

Abstract

Parental involvement has been shown to have an effect on the academic success of students (Perriell, 2015). By researching how to increase parental involvement; academic success will also become easier to increase in students. The purpose of the study is to determine how can Family Fun Time Activities after school stimulate parental involvement in student's education? Quantitative data of how involved parents reported being during the Family Fun Time Activities will be recorded. Qualitative data of how parents felt about the activities will be codified and analyzed for themes. This is a mixed methods study on the reported parental involvement and their race that they reported. White respondents reported a mean involvement score of 7.75 while Black or African American respondents reported a mean involvement score of 7.33. While this data technically shows White respondents as having a slight edge, there is not a large difference between the two which may be representative of previous studies that show a lesser effect of race on parental involvement at similar levels of poverty (Gordon & Cui, 2014). The overall themes discovered from the respondents open ended responses were “togetherness”, “productivity”, and “outside”. These responses are important for the study of what types of activities do successfully encourage parental involvement.

Introduction

The academic success of children in the United States is both a governmental concern and a concern of parents. These two groups are interested in researchers studying methods that are successful and reliable in increasing the successful education of children. Parental involvement is a relatively new field that has shown promising results in a correlation with academic success of children. If afterschool Family Fun Time Activities can encourage higher

levels of parental involvement, then the overall academic success of children involved will be positively impacted.

Unfortunately, while there is some literature on the effects of race and socio-economic status on parental involvement, there is very little research on the two variables together. The purpose of this study is to research families involved with Head Start in the Farmville, Virginia area for their parental involvement and ways that could increase it. By studying Head Start which mostly deals with families of similar yet lower SES, research can be done in order to find the effects of race and lower SES on parental involvement. In addition, the best ways to increase their levels of parental involvement will be sought.

Literature Review

What is Parental Involvement?

Perriell (2015) has given a general definition of parental involvement as a parent-figure's participation in a child's education at home and/or at school. Parental involvement has a long history of affecting student's academic performance, development, and success in life. Gordon and Cui (2012) studied parental involvement particularly in their child's school and found ground in Social Capital Theory that a major impact on their child's academic success could be found by creating social capital, which is the relationships between parents, students, and educators in schools. If a parent developed a relationship with the school, then their child was more likely to become academically successful in said school due to the development of norms and social capital. Westerlund, Gustafsson, Theorell, Janlert and Hammarström (2013) found that parental involvement has long lasting effects on their children where first they improve academically, then they are aided by socialization, and eventually later in life due to the benefits

of pro-socialization and opportunities from education, they receive less chronic stress which leads to better health in the long term than their peers with less parental involvement. Perriell (2015) also found that it was important for both parents to participate in a child's education, and that both parents can fulfill additional positive outcomes by guiding, supporting, and rewarding their child's studies as much as possible.

Minority Parental Involvement

The Epstein Model is a way of categorizing parental involvement into what was considered an exhaustive ontological list of the types and methods a parent can be involved in their child's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The Epstein model has become seen as the definitive standard for what parental involvement should look like. In accordance with the Epstein model, it is considered deviant to not attend parent teacher meetings or support a student's extracurricular activities as these are the preferred modes of parental involvement. One issue with established research in parental involvement is the idea that non-normative involvement is equivalent to no involvement in a student's academic life. Hayes (2011) found socio-economic status (SES) had correlation with parental involvement where urban African Americans with higher SES were more traditionally involved in their child's education. Further research needs to be done to collect data on alternative or non-physically present forms of parental involvement to accommodate the parents who work longer work hours or cannot afford the traditional means of parental involvement due to lower SES. According to Bower and Griffin (2011), although they were willing to do certain at home activities to engage with their child's academic life, they were unable or unwilling to physically go to the school. This is particularly indicative that there needs to be a different and more broad definition of what parental involvement can and should be. On the other hand, Gordon and Cui (2014) have found

evidence that parental involvement is less impactful when researched in areas of high poverty. This poses a research issue of whether SES impacts effectiveness of parental involvement or if there truly is a conflation of parental involvement and the covariation parents buying extraneous academic materials and opportunities.

Further Areas of Research

Parental involvement while old in concept is only relatively new as an academic area for study. According to Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal (2010) there is a significant gap in research on whether parental values of education have more effects on student achievement than their own involvement. Additionally in their research they found the issue of general parental involvement not being able to indicate holistic achievement in education (Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). This opens the need for research in scenarios where the parent's involvement matches the academic field that will later be studied for improvement. Bodovski (2010) likewise had research that upheld the notion of higher college valuation rather than just parental involvement was at least spurious in correlation to a student's academic success. Other factors in her study added the need for further research into covariant variables such as white parents who are involved are more likely than other minority involved parents to purchase additional educational books, extracurricular activities, and costly extraneous academic opportunities. Parental valuation of education, parental valuation of college, and minority status of parents all need further study in order to better understand the effects of parental involvement on their child's education.

Data and Methodology

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by the 40 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University. The survey contained both open-ended and close-ended questions. Items on the survey were designed to evaluate SMART objectives of each of five activities that were completed the previous week by Head Start families. Beyond the objectives of the activities, participants were asked about their experiences with Head Start, take home activities, and demographic information about their households.

Sample

The non-probability sample for this study was based on the 51 children (ages three to five) who attend Head Start in two rural counties in Virginia. After activities were sent home with children for five days, the questionnaire was sent home with all 51 students. Attached to the questionnaire was a children's book, to incentivize families to return the survey. Guardians of the children were asked to complete the survey and return it to the Head Start teacher the following school day. 11 questionnaires were returned the next school day. Teachers then sent a reminder home with children to return any outstanding questionnaires. This resulted in no more questionnaires being returned. Overall, there was a 22% response rate.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis of the returned surveys is based on the close-ended questions. For this study the dependent variable is parental involvement in their child's education. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was "On a scale of 0-10, what was your level of involvement in the activity with your child?". The answer choices for this item were 0-10, with 0 being not at all and 10 being a great amount. The independent variable for this study is the race of the parent. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize

this was “What is your race/ethnicity? (Please circle all that apply)”. The answer choices for this question were Latino/Hispanic, Non-Latino White, African-American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Middle Eastern, Multiracial, and Other. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

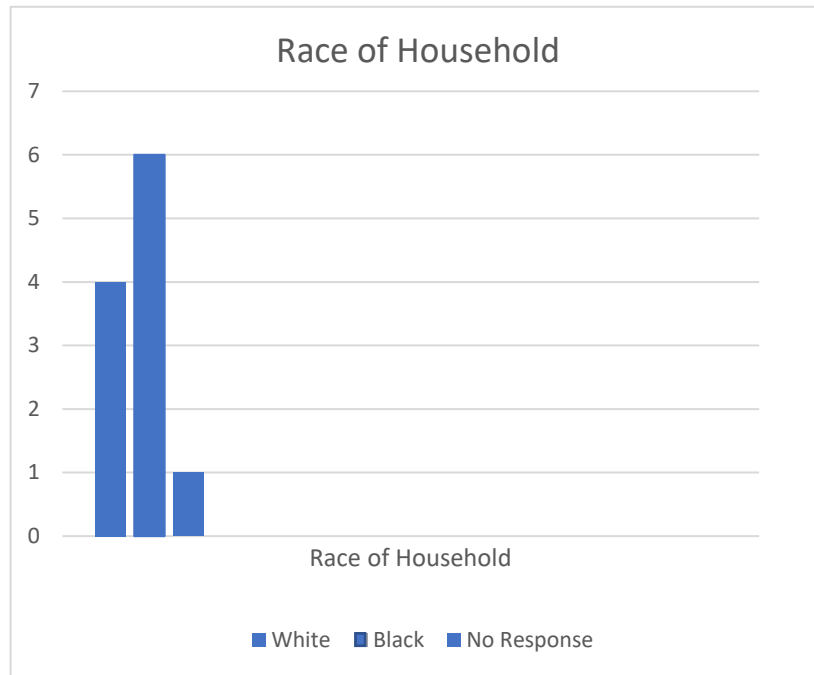
Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys is based on the open-ended questions. The open-ended questions on the survey were “What did your family enjoy most about these activities?”, “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?”, and “What are your favorite ways to spend time with your child?”. To answer the research question, “How can Family Fun Time activities after school stimulate parental involvement in students’ education?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the participant’s responses.

Quantitative Findings

For the quantitative findings, the following variables were examined using descriptive statistics. The independent variable is race of household. Of the 11 responses, four households were white, six households were black, and one respondent did not answer for this variable. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for this variable.

Table 1. *Race of Household*



The dependent variable for this study was the level of parental involvement. Descriptive Statistics for this variable are in Table 2. Of the 11 responses the mean was 7.73. The Median was 8. The Mode was 10. The Standard Deviation was 2.93.

Table 2. *Parental Involvement*

	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D
Level of Involvement	7.73	8	10	2.93

A bivariate model was run using the variables of race and parental involvement. Descriptive Statistics for this variable are in Table 3. The average parental involvement reported for participants who identified as White, was 7.75. The average parental involvement reported for participants who identified as Black or African American, was 7.33.

Table 3. *Mean Parental Involvement Per Race*

Race reported	Means
White	7.75
Black or African American	7.33

The first major finding was the reporting of dependent variables. The pool of participants was taken from a convenience sample at Head Start, which works with low-income families. The reported races were fewer White than Black or African American. Previous literature has been devoted to studying the particulars of Black or African American parental involvement. While the data is not normally distributed, the mean, median, and mode were all relatively close with no major outliers. The average parental involvement was close albeit slightly higher with participants who identified as White. This could have aligned with Bower and Griffin (2011) that White parents are more involved in schools and structured programs than Black or African American parents, but in this study there was not enough difference or sample size to truly make accurate generalizations of a larger population.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys is based on the open-ended questions. The open-ended questions on the survey were “What did your family enjoy most about these activities?”, “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?”, and “What are your favorite ways to spend time with your child?”. To answer the research question, “How can Family Fun Time activities after school stimulate parental involvement in students’ education?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the participant’s responses.

The most prolific theme of the participant’s responses was the idea of “togetherness”. The theme of “togetherness” appeared nine times out of eleven responses. For example, Respondent I stated that “These activities made it so easy and stress free to do something together!”. Respondent III weighed in that what their family most enjoyed about their activities was “The family time we spent together”. Also, Respondent VI answered the same question by saying “being together and helping each other”. This shows that parents and families both place a high value in togetherness when it comes to fulfilling activities. This could further parental involvement in children’s education simply by making sure when parents are involved that the child is also present as well.

The second most notable theme of the participant’s responses was “productivity”. The theme of “productivity” appeared six times out of eleven responses. Respondent II said that what their family most enjoyed about the activities was “spending time together and learning new things”. Respondent VI stated first among other things that their favorite ways to spend time with their child is “reading”, likewise Respondent IX stated first among other things that their favorite ways to spend time with their child is “reading”. Respondent IV mentioned for the families favorite aspect of the activities and their favorite types of activities in general “my kids

was able to learn a lot” and “learning new activities” respectively. Parents prioritizing learning and reading activities as favorable uses of time can be important information to know for supporting parental involvement endeavors. If parental involvement activities were made in a way that parents believed were a more productive use of their kids and their own time, then that activity would likely gain more support and enthusiasm from parents.

A final yet very impactful theme of the need to get “outside” and take a break from one’s routine was present. The theme of “outside” appeared in five out of eleven responses. Respondent I mentioned stress and being busy, but also for their favorite ways to spend time with their child they reported “going for walks” as an important one. Respondent III mentioned one of their favorite ways to spend time with their child as “going 4 wheeling”. Respondent V stated that their favorite activities with their child were “doing things and getting out of the house”. Respondent IX mentioned that their particular favorite activities to spend time with their child were “exploring + museums”. This theme of wanting to go outside and make changes from the daily routine show that parents are more enthusiastic about being involved in their child’s education if they believe that the method of doing so will separate themselves from their typical daily stressors and workload.

These three themes are valuable for evaluating qualities that will make parents more likely to actively participate in their child’s education. Productivity tends to allow parents to justify their time, which in the case of Head Start parents who work long hours free time may be scarce. Togetherness is important because parents do value being with their child, and it simply is not the case that parents who are less involved in their child’s education are not longing for spending more time together with them. Going outside of routines also shows promise that

parents may become more involved in their child's education when there is a novel activity or one that physically removes them from their typical environment.

Conclusion

Due to an only marginal difference, White families and Black families did not appear to have a measurable difference in parental involvement in our target population. This follows the research of Gordon and Cui (2014) that in areas of lower SES the discrepancies in parental involvement by race are reduced. There were some complications to the study. First, due to the Corona Virus pandemic, Head Start, which is where the convenience sample was taken from had been closed for a year. While Head Start was closed, their operations went online which slowed all paper traffic between officials, researchers, and students for that year. This likely negatively affected the response rate when Head Start returned to in person operations. Additionally, the incentive for a response changed this year from a gift card with monetary value to a children's book. A 22% response rate is suboptimal for proper research, but it was still enough to get an idea of parental involvement in the Farmville, Virginia area who are involved with Head Start.

With this research conducted of the Farmville, Virginia area future endeavors to increase parental involvement may be more successful. By utilizing core themes like "togetherness", "productivity", and "outside" on a larger scale, ways to increase parental involvement on a more universally generalizable scale may be possible. With universally generalized findings on increasing parental involvement in children's education it will be possible for the children in the United States to achieve more and become more successful in their educational endeavors.

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