Parental Involvement Compared to Level of Education

Shawn Terry III

Longwood University SOCL-345

**Abstract**

Parental involvement is key to the cognitive development of a child, especially from the ages of 3 to 5 years old. The purpose of this study was to show the impact of education level of a parent on the success of parental involvement with the child. Researchers worked with Head Start programs and directly with low socio-economic families from a rural southern area in the United States, whose children are enrolled in Head Start programs in three counties. Researchers sent home a survey to eighty-six families of the Head Start program asking how the activity parents received prior affected their interaction with their child. Thirty-three surveys were collected from the families after completing an activity pertaining to parental involvement. Using this mixed methods study, qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys was tested to see the correlation between an improved relationship with the child and a parent’s level of education. Although the activity increased the relationship between parent and child, researchers found that the level of the parent’s education had no correlation to parental involvement. Although socio-economic status has been previously proven to affect the level of parental involvement can impact a child's life, from this survey evidence it is shown that the actual status level may not affect the ability for parental involvement to have an impact on the child.

**Introduction**

According to Hill and Tyson (2009), an adolescent’s ability to engage in logical and analytical thinking as well as problem solving, planning, and decision-making increase during adolescence. Parents are direct agents of socialization in a child’s life to prepare them for adulthood. Previous studies have shown evidence of the impact of at-home activities on parental involvement and how they impact the cognitive development of a child (Banerjee M. et al 2011) (Jeynes W. 2011). The cognitive development of a child is facilitated by the parent through parental involvement. Parental involvement is defined as participation of a parent in a child’s education and daily life (Chang M. 2008).

Research by Hill and Tyson (2009), found that parental involvement in a child’s education has been linked to high academic achievement when educational materials learned at school are applied at home. However, the type of involvement may cause differences in success rates. Hill and Tyson (2009), found that it has been shown that when an adolescent is given direct help on homework there is less academic achievement than with other involvement within the home where education is applied to daily life. In addition, Epstein and Sanders (2000) found that “... family practices of involvement are as or more important than family background variables for determining whether and how students’ progress and succeed in school” (p. 7). The literature typically studies empirical findings about parental involvement indicators, and any type of achievement indicators (Fan & Chen, 2001). Jeynes (2005) found that different perceptions were overlooked on different kinds of academic platforms; both standardized and non-standardized.

**Literature Review**

**Impact of Parental Involvement on 3-5-year old’s**

Children, especially from the ages of three to five, are highly impacted by their interaction with their surroundings and support group. According to Brofenbreener (1994), parental involvement is key to a child’s early cognitive development since they are at this highly impressionable age. This can be proven in the behavioral patterns of children in these impressionable ages. Daniel (2009), found that children who receive a low amount of parental involvement at an early age are likely to associate with behavioral problems and maternal depressive symptoms.

Parental involvement also affects three to five years old’s emotional and social abilities. Development of these skills occurs at a very early age and can impact a student’s academic ability. Baker (2014) found that parents who were more involved in their child’s home literacy practices were more likely to have a child who was good at math, reading, and science. “During parent-child literacy interactions children learn to respond to verbal cues from parents, wait patiently as parents explain new concepts, and follow the instructions during guided learning interactions” (p. 194). This cognitive development in children 3-5 years will be key to their social abilities in the future.

**SES impact on Parental Involvement**

Socio-economic-status (SES) can often greatly impact a child’s access to education, future occupations, or housing opportunities that would otherwise perpetuate their future at a normal rate. Children with a low SES typically derive from parents who have found themselves in a low-income situation. This is often minority or immigrant families who have come to the United States as a way to offer a better future for their child (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez & Aretakis, 2014). Parental involvement in low SES families is dire in order to propel these children into a brighter future instead of getting wrapped up in crime or gang violence (Banerjee, Harrell & Johnson, 2011) (Murray, Loeber & Pardini, 2012). Low-income and minority parents often have a tougher time accessing resources for parental involvement in their child’s life. Jeynes (2011), found that this can be due to extended hours in the workplace, feeling mistrust between themselves and their child’s school; or other factors that reduce their parental involvement due to their socio-economic-status (Banerjee et al., 2011). There are a few key ways for low SES families to show parental involvement in their child’s life in order for them to succeed long-term.

A child’s desire to succeed academically may be motivated by parents’ hard work and sacrifice; along with their communication about the value of education and future opportunities in a low socio-economic-status family (Ceballo et al., 2014). This is best developed when formatted as a way to “give back” to parents who have sacrificed in order for the low-income status child to succeed in their future. According to Suarez-Orozco (2009), this is especially prevalent in immigrant communities and people of color where there are often examples of parents struggle as a sacrifice for their children.

However, there is often a sense of mistrust built between the parent and the school as schools may ask for additional money or volunteer effort on the parent’s part. To address this, Jeynes (2011) recommends that teachers form further relationships with parents who suffer from a low SES. Schools and teachers have the ability to reach out and enhance experiences for low status individuals and families to increase involvement. This connection may be built through weekly lunches for both parents and students at the school, opening access to basketball courts or fields at the school to allot ample space for parent involvement, or directly communicating materials learned in class to parents so they can continue their child’s education at home (Jeynes, 2011).

It is clear based on the above evidence that parental involvement is a subject of high importance in the development of a child. The amount of involvement, type of involvement, and background factors like socio-economic-status play a key role in determining the outcome of a child’s cognitive and social abilities. Families may practice a higher amount of involvement in their child’s lives in order to produce a higher rate of success in their lives.

**Methods and Data**

**Study design and Sample**

Researchers worked with Head Start programs which is a childcare location support the cognitive development of children under the age of five. The researchers worked directly with low socio-economic families from a rural southern area in the United States, whose children are enrolled in Head Start programs in three counties. The 86 participating families were each given five activities on each day of the week. Each activity was supplied with materials and instructions and was planned to not exceed half and hour. Each family was asked to complete the activities that focused on different smart objectives. All the families were then asked to complete a survey that contained open and closed ended questions; that focused on the overall involvement, experiences of the family. The overall response rate was 44 surveys received from the participating families. The researchers used an evaluation research strategy to evaluate the activities and was done through mixed methods research design.

**Procedure**

Survey consent forms were given to families to protect their rights; and were told that the researchers were adhering to the ethical standards and the completion of the surveys were completely voluntarily. All human subjects’ protections were adhered to, as stipulated by the Institutional Review Boards at Longwood University. A pen and paper survey were sent home in the child’s backpack with a gift card attached to them and then returned to the schools and collected by the teachers.

**Quantitative Measures**

The perceived dependent variable being parental involvement included one research developed item: How much did this activity help to improve you and your child’s/children’s relationship? Responses were on a 10- point likert-type scale (0= Not at all to 10=Very much). Questions were specific to families at Head Start programs because the parents do not have enough time to be involved in their children’s education. The researcher’s independent variable was the highest level of education obtained by the parents. This variable was shown through the demographic variable, which included the highest level of education obtained by a parent (1= less than high school to 7= Prefer not to answer). The researchers recoded the variable to gather more reliable data for the perceived independent variable. The variable was recoded into the highest level of education obtained by a parent (1= high school or less, 2= college or higher, or 3=Prefer not to answer.)

**Qualitative Measures**

The qualitative measures included open ended questions about parental involvement and experiences, including what was gained from the parent’s involvement in the activities overall. Qualitative analyses for this study focused on open ended survey questions: The Family Fun Time 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 school? Please explain. If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?

**Analysis**

**Quantitative responses**

Survey data was used to answer the following research question: (a) Do at home activities influence parental involvement? Descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS 25 to examine survey responses. Results of closed ended questions were put into Microsoft Excel, and then were plugged into SPSS 25.

**Qualitative responses**

All the questions and responses that were completed from the Head Start program surveys were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Then the researchers used qualitative coding for the responses using common themes.

**Mixed method analysis**

Researchers are using mixed method analysis where the quantitative and qualitative data both inform one another.

**Findings**

**Quantitative findings**

Out of the 86 surveys that were sent home with the children of Head Start programs, the researchers received 35 surveys throughout the second wave of collection. Through descriptive analyses of the surveys, the coded responses were plugged into Microsoft Excel and then plugged into SPSS 25. The perceived dependent variable being parental involvement was tested through one research developed item: How much did this activity help to improve you and your child’s/children’s relationships? The responses were measured on a 10- point likert-type scale (0=Not at all to 10= Very much). The findings showed that 64.7% of respondents stated they very much agreed that the activity improved their relationship with their child. 2.9% of respondents stated they didn't feel as the activity improved their relationship with their child. The average response throughout the 35 surveys, captured a mean of 8.85, which shows that the activity increased the relationship throughout each family that responded.

Table 1

*Level of Education Received*

Level of education                     Count                          %

High school degree less              11                              32.4%

College degree or more               22                              64.7%

Prefer not to say                           1                              2.9%

  The researcher’s primary independent variable was measuring the highest level of education obtained by the parents of the household. The demographic variable of highest level of education was recoded from seven groups into three groups. The new groups being: High School or less, College or higher and preferred not to answer. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of the responses obtained from the 35 surveys. The data shows that 32.4% of parents have only received a high school diploma or less, which allows the researchers to see that 11 parents never received further education. 67.4% of parents received a college degree or higher, allowing the researchers to understand that 22 parents pursued further education. Lastly, 2.9% of respondents preferred not to answer, which can be seen as low due to only one respondent preferred not to answer.

Table 2

*Crosstabulation of Level of Education and Improved Relationship*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Relationship Gained | Education |
| High School or Less | College or Higher | No Response |
| Improved | 9.45(1.04) | 8.43(2.29) | 10.00 |
| Did Not Improve | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Note.* Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.  |

A bivariate analysis was conducted using SPSS 25, which compared the means of the researcher’s dependent variable of parental involvement; and the independent variable of level of education obtained. The findings showed a positive correlation between the dependent and independent variable. Table 2 shows that respondents that have a high school diploma or less and felt that the activity improved the relationship with their child had a mean of 9.45. The data shows that respondents that received a high school diploma or less felt that the activity overall improved the relationship with their child. Respondents that obtained a college degree or higher and felt that the activity improved the relationship with their child had a mean of 8.43. These findings show that the respondents felt that the relationship with their child improved, but not as much as the respondents with a high school diploma or less. Lastly the respondents that preferred not to answer had a mean of 10.00 when compared to if the activity improved their relationship with their child. The data for the comparison of means is extremely high, because only one respondent preferred not to answer.

Through the comparison of the dependent and independent variables, the key findings showed that whether the respondents had a high school diploma or less; a college degree or more the activity improved the relationship with their child. The findings showed that the respondents that had a high school diploma or less felt that the activity improved their relationship with their child more than the respondents that had a college degree or higher through the means.

**Qualitative Findings**

Out of the 86 surveys sent with the children of Head Start programs, the researchers only received 19 surveys through the first wave of collection. Through open and axial coding, researchers found three different themes which are seen through the 19 surveys collected from participating families of Head Start programs. The themes which are seen throughout the survey responses were learning, bonding and time conflict. These themes illustrate that at-home activities influence parental involvement among the parents and their children.

Researchers asked if anything was gained from the activities and through the coding of the various survey responses found that learning was a theme. Respondent 1 stated “we learn to do teamwork”, which shows that the respondent and child learned how to work with others while doing the activities. Respondent 1’s response specifically shows that through providing at-home activities, the family was able to learn a new skill together. Secondly, we can see the learning theme when Respondent 4 stated “[child’s name] learned to take turns”, which can be seen as learning an everyday skill. Respondent 4’s response allowed the researchers to analyze that the learned skills and experiences would not have been possible if not for the research activities. Thirdly, Respondent 6 stated “helped [child’s name] with writing [child’s name] name”, this can be connected to learning as a whole; because the child learned how to write their name from participating in the activities that were sent home. In addition to the child learning to write their name is that the parent was able to make that memory with their child. Another response that illustrates learning is from Respondent 9 who stated “we had fun learning together”, showing that the at home activities allowed the parent and child to learn new things together. All the examples show how providing at-home activities influences parent involvement and allows opportunities for learning.

Bonding was another theme that was found throughout evaluation and analysis of the response to the surveys. Respondent 5 stated “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time”. The response shows the family bonding with one another and enjoying their time together. One of the activities that was sent home allowed one of the Head Start families to cherish some time together as a family. Respondent 12 stated “Mommy and Me time”, which illustrates how the parent and child were able to enjoy some time together doing something educational activities. Another Respondent, Respondent 17, stated “yes, because spending time is very important”, which can be seen as a particular family views bonding as a family as an importance that might be a difficult thing to do without assistance. Through the at-home activities Respondent 17’s family was able to be together and be involved in their child’s education. Bonding is again seen as an example when Respondent 19 stated “my family gained quality time”; which can be interpreted as spending time with one another. By Respondent 19’s vocabulary choice of “gained”, the researchers can analyze that as meaning the bond obtained was not present before these at home activities; Ultimately showing that at home activities being provided to families influences parent involvement overall.

Time confliction is the final theme that was found when evaluating the 19 survey responses. One of the questions that asked if the activities increased the amount of time spent as a family particularly was an example of this theme. Respondent 10 stated “Yes, because been a busy mom of two it’s hard to come home and try to think of something to do”. Respondent 10’s response connected to the theme of a time conflict, because the respondent stated that being a mother of two children adds more difficulty of having time to think of things to do with their child. Secondly. Respondent 11 stated “yes it was something that we made time for we don’t always get that chance”. Respondent 11 demonstrated that these at-home activities allowed their family to bond with one another. This can be seen through the respondent stating that their family doesn’t always get the opportunity to do something as a family. Lastly, Respondent 4 stated “yes it took less time to prepare the activity more time to play”, which demonstrates that the parents of that family are in a time bind. Respondent 4’s response allows the researchers to understand that the problem is with a time conflict between their family and employment.

 The researchers were able to code the 19 surveys collected from the Head Start programs by open and axial coding. The codes were then placed into three main themes; learning, bonding and time confliction. The three themes connected directly with the research question through various examples in the survey responses. After analyzing these responses, the qualitative data shows that the at-home activities increased parent involvement in various families.

**Conclusion**

From the study of 86 participating Head Start Families, the researchers were able to conclude various things from the quantitative and qualitative findings. The qualitative findings showed that through the responses toward the surveys three themes were uncovered which were learning, bonding and time conflict. Thus, allowing the researchers a deeper look on the aspect that being provided with at home activities allowed the parents to bond with their children and share learning experiences. The qualitative findings allowed the researchers to make a connection that parents workload interferes with their presence in their child’s educational realm. The quantitative findings allowed the researchers to take a deeper look to see if there was a connection between the dependent variable of parental involvement and the independent variable of highest level of education. The researchers compared both means and were able to conclude that the independent variable had no effect on the dependent variable. Parents' highest level of education does not determine whether or not there involved in their child's life. The data showed that whether the parent went to college or not, the amount their relationship improved with their child was overall showing the same mean through both categories. The findings showed that even in low socio-economic family’s parental involvement is still a problem; because of other things going on in the parent's life. The socio-economic status and highest level of educational attainment does not define the parents amount of involvement or relationship with their child.

Despite the level of education having no effect on parental involvement, we can conclude that a parents’ involvement in a child’s life is important. No matter what the level of socio-economic status of the family. The benefits of parental involvement expand through education to home life for a child. Based on our literature review we can conclude that the socio-economic status being lower may increase the importance of parental involvement. However, based on our results we can show that it is still important even with a high socio-economic status since there is no difference between the parents with a college degree vs a high school diploma.

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