Do At Home Activities Improve Parent Involvement

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**Abstract**

 Head Start is in place to get lower income children an early jump on school since they typically have harder times in school systems. The goal of this research is to get information from a Head Start which is a program to improve children’s early learning typically intended for families in lower income areas. The purpose is to use the information collected as a means to improve the community in lower income areas. The researchers sent the families of this Head Start activities to do at home. The activities are intended to improve family bonding and give the family a fun thing to do together. The families were sent five separate activities on different occasions to provide variety. At the end of activities a survey was sent home with the child including a five dollar gift card to a local convince store to improve compliance rate. Once the research was gathered researchers looked into parents involvement and relationship with their children. Researchers involved used a mixed methods , and what the research looked into particularly was : Do at-home activities increase parent involvement and relationship status between the parent and child for families with children involved in a Head Start in rural areas? Qualitative data being observed was three separate themes being : The first theme was the activities improved family fun time. The second found theme was the activities benefited with learning activities. The third theme was improved the families bonding time. The quantitative data being researched is the amount of hours parents spend with their child and how much the activity improved their relationship. The themes that are observed are more hours with the child a day would improve their relationship more. This study can be used to apply in preschools all around the world and other programs like Head Start to improve bonding with families in the community to strength family ties.

**Introduction**

The research problem is that families in lower income areas typically spend less time with their children, and this is because they might be working multiple jobs and have less time to see their children. This would result in families in lower income areas tending to be under developed educational speaking. As stated by Robert Crosnoe “The argument is that children from low-income families enter the K–12 educational system with less developed academic skills that are then acted upon by formal and informal processes of schooling” (Crosnoe, 2016) The Head Start program is there to potentially counter act this trend and give lower income children a jumpstart. Head Start programs provide learning activities with teachers, but they do not have the same affects that learning from parents have so the researchers had a purpose of sending activities to get the children time to learn with their parents. The research was sent out to see if the at home activities improve the relationship between parent and child. Researchers collected the data from the local Head Start and observed the parent’s relationship with their child. This was done by sending activities to the local Head Start and the children would take home the activities for the families to complete. Once the 5 activities were completed a survey was sent home for the parents to fill out and return. Researchers also compared the means to two questions using SPSS. The answers to the survey questions should provide information that can support the hypothesis. The hypothesis is that at home activities will increase parent involvement and relationship status between the parent and child for families with children involved in a Head Start in rural areas? The survey included data to include quantitative measures and qualitative measures. The qualitative will come from short answers to survey questions that will be evaluated for themes to try and support the hypothesis. The quantitative data came from questions either on a scale 0-10 or picking a choice. The quantitative data compared means to support the hypothesis as well.

**Literature Review**

The Head Start program is a an initiative to give children an advance in their school learning and get the children ready for school typically in lower income areas. Ray T. Mentzer, Jr. questioned first grade teachers about the readiness of children in first grade compared to students who did not attend Head Start and stated. “Seventy percent of the first grade teachers questioned felt that the Head Start graduates were better prepared in general than comparable low income children of prior years.” (Mentzer, 1968) The goal of the Head Start program is to give lower income children a better chance a thriving in the education system.

Head Start programs can be a way to look into the benefits in learning and better behavior for children around the ages of three to five. Head Start has a downside and it is because it cannot force parent involvement and Mendez (2010) found that parents satisfaction with Head Start programs were high, yet the engagement with the program was less than optimal. “Recent findings that children learn best when they receive support for learning in their homes as well as in preschool settings (Crosnoe, Leventhal, Wirth, Pierce, & Pianta, 2010)” Ansari (2016) found. At home activities are a great way to increase parent involvement with children and Ansari (2016) stated that “What is unknown is whether all parents benefit equally from their children’s participation in Head Start or whether some parents benefit more than others.” This means that not only could it have benefits for the children in the home it could also benefit the parents. The benefits for the child are positive in improving literacy skills and other skills such as “a positive impact of parental influence on preschool children’s emerging literacy skills, including receptive and expressive vocabulary, auditory processing, identifying same or different words, rhyming words, segmentation of words, knowledge of print, and pre-writing skills” (DeLoatche, 2015) Head start shows many benefits in children growth, and Singh (2003) stated that even in less than desirable home environments shows that Head Start has positive influence on its children’s cognitive growth. There are many benefits for the children involved in the Head Start program, and sending at home activities will increase these benefits and increase parent involvement. Ansari (2016) stated that “parents learn new ways to improve their parenting behavior and that such changes create a parent-mediated mechanism for Head Start to have a positive impact on the lives of children.” With Head Start teaching parents ways to improve parenting behavior and in home activities will only increase parent involvement.

**Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

A group of college students and college professors worked with a Head Start program in a southern United States rural area to send home five activities that would be researched. The research was done on 86 families involved in the Head Start program in the neighboring three counties. At home assignments were sent home with children to see if parental interaction would increase. The students at the Head Start program ages varied from three to five. We did evaluation research where we evaluated surveys that were sent home at the end of the activities. A paper survey was sent home at the conclusion of the five activities to evaluate We evaluated how and what the families completed and their feelings towards such activities. The overall compliance rate for our survey was 60%.

**Procedure**

 All human subjects protections were adhered to as Longwood University. Survey consent forms were at the top of the survey for parents to sign to agree that they are volunteering this information. The surveys are given to the students from the teachers and sent home for the parents to respond. The surveys included a five dollar gift card to a supermarket to increase response rate.

**Quantitative Measures**

Perceived parent involvement for Head Start families included researcher developed items: One question was “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)” This question was intended to judge the relationship between the parent and child. Another question we looked at was: **“**How would you rate your current relationship with your child/children? (0=Mostly negative, 10=Mostly positive)”

**Qualitative Measures**

 On the same survey, parents completed the following open-ended questions that the researchers developed. The first open ended question was “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*?” The second open ended question was “Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?”. The third open ended question asked was “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.” The fourth and final open ended question was “If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?”

**Analysis**

 **Quantitative responses.** Descriptive analysis were conducted using SPSS 25 to examine survey responses

 **Qualitative responses.** Thematic qualitative coding will be done to examine the open ended responses once the answers are transcribed to a word document.

 **Mixed-Method Analysis**. Mixed-method analysis where quantitative and qualitative data are examined and compared to see similarities and differences.

**Qualitative Findings**

In the first round of data collection, there were 19 of the 86 responses completed. In that first round of collection, there were three themes found throughout the findings of the open-ended questions on our survey from the parents with children at a local Head Start. The first theme was the activities improved family fun time. The second found theme was the activities benefited with learning activities. The third theme was improved the families bonding time.

 The most prevalent theme in the responses was that the activities improved family fun time. This theme of family fun time was found in 10 out of the 19 respondents surveys. The respondents with this theme found in their surveys are number 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 19. In respondent 4’s response to which activity was their favorite, they responded with “Animal Dice because my daughter had the most fun with it didn’t want to stop playing it.” The activities sent home improves fun time for the families at Head Start and this theme is shown in at least 52% of the first round of data collection. Another example is shown in respondent number 2’s answer to which activity was their favorite, and their answer was “Box game fun for whole family” this shows that it improved the fun time in the home for their entire family. A question on the survey was “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.” 16 of the 19 respondents responded with yes, and one left the question blank. The two who answered no were respondent 9 and respondent 12. Respondent 9 wrote “No, because we do activities every day” and respondent 12 wrote “Not necessarily. We always ensure theres time to spend with family after school.” These response show that almost all the families had improved family fun times by these activities and the other two have already been conducting fun family activities.

The second most prevalent theme was activities that benefited the family with learning activities. This theme was found in respondents 1, 5, 9, 15, 17, and 18. Respondent number 5 wrote “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” This response shows that the activities were benefiting the families with learning activities, and this was also found in respondent number 1’s response “We learn to do team work” and respondents number 9’s response “We had fun learning together” These responses show that activities benefited Head Start families with learning activities.

 The third theme was the activities improved family bonding, and this was found in respondents 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, and 14. Respondent 5 wrote “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” This response shows that the activities improved bonding time for respondent 5’s family. Respondent number 3 wrote that “Time spent together being able to do crafts. It opened the door for other simple activities.” This response shows that the activities not only improved the time of family bonding by doing the activities it made room to improve family bonding after the activities as well.

 In conclusion, in the qualitative findings from the first round of collection, three themes were found: Family fun time, learning activities, and family bonding. These responses from the 19 of the 86 respondents all showed several of the same themes and the three themes continued to persist. All of the responses showed some sort of connections to family fun time, learning activities, and family bonding. Some of these findings were found in multiple of the same responses for instance respondent number 5 showed all 3 of the themes in their responses. Respondent 1 also showed 2 of the 3 themes. These themes are recurring in many of the other respondent’s survey responses and this shows that the activities and themes are connected. This means that many of the families are stating that the activities are increasing family fun time, families learning activities, and increases family bonding.

**Quantitative Findings**

Do at-home activities increase parent involvement and relationship status between the parent and child for families with children involved in a Head Start in rural areas? The first question looks at the typical hours a parent of a Head Start child spends, and the research shows that: 20.60% spend 6 hours with their child on a typical day. While 14.70% spend 10 or more hours with their child, and only 2.90 percent spend 1 hour with their child. One question on the survey asked how this activity improved the relationship between child and parent. The data showed that the parents who typically spend 10 or more hours with their child were more likely to answer that the activity improved their relationship. 20 of the 34 answered very much on how much the activity improved their relationship as seen in table 1. The overall mean for the question of how much did the activity improve the relationship with your child was 8.57. The possible answers to the question were set up with answers 0-10 with 0 being not much and 10 being very much.

Table 1

*Average Parent Hours to Relationship Improvement*

Parental Involvement(Hours) Mean

 0-9 5.857

 10 6.075

The data in Table 1 shows the mean answer to the question about the activity improving their relationship, and shows the difference between parents who are involved with their child either 0-9, or 10 hours. While the data shows that parents who spent 10 hours were slightly higher than the parents who were involved with their child 0-9 hours. The data shows the responses with the 20 of the 34 are classified in 10 hours and the remaining 14 are in the 0-9. The data shows that parents with more involvement hours with their children are more likely to improve their relationship while doing activities. I feel that the data is not sufficient enough to support the hypothesis, and I think that the inclusions of more questions in the area of parental involvement after the activity, or the number of hours with the child after the activity would be better indicators to support the hypothesis.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the data spread does not show enough information to support the hypothesis. The hypothesis being: Do at-home activities increase parent involvement and relationship status between the parent and child for families with children involved in a Head Start in rural areas? The data for the Head Start did not show much information to support the hypothesis because the data was too close, being that parents who spent 0-9 hours with their child vs parents who spent 10 hours where about 0.2 difference to relationship improvement. This means that on average parents who spent 10 plus hours a day with their child answered 0.2 higher on the question that asked how much the activities improved their relationship. The data only compared means to two questions one asking how much time the parent spends with their child and the other how much the activity improved the relationship between parent and child. Looking into more than two questions would have potentially given a stronger support towards the hypothesis, for instance if researchers were able to ask more questions like if the parents will spend more time with the child after the activities are done with. One of the respondents answered that now that they have the activities they will be able to redo them with their child when they want something fun to do, and this would be an interesting point to further research. Potentially even being able to follow up with the same group of parents and see if they still spend the same amount of time or if they are improving their time because they are using the activities still. Since the data shows that there is a 0.2 point higher of parents who spend 10 hours with their child it could show that there is a potentially connection between activities being sent home and improving the relationship, but I think there is further research to be done before fully supporting the hypothesis.

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