

Parent Educational Attainment and How it Affects Parent Involvement

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Abstract

The issue of parent or guardian educational attainment affecting a child's education and achievement has been studied continuously (Dubow et al., 2009). However, a gap remains in here where parents and guardians feel comfortable interacting with their children's education. This research study aims to gauge how comfortable parents and guardians are when interacting with their child's education. Additional attention will be paid to study parents' educational attainment levels and how they affect a child's education, the participants for this study are parents and guardians of Head Start-aged children who live within seven counties in Central Virginia. This research survey used mixed methods; respondents answered 23 closed-ended and three open-ended questions to help specify their answers. Compiling the study results, most respondents held a high school diploma or had some college experience and felt comfortable assisting their children in educational activities. Practical implications for this study can provide insight into how comfortable parents and guardians feel when interacting with their children's education.

Keywords: Parent Involvement, Parent Education, Parental Education Attainment, Survey research, Head Start

Introduction

Although parental involvement is widely studied, parental educational attainment and comfort in their children's education remain unstudied. Previous studies have found that parental educational attainment greatly assists children's education and overall parental involvement, but parent comfort remains unknown. In parental involvement, parental comfort remains a significant challenge, and addressing the issue is crucial because children's education can falter at home as they constantly learn through every interaction. In the current literature and previous studies, such as the study conducted by Davis-Keane, Tighe, and Waters (2021), it has been found that parents with higher levels of education can create environments at home that are favorable to learning.

Despite the significant contributions made to the current literature, there is a need to study parental comfort levels with the levels of education they have achieved, as this plays a significant role in how parents interact with and teach their children. This research study seeks to understand how comfortable parents and guardians feel about their children's education. Parent comfort levels during the Covid-19 pandemic were significantly negative and after five years (Ker et al., 2021), it is important to study if there have been any changes since.

Literature Review

Parental involvement plays an essential role in a child's life and education. Studies show that a parent's education level and income can impact their participation in their child's early learning, influencing both home-based and school-based engagement. Parental involvement typically revolves around a parent's participation in their child's homework, sports, family activities, and school (Sempeles & Cui, 2024).

According to Joyce Epstein's model (1995), there are six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and working with the community. Epstein's model explains that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in school activities and have the confidence to navigate the school system, enabling them to understand better their child's academic needs (Epstein, 1995). Contrarily, parents with lower levels of education may encounter specific challenges in engaging in school activities and may feel they need more support in assisting their children with schoolwork (Ates, 2021).

Davis-Kean, Tighe, and Waters (2021) found that parents with higher levels of education are in a better position to help create learning environments at home. These parents are more likely to help their child's learning through activities like homework and structuring routines that align with Epstein's "learning at home" and "parenting" models (Davis-Kean et al., 2021). These parents also communicate more effectively with their children's teachers and school administrators. On the other hand, parents with lower educational backgrounds face additional barriers. These roadblocks are often shown through uncertainty with the school system and a need for more confidence in how they can help (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Parents in these situations may struggle to engage in decision-making roles and volunteer with their school's Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and their involvement in their children's educational attainment can be limited. Another factor affecting parents is demographics; educational attainment contributes to parent involvement. Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000) found that parents with lower educational levels are less likely to volunteer in school governance, similar to Hornby and Blackwell (2018).

Sempeles and Cui (2024) support these findings, presenting that parents with higher education levels are more engaged in home and school-based involvement. Their research shows that these parents are more likely to communicate often with teachers, volunteer at school events, help with homework, and school associations (Sempeles & Cui, 2024). Topor et al. (2010) argue that increased parent involvement in home-based learning activities positively affects a child's performance in school. Educated parents were likelier to participate in the at-home activities aligned with Epstein's "learning at home" dimension and show how parental education enhances children's learning (Topor et al., 2010).

In their 2023 study, Ringenberg, McElwee, and Israel examined parental involvement in Indiana schools through the lens of cultural capital theory. Cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and resources individuals gain through socialization and education. The study revealed that parents with outstanding cultural capital tend to participate more in school-related activities, aligning with Epstein's (1995) framework.

In their analysis of the National Household Education Surveys, McQuiggan and Megra (2017) found that 87% of parents with bachelor's degrees are more involved with their child's education and educational activities compared to 67% of parents with a high school diploma. The study shows that parents with higher education backgrounds are more likely to participate in educational activities and attend school events. The increased involvement correlates with improved academic performances in children and improves their social development. The report emphasizes the need for supportive policies to promote parental engagement, especially among families with lower educational backgrounds, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to bolster educational outcomes across diverse demographics.

The ultimate goal of the surveys sent to parents and guardians of Head Start-aged children and the study results is to understand how the parent or guardian's educational attainment affects their involvement with children.

Data and Methods

Instrument

A research collaborative at Longwood University created an online questionnaire in Qualtrix. The survey included an informed consent question and open- and closed-ended items. The questionnaire included 23 closed-ended items that covered parent needs, including resources, demographics, comfort, finances, and mental health needs, and it also included three open-ended items. The questionnaire's estimated completion time was 10 minutes.

Sample

The convenience sample for this project consists of parents and guardians of Head Start children between the ages of three and five who reside in seven counties in Central Virginia. There are approximately 119 families in this sample population. Head Start headquarters emailed the online survey to county Head Start teachers, who then emailed the study to Head Start families in their classrooms. Surveys were emailed home thrice during data collection, resulting in 26 submitted surveys. The response rate was approximately 26 percent. No incentive was offered to participants to complete this survey.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The dependent variable of interest was "How comfortable do you feel helping your child with educational activities on a scale of 0-10?" the independent variable was "What is the highest degree of education you have

completed?” The attributes for the independent variable were “Some high school, high school, some college, associate degree, bachelor degree, master degree, or doctorate.”

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis was based on the open-ended items. Thematic coding was used to analyze parent responses.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

When studying the parent and guardian comfort levels when interacting with their children’s education, the majority of respondents said that they felt comfortable interacting with their children’s education. When prompted to rate their comfort levels from 0 through 10, respondents had a mean of 8.77, meaning that respondents felt very comfortable interacting with their children’s education.

Table 1.

Educational Attainment

Education	Count	%
Less than HS	1	4.8
Highschool or GED	8	38.0
Certification from a trade/vocational school	0	0.0
Some College	6	28.5
Associate’s degree	4	19.0
Bachelor’s degree	1	4.8

Graduate degree or more	1	4.8
Total	21	100

Note. N=25

Table 1 shows the percentage of parents who have completed each level of educational attainment. Of the respondents who stated their education levels, 38 percent said they had a high school degree or GED. For the dependent variable, parent comfort and helping their children in academic activities, the average comfortability rating for parents helping their children with educational activities, on a scale of 0 to 10, was 8.77, and the standard deviation for the same question was 2.50.

Table 2.

Mean Educational Attainment by Parent Comfortability To Help with Education

Education	Means
Less than Highschool	5.00
Highschool or GED	9.85
Certification from a trade/vocational school	0
Some College	9.00
Associate's degree	8.75
Bachelor's degree	10.00
Graduate degree or more	10.00

Note. N=25

Table 2 shows the respondents' mean and comfort in helping their child with education and the parents' educational attainment. The highest mean was between parents having a bachelor's degree or having a graduate degree or higher, but these options only had one response each, making the means extremely high at 10.00. Most respondents felt comfortable being involved with their children's education; however, one respondent said they felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

Qualitative Findings

The parent involvement survey included three open-ended qualitative items asking how parents interact with their children, deal with stress, and whether or not they wanted to share more information with the researchers. The activity question revealed four themes about how respondents spent time with their children. Four themes were presented in the second question, and the last question related to whether parents wanted to share more information; however, it had a resounding theme of 'no.'

The question, "What are some things you enjoy doing most with your child?" presents four themes: activities that bring them and their children joy, physical activities, schoolwork, and building skills. Respondents 17 and 25 said respectively, "Everything we do together I enjoy" and "Everything." Respondents also enjoyed physical activities with their children, such as singing, dancing, and going outside. To characterize this theme, Respondent 24 replied, "Playing at the park, dancing, [and] laughing!"

The other open-ended question, “How do you deal with stress?” found that relaxing, therapy, and self-care were the main themes identified by respondent’s answers. The techniques respondents used were “Journaling,” “Walking away,” or “taking a walk.”

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to research how comfortable parents and guardians felt being involved in their children’s education while also understanding their educational attainment level and how it factored into their involvement. The findings indicated that regardless of parent education levels, parents and guardians felt comfortable interacting with their children’s education and being involved overall. Similar to current literature, a higher level of education showed that parents were comfortable with their children’s education overall.

It is essential to continuously study parent education and how it may affect parent involvement. While it continues to be steady, parent educational levels will always affect a child’s education and thus should be studied continuously.

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