

Measuring Family Involvement in Head Start Families with Family Fun Time Activities

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Abstract

There is little data on the effects of family involvement on children's educational development. The purpose of this research on Family Fun Time Activities was to gather information on family involvement within numerous Head Start families in Virginia. This study shows how often families participate and engage with each other. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and will be analyzed, as this is a mixed methods study. This article discusses three main themes within the qualitative data which include family bonding, knowledge and simplicity. Families enjoyed spending time together, children used their skills and learned new things, and parents and guardians enjoyed the simplicity of the activities. Results show that parents and guardians with a higher education do not affect family engagement. However, respondents confirm that participating in the Family Fun Time Activities do increase family involvement. This paper explains the ways that family involvement affects children's educational development.

Measuring Family Involvement in Head Start Families with Family Fun Time Activities

Over the years, an abundance of intriguing studies have been conducted to gather information about family involvement in children's lives and educational development. This research is important because it allows individuals to get a better idea of how significant it is for parents and guardians to be involved in their children's lives. Through the studies, it allows those involved to see what kind of differences there are within each family, how drastic those differences are and how they impact each child. This data is informative in the sense that it enlightens parents about this problem and helps them to be more aware of the involvement in their children's lives. This research is important now because the sooner the data is obtained and the more that is learned, the sooner parents can be informed and assisted in being more involved in their children's lives and education.

Several studies were reviewed to gather data based on the different factors of each study. The studies were about parental involvement, Head Start and other learning programs. Within these topics the studies discussed peer interactions, child play, parental strictness, parents rating their spouse's involvement, the effects of reading to children and how often, what child care provider's think about parents' involvement and communication, and home factors that impact children's school success. Although the data was very informative and helpful, there were some deficiencies in the studies. Some of the data came from parental responses, which could potentially be biased and inaccurate, although it is unknown. Some of the studies used small or very specific samples so it is hard to tell how accurate the data is overall. This study needed to be completed because it adds to the current data, which is why these studies need to continue being conducted. As each new study is done, anything can be changed or fixed, which will allow for more accurate and detailed results.

The significance of this study is to inform parents and guardians about the facts of parental involvement in children's lives and how it affects their education, skills and social lives. Informing parents of this data will expectantly cause a significant impact in prioritizing being more involved and engaged in their children's lives. The purpose of this study is to gather information on family involvement within numerous Head Start families using Family Fun Time Activities and show how often families engage with each other and how.

Literature Review

Parental Involvement

The purpose of family involvement is to assist in the social, emotional, physical and academic growth of children (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Family involvement is crucial to children's development and social skills. Numerous studies have been conducted to show the effects of family involvement and participation in preschool aged children to prove why it is important and in what ways parents or caretakers can get more involved. Joyce Epstein (1986) organized a study that describes six different types of family involvement. These include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. These practices come with challenges but have still shown positive results for the children, their parents and their teachers. Some positive results include awareness of the importance of school, monitoring the child's progress, communication skills, connections with other families, understanding of student diversity and several more (Epstein, 1986).

A study involving 442 Turkish children, their parents and 25 teachers was conducted on the effects of parental involvement and their children's peer interactions (Ahmetoglu et al., 2022). A questionnaire was used to measure parental involvement and a peer play scale was used to measure children's interactions in play circumstances. Home involvement, homeschool,

school based involvement, play interaction, play distribution and play disconnection were the factors being measured. The findings show that parental involvement with children affects how their children socialize and interact with others their age (Ahmetoglu et al., 2022). As young children may not be ready or properly know how to socialize, their parents' interactions with them significantly help them to form positive peer interactions (Ahmetoglu et al., 2022). Along with socialization, parent involvement in educational circumstances aids them in succeeding in academics (Ahmetoglu et al., 2022). A shortcoming of this specific study was that most of the information came from the parents and teachers which may have been biased and slightly inaccurate.

Gleditsch and Pedersen (2017) used surveys and questionnaires to measure how parents rate their and their spouse's involvement with their children. The findings for this study show that both mothers and fathers rated themselves highly for praise and affection but low for discipline, whereas mothers rated fathers highly on praise and affection and fathers rated mothers highly on attentiveness. This data shows that mothers rate themselves higher overall than fathers rate themselves. However, in a separate study done to show the effects of reading to children and how often, fathers were rated higher (Pergar & Hadela, 2020). While mothers were estimated to read to their children more, fathers scored higher. Data shows that mothers read to their children daily 47% while fathers read to their children 46%. The more time parents spend reading to their young children, the more successful children will be socially and academically in later life. These studies prove that parental involvement and attentiveness is crucial in the youth's development.

Not only is parental involvement at home important, but being involved outside of the home in education and extracurricular activities is pivotal. Early child care providers believe that

parents could show more effort in communication, parent-child care interactions and time management (Barnes et al., 2016). Verbal communication was proven to not be as effective as newsletters and daily journals. This is because parents seem to be in a hurry and do not make time for proper interactions with their children's child care providers. With the help of child care providers, Barnes et al. (2016) found that the more frequent parents interacted in their children's school in regards to communication, volunteering and time management, the more their children would succeed in education, social interactions and accountability. Unfortunately, this study used a small sample, so larger samples would be more accurate in the future.

Head Start and Home Learning Programs

In regards to parental involvement, Head Start and other home learning programs have assisted parents with developing stronger connections to their children as well as learning new techniques and learning activities. Parental education, family stress, child temperament, and home learning are some of the main factors in determining children's school adjustment and success (Machida et al. 2002). The main finding was that only the child's temperament was associated with home learning activities in the sense that more difficult children did less home learning activities (Machida et al. 2002). Family stress also affected home learning ability, but not as significantly as the children's temperament.

With one particular Head Start program it is seen that children have a higher school readiness when parents are not as strict and let them play (Parker & Boak, 1999). It is important to be commanding with certain things, but with young children, play is important. Child play, peer interactions and positive parent-child interactions reflect in children's development. "Play is a child's work, the avenue for developing literacy skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, and imagination that leads to divergent thinking and empathy" (Nourot & Van Hoorn, 1991). It is

also important to note that parent engagement with reports, building better relationships with child care providers and more volunteering are all factors that Head Start and other home learning programs have also proven to be effective in their children's lives (Share & Kerrins, 2013).

Parental involvement in the home and outside of the home has been studied numerous times. These studies have all been conducted in different and similar ways to prove the importance of parental engagement and the effects it has in young children's social skills, education and overall development. A majority of parents believe they are involved in their children's lives in some proportion, especially mothers (Gleditsch & Pedersen, 2017). Head Start and home learning programs have not only helped parents to be more involved in their children's home lives and education, but teaches them skills and techniques to better themselves as well. The study being conducted presently measuring family involvement using family fun time activities will add to this data in showing how and in what ways parental engagement helps young children in their education and development.

Data and Methodology

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by 10 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation Team at Longwood University. The survey consisted of 14 questions, 11 close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The first question on the survey asked respondents for informed consent. Any respondents who answered "no" to the informed consent were not able to see any other questions. The survey included questions that measured family involvement, family enjoyment, evaluation of SMART objectives and demographics. The survey was sent online through the Qualtrics program. Head Start teachers emailed links to the survey to

guardians, and children brought home books with a QR code attached. This resulted in four questionnaires being completed. Overall, there was a 4% response rate. Therefore, data from previous years (2019, 2022 and 2023) on Family Fun Time Activities were added to the analysis. This resulted in 66 completed surveys to be used in analysis (four from 2023, 20 from 2022 and 42 from 2019).

Sample

The non-probability sample for this study was based on 17 children (ages three to five) who attend Head Start in rural Virginia. Head Start is a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic needs. Members of the Evaluation Team from Longwood University measured family involvement using different Family Fun Time activities. One of the groups' activity required the children to identify leaf colors and sizes and if they could operate a crayon. Along with the activity, the children's books with the QR code were made available for families to take an online survey after they completed the activity. Teachers sent an email to guardians reminding them to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in four questionnaires being completed. Overall, there was a 4% response rate.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis of completed surveys is based on the close-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, "On a scale from 0 to 10, how much did this activity encourage your family to work together?" (0 = not at all, 10 = a great amount). For this study, the independent variable is socioeconomic status (SES). The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, "What is the highest degree of education you have completed?".

The attributes include some high school, high school or GED, certification from a trade/vocational school, some college, associates degree, bachelor's degree, graduate degree or more. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the completed surveys (from 2019, 2022, and 2023) was based on open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were, “What did you enjoy about this activity?”, “What are your suggestions for improving this activity?”, and “Typically, what activities do you do with your child?”. To answer the research question, “On a scale from 0 to 10, how much did this activity encourage your family to work together?”, inductive open coding was used to determine recurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

Findings

Qualitative Findings

The data from the 2019, 2022 and 2023 studies completed on Family Fun Time Activities derived from 38 respondents. Family Fun Time Activities involve three themes: families spending quality time which includes having fun and togetherness, learning new things and exercising basic motor skills such as coloring, and the simplicity and ease of the activities for the families at Headstart.

Family Bonding

The first theme of the Family Fun Time Activities study shows family bonding and togetherness. Respondent 19_8 mentions, “It had us spend more time together by looking up more things to do as a family.” Survey 19_19 states, “My family gained quality time.” The surveys show that families enjoy bonding together using educational activities. Survey 22_15 further demonstrates the theme saying, “Spending time together, doing something educational is

always fun.” Respondent 22_10 mentioned their favorite thing was, “Doing them together. [child’s name] says she loves doing things with mom and dad.” Each of these surveys prove that doing activities as a family, educational or not, is a successful way to bond and spend time with each other.

Knowledge and Motor Skills

The second theme that results from these studies is knowledge and motor skills. This discusses the things children learned from the activity, whether it be education or general. Respondent 22_16, “Enjoyed the different learning outcomes that came along with the activities.” Respondent 19_4, “She learned to take turns.” Several parents mentioned the certain things their children learned through the activities. Respondent 19_19, “It helped my child understand things about his feelings and what to be thankful for.” These activities not only help children use their skills and learn colors, shapes and numbers, but also help them to learn how to identify their emotions and take turns. Activities such as these encourage families to connect and spend time together through having fun and learning. Parents and guardians implementing these practices into their children’s lives can aid the children in developing social and fundamental skills as well as teaching them basic education.

Simplicity

The third and final theme discusses the simplicity and ease of the activities. A lot of the responses mention how easy and convenient the activities were, especially for the single and busy parents and guardians. Respondent 19_3 stated, “Absolutely, it took all of the planning and prepping out of the equation.” Several parents do not have time to think of or play games with their children, so these pre-packaged activities made it easier. Respondent 19_10 agreed, stating, “Being a busy mom of two, it’s hard to come home and try to think of something to do.”

Respondent 19_13 concurred, “Yes, because I don’t have time to look for things to do or go to the store to buy supplies. I don’t have transportation.” This is a helpful measure for parents who want to do things with their children but do not have the time or resources to do so. The simplicity of these activities was something the parents enjoyed and respected. Keeping things easy for busy parents may be the controlling factor in how often they interact with their children in this aspect.

In 2019, 2022 and 2023, data was collected as a result from survey responses from Head Start families who completed the Family Fun Time Activities. It is concluded that there are three main themes: family bonding, knowledge and motor skills and the simplicity of the activities. Several responses prove the themes, explaining how they enjoyed spending time with each other, watching their children learn things and appreciating how quick and easy the activities were. The data shows that Family Fun Time Activities positively impact children and families as a whole. It connects families, children learn and use their skills and it can be a fun way to bond while still being educated in some way. As the future approaches, it will be interesting to see the themes of this study and how families respond.

Quantitative Findings

The dependent variable is the amount of encouragement the families had to work together during the Family Fun Time Activities. This is asked on a 0 (not at all) to 10 (a great amount) scale. The independent variable is the highest level of education the parent/guardian has completed. Respondents answered “Some High school”, “High school or GED”, “Certification from a trade/vocational school”, “Some college”, “Associate’s degree”, “Bachelor’s degree” or “Graduate degree or more”. The hypothesis is that if parents/guardians are very involved in the

Family Fun Time Activities, then they are also very involved in their children’s education and lives.

The mean score for family involvement was 7.2, the median was 2.8 and the standard deviation was 2.6. This means there was a significant amount of individuals who responded between 2.6 and 7.2. This shows that the answers on this variable varied greatly.

Table 1

Mean and SD of Family Involvement

Involvement	
Mean	7.2
Median	2.8
Standard deviation	2.6

Note. N=66

Table 1 shows the mean, median and standard deviation of how involved families were during the activities. The majority of respondents ranked themselves as being engaged in the family activity to some proportion. Only one respondent scored themselves as a 9 for how involved their family is.

Figure 1

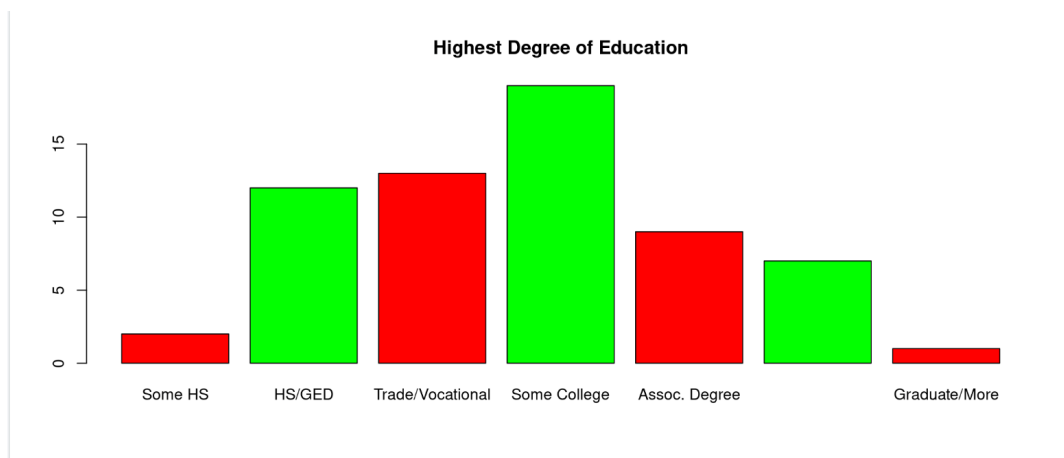


Figure 1 explains the percentages the respondents had for each education choice. 3.1% of respondents replied with having only some High School education, 19% responded with having a High school diploma or GED, 20.6% reported completing trade or vocational school, 30.2% said they completed some college, 13.3% responded with having an Associate's degree, 11.1% acquired a Bachelor's degree and 1.6% responded having a Graduate degree or higher. Within the responses from the Head Start families, there was at least one person for each education option. This further shows that there is a wide range of education among families, even within the same programs.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Involvement by Education

Education	Mean	Standard Deviation
Some high school	8.5	2.1
High school diploma or GED	6.4	2.7
Certification from trade or vocational school	7.8	2.9
Some college	6.9	2.0
Associate's degree	7.6	2.3
Bachelor's degree	6.4	4.1

Note. N=66

Table 2 shows the comparison between respondents' highest education completed and self-ranked family involvement in Family Fun Time Activities through the mean and standard deviation.

The original hypothesis stated that if parents and guardians are very involved during the Family Fun Time Activities, then they are most likely very involved in their children's lives and education. The data shows that the mean between the lowest level of education and the highest level of education is where the difference can be found for the comparison of these variables. They do not vary greatly, as the two means of 8.5 and 6.4 produce only a difference of 2.1. The means are mainly consistent for highest education achieved, meaning that the level of education acquired does not have an affect on the amount that families are involved in their children's lives.

Conclusion

The main point of this study was to gather information on family involvement, how it affects children's development and educational success and to also inform parents and guardians of the findings and how they could be more involved. Families enjoyed bonding, learned new things and used their skills. It was also found that families ranked themselves as being engaged in some proportion. There were families with all different kinds of education, but that did not have an effect on the results. The findings indicate that being more involved has a positive impact, just as the studies previously mentioned did.

This data is important to know because it makes parents aware and helps put more effort into being involved in their children's lives and education. If more parents know how much of an impact it has on children's development and skills, more will implement it into their routine. A majority of the parents appreciated the simplicity of the activities, mentioning that they usually do not have the time or money to do those things with their children. However, engaging with children can also be done through homework, playing, talking, eating together and more. It is also important to know that parents' and guardians' education does not matter when it comes to being involved with their children. The results indicate that the lowest and the highest education

options had little to no difference within their experiences with family involvement. The parents' education does not make a difference because it is not about what they can teach their child but how they can help them to develop skills and grow. If more studies about this are done, more parents will be made aware and eventually there will be a significant difference in children's development and educational success.

These studies are important because the results can make a great difference and impact in the development of young children. Parents have the tools to be able to assist their children in a successful development, but unfortunately many do not realize the impact that their involvement has in their child's life, and therefore do not prioritize engagement. The findings tell readers that society has the ability to be able to help their young children develop successfully. As more studies are done and more data surfaces, it will be interesting to see what impact these findings have on society and young children's development and how that affects them as they grow up. Overall, parents being more involved in their children's lives has a positive impact on their education and skills.

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