**The Effectiveness of Family Fun Time Activities on Family Engagement**

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**Abstract**

A needs assessment was sent to parents in Prince Edward County to determine what they felt they needed as parents. The respondents indicated that they as parents need more time to spend with their families. Family Fun Time Activities along with surveys were created and sent home to students that attend The Andy Taylor Center and Head Start. The purpose of this study is to determine if Family Fun Time Activities positively impacts family engagement. This study was created to improve family engagement. The parents who filled out the surveys are the ones who are being studied in this research. This is a mixed methods study with both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative analysis of the returned surveys was based on the close-ended questions. Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys was based on open-ended questions. The three themes associated with these open-ended questions are family engagement, learning, and motor skills. Socioeconomic status, parents’ education level, and the home learning environment are the general themes that were found in this research.

**Introduction**

The current study is focusing on parental involvement because of the feedback we got back from the needs assessment. We wanted to test whether Family Fun Time Activities helped improve family involvement. A needs assessment was sent to parents in Prince Edward County to determine what they felt they needed. Respondents indicated that what they needed was more time to spend with their families. Five Family Fun Time Activities were sent to parents whose children attend The Andy Taylor Center and Head Start. The Family Fun Time Activities consisted of an obstacle course, a cupcake flower craft, an emotions flip-book, a pizza craft, and a finger puppet craft. Research was conducted on if these Family Fun Time Activities improve parental involvement. The themes of research for this study were socioeconomic status, parents’ education level, and the home learning environment. These themes were researched upon to see the connections between them and parents involvement in the success of their child’s education.

**Literature Review**

Epstein (1995) identifies six frameworks that helps define family engagement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Harris and Robinson (2016) also identified a framework for understanding parental involvement called “stage-setting”. Stage-setting can be defined as parents’ recognition of the importance of schooling and the overall quality of life that they create for their children. The current study is focusing on parental involvement and whether Family Fun Time Activities improve family involvement. Researchers sent Family Fun Time Activities home with preschoolers of the Head Start Program and the Andy Taylor Center. Research was conducted on if these Family Fun Time Activities improve parental involvement. Parental involvement is important to study because it helps explain children’s academic success. This literature review describes different concepts related to parental involvement and the impacts it has on children. Socioeconomic status, parents’ education level, and the home learning environment are the general themes used in this literature review to explain parents involvement in the success of their child’s education.

**Socioeconomic Status and Parents Education Level**

Gershenson and Vinopal (2017) was concerned with the gap between parent’s education level and socioeconomic status and how these overall impacts family involvement. Gershenson and Vinopal (2017) found that the gap between socioeconomic status and parental involvement is more nuanced than previous research has ever recognized. This study concluded that noncollege- educated parents spend less time with their children and this could be because those parents have more time constraints. These general results are similar to those reported by Guryan, Hurst, and Kearney (2008). Guryan, Hurst, and Kearney (2008) also found that higher educated parents spend about 4.5 more hours with their children compared to parents with a lower education. Both Gershenson and Vinopal (2017) and Guryan, Hurst, and Kearney (2008) studies explain that further research is needed to explain time conflict differences among parents of different socioeconomic statuses. Guryan, Hurst, and Kearney (2008) explain that the time parents spend with their children is more valued when the parent has a larger amount of time designated to their children. Further research is also needed to explain the factors driving differences in quality time with children by socioeconomic status.

Räty (1997) created a study that examined parents educational level and the affects it has on their children’s competencies. The higher educated parents emphasized cognitive- verbal competencies while vocationally or less educated parents emphasized practical competencies among their children. This study established parents educational level and the effects in parental assessments of their preschool- aged children. It was proven that the education level that parents have are reflected in their children’s competency assessments. Harris and Robinson (2016) argue that if a child is capable of having a high rate of success in their education, and their parents reduce their level of involvement regarding their children’s educational attainment, that child will not be impacted negatively because of their capabilities. Both studies examine socioeconomic statuses and parents’ education level. This can be connected to parents’ education levels and how it does not always impact children in a negative way.

**Home Learning Environment and Socioeconomic Status**

Lin, Litkowski, Shmerold, et al. (2019) produced a study that was centered on home learning and parent- educator communication. This study demonstrated that home literacy environment (HLE) and home numeracy environment (HNE) are critical predictors of children’s academic growth. This study also demonstrated that parents with low perceptions of frequent parent- educator communication relating to children’s education and developmental levels are linked to increased HLE and HNE practices. Lin, Litkowski, Shmerold, et al. (2019) explained how future research is necessary to determine whether greater parent- educator communication results in more frequent home learning practices throughout the preschool ages. These general results of this study are similar to Melhush, Phan, Sylva et al. (2008). Melhush, Phan, Sylva et al. (2008) study emphasized the home learning environment is influenced by parents’ education level and socioeconomic status. The extent of home learning practices allows for a higher and independent influence on educational attainment. Melhush, Phan, Sylva et al. (2008) helps explain that the home learning environment is only moderately associated with socioeconomic status. This study allows future research to observe the differences of low socioeconomic status families and high socioeconomic status families and the uncommon knowledge of the different measures of HLE.

Socioeconomic status, parents’ education level, and the home learning environment are reviewed in this literature to help explain why some children are at more of an advantage than others to have a higher rate of academic success. Comparing socioeconomic status to parents education level focuses on how children of lower-educated parents impacts their academic success. This is done Comparing socioeconomic status and the home learning environment also offers insight to the impacts on children’s education. The Family Fun Time Activities study will help add to existing research by examining if these activities are impacting parental involvement.

**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 of the activity. 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 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 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 preschool the next day. Teachers sent a reminder home with the children to return outstanding questionnaires. This resulted in 16 questionnaires being returned. Overall, there was a 16.2% 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 on a scale from zero through ten. For this study the independent variable is the highest level of education any one in their household has completed. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was “What is the highest degree of education anyone in your household has completed?” 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”, and “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 your 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, “How does parents education affect family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondent’s responses.

**Findings**

**Quantitative Findings**

My dependent variable for this study is family involvement. The question is “How involved was your family throughout the activity. It is coded on a 0-10 scale. The mean of this dependent variable is 8.86. The standard deviation of this dependent variable is 1.45. In this study the independent variable is the highest level of education anyone in their household has completed. The answer choices are coded as “Less than $10,000”, “$10,000 – $30,999”, “$31,000 - $50,999”, “$51,000 – 70,999”, “$71,000 - $90,999”, “$91,000 or more”, and “Prefer not to answer”. Four respondents answered, “less than $10,000”. Two respondents answered “$10,000- $30,999” and two more respondents answered “$31,000- $50,999”. There were no responses for “$51,000- $70,999”. One respondent answered “$71,000- $90,999” and one other respondent answered “$91,000 or more”. Four people preferred not to answer. The respondents that answered “less than $10,000” on the survey received an average of 8.0 in relation to parent involvement. For those who answered “$10,000- $30,999” received an average of 10.0 in relation to parent involvement. The average family involvement was 10.0 related to the income of “$31,000- $50,999”. For those who answered “$71,000- $90,999” received an average of 10.0 in relation to parent involvement. The average family involvement was 7.5 related to the income of “$91,000 or more”. This shows that the parents socioeconomic status does not affect parental engagement.

**Qualitative Findings**

There are three open-ended questions provided in the survey. The first question is “What did your family enjoy most about these actives? Why?” The second open-ended question is “What did your child learn form these activities?” The third open-ended question is “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?” In this section of the study, there were three themes that were found from these open-ended questions on the survey. The three themes associated with these open-ended questions are family engagement, learning, and motor skills.

The first theme found in the first open-ended question, “What did your family enjoy most about these activities? Why?”, is family engagement. Many respondents wrote about how these activities promoted family engagement. Respondent two answered the first open-ended question writing, “So I enjoy watching [child’s name] complete these activities while I assist her”. Respondent four discussed family engagement in the first open-ended question writing, “Time spent together”. Respondent five answered the open-ended question by writing “Its fun when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family”. Respondent eight explained that seeing her child helping herself with the activities was enjoyable for her child and family. Respondent 12 answered the first open-ended question writing, “Yes and my family and son enjoyed doing the little thing we was doing together”. There were many other respondents that answered this question that involved family engagement. Family engagement was a key theme within the open-ended question section.

The second open-ended question, “What did your child learn from these activities?”, revealed the second theme, learning. Many respondents expressed in their answers something relating to learning. Respondent one discussed that her child learned how to listen and follow directions. Many other respondents discussed following instructions. Respondent nine answered this question writing, “letters, numbers, how to take turns”. Respondent 10 also answered this question by explaining that their child also learned letters and numbers. Respondent five put in there answer that their child also learned numbers. Respondent 11 answered, “he learned shapes, colors and emotions”. Respondent five and respondent 12 also explained that their child learned shapes. Many of the respondents answers were similar to one another when discussing what their child had learned from these activities.

The third theme associated with the first open-ended question (“What did your family enjoy most about these activities? Why?”) and the second open-ended question (What did your child learn from these activities?) is motor skills. Respondent one answered the second open-ended question writing, “practiced cutting with scissors”. Respondent two answered the question by explaining that their child learned how to cut, glue, and how to trace. Respondent six answered the first open-ended question writing, “she loved cutting and gluing, she loved making stuff and jumping with everyone”. Respondent 13 answered the second open-ended question by explaining that their child learned how to move in a zig zag motion. Respondent 16 answered the second open-ended question writing “my son learned different techniques from the activity that he can apply to real life”.

Out of all of the open-ended questions asked on the survey, the first and second questions revealed the three themes. The three themes addressed in this section are family engagement, learning, and motor skills. The third open-ended question, “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?”, did not have a great enough theme to address within this section of the study.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Family Fun Time Activities was found to improve family engagement among parents and their children. In past literature and studies, we found that the noncollege educated parents spend less time with their children (Gershenson & Vinopal, 2017). A potential reason for this is the time constraints. We learned that the education level that parents have are reflected in their children’s competency assessments (Räty, 1997). We found that that HLE and HNE are critical predictors of children’s academic growth (Lin, Litkowski, Shmerold, et al., 2019). We also found that parents with low perceptions of frequent parent- educator communication are linked to increased HLE and HNE practices (Lin, Litkowski, Shmerold, et al., 2019). We learned that the extent of home learning practices allows for a higher and independent influence on educational attainment (Melhush, Phan, Sylva et al., 2008). Within the study we found that family engagement, learning, and motor skills were all common themes in the respondents open-ended answers. This study also found that parents socioeconomic status did not affect their parental engagement.

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