Parental Involvement Among Children in Head Start

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Abstract

Parent involvement is an important topic that for all to understand and can be very beneficial to those who would like to expand their understanding on the subject. The role of parent involvement among children has been researched but only focused on certain aspects when there is much more research to be examined (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine the level of involvement a parent/guardian has with the child and to promote involvement overall. The participants studied were students attending Head Start and their guardians. The data collected and analyzed was based on five take-home activities the children did with their parent/guardians and after all activities were completed a survey was sent home for the guardians to complete. This was a mixed methods study and the quantitative data is closed-ended question represented in the survey. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions in the survey and analyzed through open and axil coding. Themes that arose were that there was a significant amount of time spent together while doing the activities, all participants seemed to have learned a lot, and that the guardians were appreciative that there was little preparation time to set up and complete the activities. The primary statistical results were that parents/guardians who spent less time on the activity felt they were more involved with their child. Overall results indicated that parents were more than willing to be involved in their children’s school activities and plan to be more involved in the future.

Parental Involvement Among Children in Head Start

Parent involvement is a topic that has been studied but certain aspects have not been fully researched into that could be very beneficial to research. The topic of how parent involvement impacts children’s development had been touched on but there are many ways parent involvement can contribute to a child development. There are circumstances that can affect how involved a parent can be in a child’s life.

Studies that have looked into this type of research are ones such as a study conducted by El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2015) explained how parent involvement not only impacts children’s development in school but also socially and emotionally as well and that this topic should be studied more (pg. 988). Specifically, for this particular study there is research on parental involvement among Head Start children such as one by Ansari and Gershoff (2016) which expresses that there is a strong correlation between parental involvement and children’s outcome in behavior (pg. 563). Both of these studies have addressed the issue of parent involvement and how higher levels of involvement are beneficial to a child’s development.

The significance of this study was to promote the importance of parent involvement and give Head Start students and their parents/guardians the opportunity to have that higher level of involvement. Parents can look at this study and understand the importance involvement has on their children’s development. Other researches can use this as reference and can duplicate the experiment if desired. The purpose of this research study was to indicate the impact parental involvement has on young children in Head Start and also give SMART objectives for the child to complete as well.

**Literature Review**

**Parent Involvement**

One of the most important factors in the educational development of a child is that the child has parental involvement both at home and in school (Kuru Cetin & Taskin, 2016). According to this study, parental involvement has many levels involved and can be changed by contextual factors, personal characteristics and opportunities for learning. Parents that are involved in school activities have a greater chance of the child being more prepared and have an easier adjustment to school when younger (Mendez, 2010). The concept of parental involvement is defined as a systematic approach in which it holds many components to ensure children’s success (Kuru Cetin & Taskin, 2016). The behavior of the parent at home as well as in a school setting are what help to contribute to the child’s educational progress (El Nokali et al., 2010). Another aspect of parent involvement is not only aiding to the child’s success but also maintaining good communication with school personnel (DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey & Sundman-Wheat, 2015).

**Parental Involvement in Head Start Children**

The Head Start program was developed to encourage early social development and learning in preschool level children as well as start a basis for school preparedness for less advantaged children to keep them in pace with their peers (Chor, 2018). According to Ansari and Gershoff (2016), “The Head Start program is the largest federally funded early childhood compensatory program in the United States, serving nearly one million low-income children and families” (p 563). Promoting early learning in children’s education is a large part of Head Starts goals when it comes to family involvement (Mendez, 2010). That is why Head Start tries to encourage parents to be more involved with the children on school-based activities (DeLoatche et al., 2015). In order to promote parent involvement in preschool settings among ethnic minority families who are enrolled in Head Start, there was an intervention for those families to accomplish that goal. The outcome was that there was a high rate of parent satisfaction with the intervention, but engagement was less than predicted (Mendez, 2010). There was another study that looked into families who have had generations attend Head Start and see how the program had different experiences on them. It was found that one quarter of the Head Start community had a mother who attended Head Start when young (Chor, 2018).

**Considerations for Family Structure**

Research on the influence family structure has on parental involvement is very scarce but it does have a large impact on how much time parents can offer to their children outside of school. There has been two topics on the subject of parental involvement in accordance to family structure and those are: when parents are more involved successful outcomes for education are higher and family structure plays a large role in educational outcomes because children who come from stable first marriage homes are more likely for success. This research study looked into how parental involvement fluctuated depending on the family structure. In this study, there were ten different family types looked at and the mean levels were computed and calculated. The results found were that biological married parents were the most involved with the children whereas the other eight family types, mostly children from one parent households had not as sufficient levels of involvement. Although there was a difference in involvement levels there was a positive effect that accounted across all racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic statuses (Myers & Myers, 2015). Another study focused on a more precise form of family structure and that was single mothers with children attending Head Start and the purpose was to gain perspective from the mothers and report experiences with parent involvement. There were five mothers that got interviewed for the research who all had a 4-year-old enrolled in Head Start. All mother reported having very positive experiences and overall the study helped in the development of all individuals involved (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003). In a study with the purpose of parent involvement based on the family’s socioeconomic status found by qualitative data based on document analysis and interviews. It was found that no matter the socioeconomic status of the family, there was little difference in the family’s involvement with school-based activities and the process of the child’s education (Kuru Cetin & Taskin, 2016). Previously started in parental involvement in Head Start children, the African American parents that had the intervention noted interest in getting serviced to improve parent involvement for the child. For assessment there was a 42-item questionnaire that the families had to complete in order to assess involvement. There was a large sample of 288 families from 3 areas of African American communities where about 40% was the control group and 61% of the participants got the intervention. The parents who received the intervention put more effort into reading to the child compared to the parents who did not receive the intervention (Mendez, 2010).

**The Influence Parental Involvement has on Children**

There has been a large amount of research that supports the fact that high levels of parent involvement in school-based activities result in a positive outcome for academic in young children (Myers, M. & Myers, B., 2015). Parent involvement during preschool is associated with children having positive and long-term academic, behavioral and social outcomes (DeLoatch et al., 2015). According to Chor (2018), “In sharp contrast to full sample Head Start Impact Study findings, Head Start has large, positive impacts on cognitive and socioemotional development through 3rd grade among the children of former participant mothers including improved mathematical skills and reductions in withdrawn and aggressive behavior” (p. 264). There was a study justifying that statement and the study showed parent involvement was linked to lower behavioral problems within young children. By examining within and between-child associations with parent involvement and socioemotional and academic courses. It showed that children with very involved parents had few conduct problems and greater social functioning, but it was not able to predict any changes in academic achievement. What this finding proposes is that parents are a large influence on children’s development (El Nokali et al., 2010). In another study, it was sought to find if there would be improvements in both the parent and child outcome if there was more parent involvement in Head Start. The research was conducted by having the parents document how frequent they participated in Head Start activities during the children’s 3-year-old year. There was a clear distinction in change within both the child’s behavior and parenting that indicates that by improving the parent’s skills in parenting, the child’s outcome will be enhanced as well (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

**Data and Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

We worked with families who had their children enrolled in Head Start. More specifically, 86 families whose children attended head start in three rural southern Virginia counties were included in the study. All parents/guardians were asked to complete a survey after completing all five activities. The overall response rate for the surveys was…

Evaluation research for parental involvement among five different activities was conducted by the use of surveys to collect the data from the participants. Quantitative data was conducted by using closed-ended questions in the survey and qualitative data was conducted with open-ended questions.

**Procedure**

Survey consent was given out to all the participants which was found at the top of the survey. All participant protections were adhered to, as stipulated by the Institutional Review Board for Longwood University. A paper survey was administered to all the participants with a five-dollar Walmart girt card as a form of incentive. The activities were sent to the homes of the head start children in the Fall of 2019 and the data was collected in the form of surveys that were sent out with the students after all activities were completed and the children were asked to bring them back to Head Start after completion.

**Quantitative Measures**

Close-ended questions were conducted for the quantitative data in order to measure the dependent variable of parent involvement, some of the items developed for the survey were: *How long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?* The answers ranged from 0 minutes to longer than 30 minutes to complete. *How involved was your family in this activity?* Responses were on a 10-point scale *(0=Not at all, 10=Very much).* There were a variety of options to choose from. Questions pertained to the involvement of the parent of these activities and if the activities were enjoyed by the child. These five different activities were the independent variables in this research study. They are all used to show how much parent involvement there was for the activities and if different activities had different levels of involvement.

**Qualitative Measures**

Open-ended questions were conducted in the survey in order to receive measures for the qualitative data. The measures for this section of the survey were focused on four questions: *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*. And lastly, *if you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?* All participants were asked the same four questions no matter the circumstances.

**Analysis**

**Quantitative responses.** Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS, statistical package for the social sciences, to examine the survey responses.

**Qualitative responses.** The open-ended questions on the survey were used to answer the question of parental involvement within a family and if these activities help to provide that involvement. The responses for the qualitative data was coded by theme.

**Mixed methods analysis.** Mixed-method analysis where at the end of the result section, quantitative and qualitative data is validated, contrasted, or improved by one another.

**Quantitative Findings**

If parents are involved with the at home activities with their children, then the success rate of the activities will be greater. The dependent variable for this data set was the question *How involved was your family in this activity? (0=Not at all, 10=Very much).* This question related to the Sugar Writing Activity to see how involved the parents were in assisting their child during this activity.

Table 1

*Parent involvement*

Valid Frequency Valid Percent

4 1 3.1

5 4 12.5

6 1 3.1

7 3 9.4

8 1 3.1

9 3 9.4

10 19 59.4

*Note.* Valid is the 1-10 scale the respondents got to choose from. No respondents chose 1-3.

59.4% of the respondents indicated that they were highly involved in the Sugar Writing Activity and since there were no respondents that answered 1-3 then it shows there was not a lack of parent involvement for this activity. The rest of Table 1 is spread out quite evenly so there are no other outliers in this data set other than respondents answering 10.

The independent variable in this data set was *How long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?* The majority of respondents indicated that it only took 11-20 minutes to complete the activity, which is not a surprising outcome. The hypothesis was that if parents spent more time with their children on the activity then they would classify that there was more parent involvement.

The bivariate components relate because it was predicted that if parents spent more time working on the Sugar Writing Activity with their children then the parents would consider there to be a higher level of parent involvement. It combines the two question of *How involved was your family in this activity? (0=Not at all, 10=Very much)* and *How long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?*

Table 2

*Parent Involvement X Time Spent on Activity*

Time Mean Number

0-10 Minutes 9.67 3

11-20 Minutes 8.91 11

21-30 Minutes 7.67 9

Longer than 30 Minutes 8.89 9

Table 2 indicates that the less time spent on the activity the more involved the parents considered themselves to be with their child. This was an unexpected outcome because it was hypothesized that the more time spent on the activity the more parents would be involved but Table 2 showed it was quite the opposite. An explanation for this outcome would be that because the parent was involved in the activity with their child it took less time to complete the activity. In comparison to if the child completed the activity on their own then it would be predicted that it would take the child alone more time to complete it. Even though this outcome goes against the hypothesis, there is a logical explanation as to why it would take less time to complete the activity but still feel there was a high amount of parent involvement and that is simply because with high parent involvement the activity was simple to complete and therefore took less time.

The key finding found from this data set is that parents feel they are more involved in the activity even if they did not spend a large amount of time working on the activity with their child. It is logical that if a parent assists the child in the activity it will get completed faster. Therefore, the hypothesis of if parents are involved with the at home activities with their children, then the success rate of the activities will be greater is correct. The parents and child were successful in completing the activity it was just completed quicker than predicted but the parent was involved with the activity.

**Qualitative Findings**

Through open and axial coding through open-ended survey interview questions, there were three themes discovered. Those themes are time spent together, learning, and little preparation so there was more time for fun.

The first theme found in the take home surveys was time spent together. A significant portion of the respondents indicated that these activities encouraged them to spend time together. Evidence is presented in Respondent 3 answering, “Time spent together and being able to do crafts,” when asked what their family gained from the activities. Respondent 7 also had a similar experience by stating, “We enjoyed sitting down together doing the activity as family.” For Respondent 13 these activities really impacted the family due to the fact of Respondent 13 expressing, “We were together doing these activies; 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 + it was fun.” Respondent 13 explained that because of these activities it encouraged them to want to do more things as a family since they enjoyed it so much. Respondent 17 stated, “Working together, have family time,” when asked what they gained from these activities. A vast majority of the respondents indicated that they spent time together doing these activities and some want to continue that in the future.

Theme two is learning, respondents indicated that either they or their child learned something from the activities. Respondent 4 noted that, “She learn to take turns,” informing that her child learned the importance of taking turns. Respondent 5 expressed, “We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” This activity provided Respondent 5 with fun, but they all learned something in the process. A good portion of the respondents claimed that they enjoyed their time learning, such as Respondent 9 stating, “We had fun learning together.” These activities did not just impact them in the short term but gave room for future learning opportunities as well. Respondent 11 expressed that they gained, “fun learning activities that we can keep playing in the future.” The fun does not seem to have to end after these activities concluded. Respondent 12 explained that her child gained the most out these activities when she claimed, “‘Mommy and me’ time with education and creative projects. My daughter had a time of laughs and learning.” Learning was one of the intended factors for these activities, so to hear that many respondents gained that out of these activities shows that they were a success for their intentions.

Little preparation for the activities was the third theme found, respondents expressed that it was beneficial that there was short preparation time and they had more time to have fun when asked if being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time. Respondent 4 commented, “Yes it took less time to prepare the activity more time to play.” The pre-planned activities made the process of figuring out what to do simple and the family could focus on family time. Respondent 7 answered, “Yes! It was very helpful. Everything was already there so all we needed to do was enjoy the activity with him.” Respondent 3 agreed by expressing “Yes absolutely! It took all of the planning and prepping out of the equation.” These three respondents all found that having pre-planned activities helped with their family time due to the fact that there was little preparation so they could focus on spending time together and having fun.

These finding suggest that being provided with activities does provide families with something to encourage parental involvement. Also, the parents being involved in these activities impacted the children as well when respondents indicated how much fun the child was having. The results for the question regarding which their favorite activity was and why, the responses ranged but there were a fair number of respondents who enjoyed the animal dice game and stress ball activity the most. For what the family gained from these activities the answers ranged greatly but there were a couple of responses relating to spending time together. Most of the respondents confirmed that having pre-planned activities was beneficial to the amount of time they got to spend having fun. Lastly, when asked if they could change one thing about these activities for the future, more than half of the respondents responded with nothing should be done. Overall, the responses for the qualitative portion of this survey showed that parents were being involved in their children’s lives and were making time to do these activities with them.

**Conclusion**

This research study investigated parental involvement among students attending Heat Start in three counties in southern Virginia. Five activities were sent home with the children and a survey was sent with the last activity which was anticipated to be completed by the parent/guardian of the child and sent back to Head Start the following week. As most research studies proceed, there will always be some deficiencies that will take place. Some for this particular research study we focused on a specific population so a limitation could be that since we only looked at a certain area there is still more room for studies in parent involvement in other areas. The main purpose was to explore parental involvement among Head Start families and to analyze the data of involvement for each activity. The findings suggested that if activities are already prepared and sent home, parents/guardians are more willing to be involved in those activities and found it to be very beneficial for all participants. Most parents/guardians indicated that they felt they had a high level of involvement in their children’s lives but there are still factors that can hinder how involved they can be. With these findings parents everywhere can see that it is beneficial to be involved in their children’s life even in little things such as take-home activities. Parental involvement has a great impact on a child and even if circumstances are great in a family, being involved can make all the difference in the child’s development and future.

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