The Effect of Parent Involvement on Family Fun Time Activities

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is finding out how parent involvement is affected by different dependent variables, such as household income and gender. Research groups were 3–5-year-old children at four Head Start centers and the Andy Taylor Preschool Center. The research took place at Longwood University. 5 activities were sent home for the children to do with their parents, and at the end of the week, a survey was sent home to each household to complete. This is a mixed methods study, looking at both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was based on open-ended questions. Three themes appeared including: togetherness, enjoyment, and learning. The quantitative data concerned the dependent variable and based on close-ended questions. The dependent variable for this study was household income. The practical implications for this study are that these surveys could be utilized to prove that household income affects parent involvement.

**Introduction**

There has been an issue of parent involvement when it comes to household income. Parents that make more are more involved in their child’s life because they have more resources, including time, to do so. Family Fun Time Activities were five activities sent home with 99 Head Start and Andy Taylor families, with one activity sent home every day for a week. These Family Fun Time Activities were to promote and encourage parent involvement among their children.

The Family Fun Time Activities would help families of all income because no matter what a parent’s household income is. If a child does not get to spend much time with their parent because they work a lot, then it gives the parent a chance to do something fun and educational with their child. If a parent makes a decent amount of money and the parent is very active in their child’s life, then it gives the parent a chance to see their child’s progress in cognitive and motor skills, and help them learn skills that will help them throughout their life. The purpose of this research is to find out how parent involvement is affected by household income among 3–5-year-old children at Head Start programs.

**Literature Review**

Parent involvement is defined as the collaboration between parents and school to boost their child’s academic success. Researchers have examined parent involvement and how it affects school readiness for children. A multilevel study associated with the socioeconomic context on school readiness for children (Kingston, Calazada, & Brotman, 2013) tested if higher levels of parent involvement were in relation to lower levels of behavioral problems in children who were raised by a single parent. Unfortunately, this study used teacher ratings as their only source of measurement (Kingston, Calazada, & Brotman, 2013). Kingston, Calazada, and Brotman discovered that parent involvement did not affect the socioeconomic risk and academic components of school readiness. However, there are some studies that found that parent involvement was successful in furthering their child’s education (Ozgul and Bayindir, 2022).

Ozgul and Bayindir (2022) performed a study that looked at the relationship between school readiness, self-regulation skills, and parent involvement towards the education of their preschoolers. This study also looked at the differences between paternal and maternal involvement. It also was supposed to explain the relationship between self-regulation, parent involvement, and school readiness, but mainly focusing on the skills of self-regulation and how it relates to parent involvement and school readiness. The findings of this study emphasized the importance of self-regulation skills in school readiness for preschoolers. However, the data for this study was gathered once at a certain time. They also discovered that a longitudinal study could be used to investigate the changes over a longer period of time. There were also some studies performed that looked at specifically at the fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives.

There were two studies that looked at fathers’ involvement and found differences between maternal and paternal involvement. Abel (2012) discovered that African American fathers are generally less involved than mothers as many of them do not live with the other parent and have lower levels of education than fathers of other ethnicities. Epstein states that partnerships tend to descend as the students go through school unless the links are maintained between school, family, and the community (Epstein, 2001). Unfortunately, this study was conducted with a very small sample size of 101 African American fathers, and only focused on fathers with children in elementary school (Abel, 2012). Despite it being conducted with a very small sample size, the study still found that African American fathers are less involved in their child’s lives than other ethnicities. A study performed by Kim (2018) looked at the differences between the father and mother in terms of parent involvement. This study proved to be very successful as Kim (2018) found that fathers were less involved at school and mothers were way more involved at school. Fathers were found to have more involvement in their children’s lives at home and mothers were the primary parents involved at school. There was less of a difference between paternal and maternal involvement at home. This study found that mothers are mor involved than fathers at school. Head Start programs also have a significant influence in parent involvement.

There a study done that looked at factors related to three dimensions of parent involvement (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). The three dimensions were school-based involvement, home-based involvement, and parent-teacher relationship. 154 African American parents were recruited from two Head Start programs. They discovered that economic stress and social disorder in the neighborhood related negatively to parent involvement. They used different methods to assess the parents’ demographics, income, neighborhood characteristics, and beliefs. While previous research has shown that parents do not register neighborhood and economic factors as barriers to parent involvement, more current research has come to light showing that these factors do significantly affect parent involvement. Another study involving Head Start programs looked at Head Start home visiting programs and how they improved parent involvement.

A study completed by Nix, Bierman, Motamedi, Heinrichs, and Gill (2018) looked at two Head Start home visiting programs. During the study, the three factors that were examined were attendance, cooperation between the parents and home visitors, and if the parents used the materials provided by the Head Start program. The study then tested whether those three components aided in school readiness across four years. These programs were found to be very successful in contributing to children’s school readiness in the Head Start program. Although growing up in impoverished areas may reduce school readiness, effective programs for preschool parents will aid in reducing the readiness gap (Nix, Bierman, Motamedi, et. al., 2018).

In the end, parent involvement significantly affects school readiness among children. A study found that fathers are generally less involved in their children’s lives at school (Kim, 2018). Another study found that African American fathers are less involved in their children’s lives than other ethnicities (Abel, 2012). A study that looked at two Head Start programs found neighborhood and economic context significantly affect parent involvement, despite what research has shown in the past (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Another study that looked at Head Start home visiting programs found that these programs proved to be very successful and greatly contributed to school readiness among preschoolers.

**Data and Methodology**

**Instrument**

A survey questionnaire was created by the 50 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University. The survey asked both open and close-ended questions. Items on the survey were designed to evaluate SMART objectives of five activities that were completed the previous week by Head Start and Andy Taylor Center families. Items were included that also addressed demographic information, enjoyment of the activities, family involvement, and completion. Hard copies of the questionnaire were delivered to Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center.

**Sample**

The non-probability sample for this study was based on 100 children (ages three to five years old). Seventy-nine children attended Head Start in three counties. Head Start is a federally funded subsidized preschool for families with economic needs. Twenty-one children attended the Andy Taylor Center, which is located on a college campus, and families apply and pay for their children to attend. Attached to the questionnaire was a children’s book to incentivize families t return the survey. Guardians of the children were asked to complete the survey and return it to the preschool the next day. Teachers send a reminder home with children to return outstanding questionnaires. This resulted in 16 questionnaires being returned. Overall, there was a 16% response rate.

**Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative analysis of the returned surveys was 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 “How involved was your family throughout the activity?” The answer choices for this item were “a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being not at all, and 10 being a great amount”. For this study the independent variable is household income. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was “What is your annual household income?” The answer choices for this item were “less than $10,000, $10,000-$30,999, $31,000-$50,999, $51,000-$70,999, $71,000-$90,999, $91,000 or more, prefer not to answer.” Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys was based on open-ended questions. The open-ended questions on the survey were, “What did you family enjoy most about these activities? Why?”, “What did your child learn from these activities?”, and “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?” To answer the research question, “How does family household income affect family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

**Quantitative Findings**

The dependent variable is family involvement throughout the activity. It is coded on a 0 to 10 scale. The mean of this variable is 9.54. The standard deviation is 0.93. The independent variable is socioeconomic status. 4 parents who filled out the survey make less than $10,000. 2 parents make between $10,000 and $30,999. 2 parents make between $31,000 and $50,999. 1 parent makes between $71,000 and $90,999. 1 parent makes more than $91,000. 3 parents preferred not to answer. The average involvement for the 4 parents who make less than $10,000 is 9. The average involvement for the 2 parents who make between $10,000 and $30,999 is 10. The average involvement for the 2 parents who make between $31,000 and $50,999 is 10. The 1 parent who makes between $71,000 and $90,999 have an average involvement of 10. The 1 parent who makes more than $91,000 has an average involvement of 10. The 3 parents who preferred not to answer had an average involvement of 9.

**Qualitative Findings**

In the sixteen surveys, there were three themes found in most of them. They were togetherness, enjoyment, and learning.

In the theme of togetherness appears in 8 out of the 16 Family Fun Time Activities surveys. The parent in survey number 4 stated that what they enjoyed most about these activities was “time spent together, the talks, learning.” The parent in survey 7 stated that “we enjoyed putting all different shapes together on the pizza survey.” The parent in survey 9 stated that they loved “doing them together.” The parent in survey 10 stated that they loved “doing them together. [child] says she loves doing things with mom and dad”. The parent in survey 12 stated that “yes, and my family and son enjoyed doing the little thing we was doing together.” The theme of togetherness among the responses of Family Fun Time Activities shows that families really enjoyed doing the activities together.

Another theme that was found among the Family Fun Time Activities surveys was enjoyment. This theme appears in 8 out of the 16 surveys. The parent in survey 6 stated that “I enjoyed watching [child] complete these activities while I assist her.” The parent in survey 3 responded, saying “our family really enjoyed how simple the activities were and how much our child enjoyed them, even completing some with siblings.” The parent in survey 5 said “it’s fun when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family.” A parent in survey 7 stated that “we enjoyed putting all different shapes together on the pizza survey.” A parent in survey 15 stated that “we enjoyed making the finger friends the most.” When asked for recommendations that they would suggest to make these activities better, the parent of survey 4 stated “none. We both enjoyed them.” These responses show that most of the families enjoyed doing the activities or enjoyed watching their child perform these activities.

Another theme that was found among the Family Fun Time Activities surveys was learning. This theme was found in 7 out of the 16 surveys. When asked what their child learned from these activities, the parent from survey 2 said “[child] learn how to cut and glue and how to trace better.” The parent in survey 7 said “my child learned how to be creative.” A parent in survey 11 said “he learned shapes, colors, and emotions.” The parent from survey 16 said “my sons learned different techniques on from the activities that he can apply to real life.” These responses show that there were a few children who gained skills that they did not have before they did the activities.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research is to examine how household income affects parent involvement. The findings of this research were a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Studies have found that socioeconomic context affects parent involvement. Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) discovered that economic stress and social disorder related negatively to parent involvement. This study had changed what previous research had found. Parent now register neighborhood and economic factors as affecting parent involvement.

The qualitative themes found in the Family Fun Time Activities were togetherness, enjoyment, and learning. The quantitative findings were coded on a 0 to 10 scale, with the mean being 9.54 and the standard deviation being 0.93. The purpose of these activities is to examine the relationship between household income and parent involvement. Parent involvement is very significant as it affects children’s school readiness, and it affects their education and motivation to engage. Household income’s effect on parent involvement is also very significant because the lower the household income, the less extra expenses the parent will have to spend on their child. How household income affects parent involvement is a very significant topic today because our country is still greatly divided based on income.

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