21-30 9 27.3

30+ 10 30.3

When it pertains to my dependent variable, the question was, *during a typical day, how many hours do you get to spend interacting with your child/children?* The data showed that there were thirty-four valid responses out of thirty-six who completed this question. From the data, it showed that the mean was 5.985 out of 10. The median in relation to this specific data was exactly a 6 along with the mode which was identical, standing a flat 6 as well.

In table 2, both the independent and dependent variables were compared in relation to their means. The independent variable was, *how long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?* The dependent variable was, *during a typical day, how many hours do you get to spend interacting with your child/children?* The mean of how long it took a parent and their child/children between 0-10 minutes was 5.40. For the parents who completed the activity with their children that took eleven to twenty minutes, the average was 6.72. Unlike the last data, the average for respondents that took twenty-one to thirty minutes was 5.13. For the respondents that took longer than thirty minutes, the mean was exactly 6. When analyzing the data, it shows that longer the activity took, the higher the mean. Based on the comparison of data, it also showed that the higher the amount the parents interacted with their child/children.

Table 2

Cross Analysis between Independent and Dependent Variable

Time (min) Count (Respondents) Mean

0-10 5 5.40

11-20 9 6.72

21-30 9 5.13

30+ 10 6.00

Total 33 5.06

In the graphs that were presented, both the independent and dependent variable showed a unique relationship into how the activities that were assigned affected parent involvement with their children. In the data, it showed that majority of respondents took longer than eleven minutes to complete the Animal Dice Activity, whereas, only 5 respondents took less than 10 minutes. In table 2, it presented a cross analysis of the length it took parents and children to complete the activity with the number of hours he or she was engaged with their child/children. The most fascinating discovery that was found in the data was found in the cross analysis where it showed when it took parents and their children longer to complete the activity, not only was the mean higher, but also the amount the parents had interaction with their children.

**Qualitative Findings**

The responses that were shown were coded through open-ended coding. In the first round of data collection, 19 out of 86 surveys were returned. Of those included several themes. A reoccurring theme found was the amount of fun the families had while completing the activities. Another essential theme found was togetherness. These two themes were commonly found throughout the responses which showed the high importance of them pertaining to the completion of these activities.

Throughout the responses, a theme that was seen numerous times was the amount of fun that the families had. An example was when a respondent mentioned that they had an enormous amount of fun with the animal dice activity. Respondent 4 stated, “Animal dice because my daughter had the mot fun with it and didn’t want to stop playing it.” Another response that supports this theme is in relation to the animal dice activity and how they enjoyed a variety of animals. Respondent 8 stated that, “Our favorite activity was the dice because (we) had fun doing the different animals.” Another reoccurrence found in one of the responses was when they described working together while having fun. Respondent 16 mentioned, “We gained that we can together and have fun”.

Another theme that was frequently commented on was in relation to family togetherness. Synonyms that were used were together, team work, bond, and family time. The word “together” was used the most. Throughout the response, it was very evident that family togetherness was a priority and viewed as very important. In one of the responses, it was shown that having time together allowed more availability and openness to new activities. For example, respondent 3 stated, “Time spent together and being able to do crafts. It opened to door for other simple activities.” The second response in relation to family togetherness relates to ordinary spending time with one another. Respondent 7 stated, “We enjoyed sitting down together doing the activity doing the activity as family.” The third response pertained to being more opened and willing to perform new activities rather than just the activities that were originally assigned. Respondent 8 stated, “It had us spend more together by looking up more thing to do as a family.”

Overall, it seems the majority of all families, if not all, enjoyed the activities that were given. With the data was given, there were 19 out of 86 surveys were analyzed. Within these surveys, reoccurring themes that were found included family togetherness and the concept of having fun with their parents. Based on the data, The Animal Dice Activity was the most popular, with the Stress Ball Balloon Activity coming in second. With the activities that were given, the families were able to spend time together while having fun which was essential to only my research question, but more importantly both the children and parents having a healthier relationship. Many of the families that took the survey appreciated how they didn’t have to play the activity or gather the materials, which made the activities more fun and enjoyable opposed to stressful. As a result of the completion of these activities, it has allowed these children along with the adults to hopefully adopt and contribute the skill learned to their daily life.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to promote parental involvement with their child/children by assigning five-take home activities. From the qualitative findings, it was found that there were reoccurring themes of fun and togetherness when completing the activities. The two themes that were found throughout the responses showed the high importance of them pertaining to the completion of the five activities. From the quantitative portion of the study, it was found that the lowest amount of five respondents said that it took them 0-10 minutes to complete the activity.

The middle range of respondents said that it took them either 11-20 or 21-30 minutes to complete the activity; however, the highest count of ten respondents was found in the portion of parents and their children who took longer than thirty minutes. In the cross analysis of the independent variable and dependent variable the lowest mean was 5.40 for the time of 0-10 minutes whereas the highest mean was 6.72 for the time of 11-20 minutes to complete the activities. The most unique discovery in conducting this research was where it showed when it took parents and their children longer to complete the activity, not only was the mean higher, but also the amount the parents had interaction with their child/children.

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