Parent Involvement in Head Start Home Activities

Sharrell Cuffee

Longwood University

**Abstract**

For some parents being involved in their child, or children’s, education is easy. Many parents find it challenging because they are too busy or do not understand the ways they can get their family more involved in helping educate their children. The purpose of this study was to see whether or not families will become more involved with each other and with educating the child/ children if the child/children are given an activity to do with their family. This study was conducted in three different counties: Nottaway, Cumberland, and Prince Edward. The participants are families who have children in the Head Start program in the three counties. For the research, five different activities were sent home with each child in Head Start and then at the end of the five days a survey was sent home for the parents to take, along with a gift card to Walmart for their participation. This was a mixed methods study, which collects both qualitative and quantitative data. Within the survey, that was sent home, were open-ended and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions were used to obtain the qualitative data, and the close-ended questions retrieved data for the quantitative data. Some themes that come about where parent involvement, more activities, and enjoyment.

**Introduction**

For some parents being involved in their child, or children’s, education is easy. Many parents find it challenging because they are too busy or do not understand the ways they can get their family more involved in helping educate their children. “Childhood researchers report a positive relationship between parental involvement and various literacy, and problem-solving skills associated with later academic success,” (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). There have been many studies done to see how different characteristics can play a part in parent involvement such as culture, location, race, and so on. Parent involvement plays a big part in a child’s development in education at a young age. So, for the research we are looking at low-income families that have children in the Head Start program.

During this research we had a response rate was 44% and out of that we found that the families were involved in the activities and they loved doing them. Some deficiencies that we faced while conducting this research were not getting all the surveys back, respondents not answering some questions, or participants not doing all of the activities. This research is to show people/ parents how important a parent’s involvement in a child’s education can be. We did this research to see how involved the parents were in their child/children’s education in the Head Start programs from the three counties.

**Literature Review**

**Parent Involvement.** When defining parent involvement, preschools or school programs would define it as the participation or connections of parents to their child’s activities, meeting or talking with teachers, and keeping up with their child’s academics (Kofmacher, Green, Staerkel, Peterson, Cook, Roggman, Faldowski, and Schiffman 2008). When understanding the beneficial outcomes that parental involvement has on children people can see it plays a very important role (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, Peay 2000). Some activities that could be included in parent involvement is parents being involved at school such as communicating with teachers, volunteering, or going to different school events. Another one could be parents being involved at home with simple tasks like helping with homework and keeping track of their child’s progress. Also, parent involvement could be as simple as them encouraging their children (Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, Diggs Brody, 2017). In some studies, it is found that parent involvement in children lives show a positive effect with their performances in school (Lamb-Parker et. al. 2000).

**Head Start.** “The Head Start program is the largest federally funded early childhood compensatory program in the United States, serving nearly 1 million low-income children and families (Administration for Children and Families)” (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). When trying to examine parent’s involvement, Head start is a model setting to understanding the effects it has on a child’s early schooling success (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Head Start has a requirement in which parents are involved in all parts of the program to ““to enhance their parenting skills, knowledge, and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of their children” (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

**Program Satisfaction Among Parents.** Kofmacher, et. al. (2008) stated that parents can have positive and negative reactions to engagement. The level of satisfaction a parent has about a program can also affect their engagement with a program (Korfmacher, et.al. 2008). Parents who do not committee themselves completely may still feel satisfied with the program. Or they feel that have to do activities even though they were not satisfied with some experiences (Korfmacher, et. al. 2008).

**Getting Everyone Involved.** Mendez (2010) states that The Companion Curriculum (TCC) was designed to improve a child’s readiness for school. “This program seeks to enhance Head Start children’s school readiness by increasing parent involvement in education and strengthening the parent–teacher relationship,” (Mendez, 2010). It was done by increasing the involvement of parents in their child’s education and by building a better bond between parents and teachers (Mendez, 2010). One way this was done was by sending home educational activities so that parents could be more playful in an educational way (Mendez, 2010). Workshops took place in which teachers would be demonstrators and allowed siblings or other family members to join to learn ways on how to help a preschooler become ready for school (Mendez, 2010).

**Methods and Data**

**Study Design and Sample.** For this research we are using families with children at three different Head Start programs. Head start is a federally funded early childhood development program for low income families. There are 86 families with children from three counties with Head Start: Nottaway, Cumberland, and Prince Edward. The response rate was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We used open-ended and close-ended questions about the activities that were sent home in order to do evaluation research.

**Procedure.** There is a consent form that the participants will have to sign and check. It is located on the top of the first page of the survey that was sent on the last day of the activities. The participants had to check a box to show that they understand their rights as a human participant. *Survey Instructions: Please answer the following questions based on your household’s experience with the Family Fun Time Activities. Your answers will be anonymous. Please answer questions as accurately as possible and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If for any reason you feel the need to end your participation in this survey, you are free to do so. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Dr. JoEllen Pederson at pedersonjg@longwood.edu or 434-395-2700. Do you agree to these directions? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ No.* This is given by pen and paper and sent home with the children. It is also sent home with a five-dollar Walmart gift card. It should take about 20 minutes to complete the whole survey.

**Quantitative Measures.** To collect quantitative data, we used close- ended questions. We used these close-ended questions to measure the amount of parent involvement there is in the 86 families we are working with. Some questions we used are: *On a scale of 0-10, how much did your family enjoy this activity? (0=Not at all, 10=Very much), On a scale from 0-10, how much did this activity help to improve you and your child’s/children’s relationship? (0 = Not at all, 10= Very much), On a scale from 0-10, how much assistance did your child/children require for this activity? (0=None at all, 10=Very much), On a scale from 0-10, How involved was your family in this activity? (0=Not at all, 10=Very much).* All of these questions were based on an 11-point scale.

**Qualitative Measures.** To get our qualitative data we used open-ended questions instead of interviews. All the information that we get from our participants are anonymous. We asked four open-ended 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 If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?.*

**Analysis.** For the quantitative responses we imported the information into the Statistical Package of the Social Science databased which is used for descriptive analysis. And for the qualitative responses we transcribed the open-ended answers to a work document and coding them responses by themes.

**Mixed methods Analysis.** Mixed methods analysis is used to find descriptive research. And it collects and analysis qualitative and quantitative research.

**Qualitative Findings**

While conducting this research we use open-ended questions to get some qualitative data instead of doing interviews. These finding are from the first 19 surveys that we received thus far out of the 89. The respondents have given us many different responses. We took the data that we got, coded the them and set them into different themes. Some themes we came up with was parent involvement/ family involvement, more activities (implementing that families would want to do more activities with one another), and enjoyment.

**Parent/ Family Involvement.** While coding these responses a lot of respondents talked about how their families loved doing these active together. The question that was asked was *Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?* The responses to this question were very interesting. Respondent 5 said “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” Another respondent, Respondent 10, said “The animal dice game it got the family physically active. Great way to promote healthy family activities. Making it fun!!!” “” Mommy and Me” time with education and creative projects. My [child] had a time of laughs and learning,” was said by Respondent 12. These activities had families coming together to try and do something new and fun. Almost all respondents gave an answer to this question which gave us a since of enjoyment and willing to do more activities as a family.

**More Activities.** Many respondents thought that these activities had either pushed them to want to do more or just added some fun to what they already do. A question was asked whether or not these pre-planned activities increased the amount of time the respondents got to spend with their families. *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.* Respondent 11 said “Yes, it was something that we made time for. We don’t always get that chance.” Another respondent, Respondent 13, said “Yes, because I didn’t have to look for things o do or go to the store to buy supplies. I don’t have transportation.” Then Respondent 17 goes on to say, “Yes, because spending time is very important. Communicating, family members voicing opinions.” These activities gave families the opportunity to try something new and fun. Some respondents thought that the activities being pre-planned helped in many different ways. And some thought that it just added more ideas for them to add to what they already do. But overall from these respondents we see that they would like to have more activities that they can do.

**Enjoyment.** A common recurrence within the survey responses was the respondents mentioning how much them and their families enjoyed these activities. Respondent 13 said “We were together doing these activities: my brother, me, and my [child]. We don’t usually do these kinds of things together. I want to continue doing things together. My [child] was happy & it was fun.” Another respondent, 7, said “we enjoyed sitting down together doing the activity as family.” The respondents gave positive feedback and were very helpful when answering the questions. From what we have received families enjoyed the multiple aspects that came along with these activities. They enjoyed the activities themselves, spending the time with their families, and some enjoyed seeing their children having fun and learning new things. This shows us that the families enjoyed all the aspects the activities.

**Quantitative Data**

**Independent Variable.** For this analysis the independent variable were the different activities that were sent home through Head Start to families in Nottaway, Cumberland, and Prince Edward County. These questions used nominal and order measurements, which are categorical questions. The table below (Table 1.0) shows one of the questions asked about the whether or not a child or children needed assistance with doing the activity. 12.5% or 4 out of 32 of the respondents said that their child or children did the activity without assistance. 26 out of 32 or 81.3% of the respondents said that their child/ children needed some assistance. And 2 out of the 32 respondents said that their child/ children did not need any type of assistance for this activity.

Table 1.0: *Was your child/ children successful in writing the letters in their name in the tray?*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assistance Needed | Independent Variable | |
| Frequency | Valid Percent |
| Yes, without assistance | 4 | 12.5 |
| Yes, with assistance | 26 | 81.3 |
| No | 2 | 6.3 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

**Dependent Variable.** The dependent variable for this analysis was how much parents and children would be involved in doing the activities. The question was on a scale from 0-10 for how involved the family was in this activity. There were no responses that had 0-3 circled, so they were left out of the data. This information used interval and ratio measurements, which are continuous variables. 59.4% or 19 out of 32 of the families scored the activity as a 10, which means the families were very involved in this activity. And 1 respondent scored this activity a 4 out of 10, which meant that the family was somewhat involved. The mean/ average for all the respondents was a score of 8.63 out of 10. Overall families were pretty involved with this activity.

Table 2.0: *How involved was your family in this activity?*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Statistics | |
| Mean | 8.63 |
| Median | 10.00 |
| Mode | 10 |

**Bivariate.** For this analysis we did a bivariate analysis to compare v27, *How many shapes did your child/ children identify?,* and v29, *Was your child/ children successful in writing the letters of their name in the tray?.* After doing so, we found that with respect to completing shapes, 18 children were able to identify 3-4 shapes with some assistance, as shown on the table below (Table 3). This means that 69.2% of the children were successful in identifying 3-4 shapes. We were also able to find that overall 26 out of the 32 respondents said that their children needed some assistance to complete the activity. And that 4 of the children did not need any assistance to complete the activity. This analysis helps show that the parents involvement helped the child be able to identify some shapes.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Shapes Completed (v27) |  | Assistance Needed (v29) | | |  |
|  | Yes, without assistance | Yes, with assistance | No | Total |
| 0 | count | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 1-2 | Count | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 3-4 | Count | 1 | 18 | 0 | 19 |
| 5+ | Count | 2 | 6 | 0 | 8 |
| Total | Count | 4 | 26 | 2 | 32 |

Table 3: Bivariate

**Key Finding.** After doing the data for this analysis were able to compare whether these activities would increase the involvement of the family as a whole. In the bivariate analysis it shows that some of the children were not able to complete the activity unless they had some assistance. With the parents or family being involved we were able to see that the whole family was able to enjoy themselves even though the activities were for the children they got the family involved with one another.

**Conclusion**

The main point of this research was to see if giving families activities to do would it increase the parent’s involvement in their child/ children’s education. So, after conducting the research we found that giving families activities that are already planned out for them that they are more likely to be involved. The families enjoyed the activities and the time spent with each other while doing them. Parents liked that fact that the activities were already planned out for them, so they did not have to waste time to come up with something to do. So, if preschools or early development programs were to send home activities, parents may be more involved in their child/ children’s education.

**References**

Ansari, A., Gershoff, E. (2016) Parent involvement in Head Start and children’s development: Indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 562-579.

Korfmacher, J., Green, B., Staerkel, F., Peterson, C., Cook, G., Roggman, L., Faldowski, R., Schiffman, R. (2008) Parent involvement in early childhood home visiting. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 37,* 171-196.

Lamb-Parker, F., Piotrkowski, C. S., Baker, A. J., Kessler-Sklar, S., Clark, B., Peay, L. (2001). Understanding barriers to parent involvement in Head Start: A research-community partnership. *Early* *Childhood Research Quarterly, 16*, 35–51.

Jarrett, R., & Coba-Rodriguez (2015) “My mother didn’t play about education”: Low-income, African American mothers’ early school experience and their impact on school involvement for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten. *The Journal of Negro Education, 84,* 457-472.

Mendez, J. (2010) How can parents get involved in preschool? barriers and engagement in education by ethnic minority parents of children attending Head Start. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16,* 26-36.

Oswald, D., Zaidi, H., Cheatman, D., Diggs Brody, K. (2017) Correlates of parent involvement in students’ learning: Examination of a national data set. *J Child Fam Stud, 27,*316-323