

Family Fun Time Activities: Research on Family Involvement at Head Start

Melissa Savage

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, Longwood University

Sociology 345: Social Research and Program Evaluation

Dr. JoEllen Pederson

November 22, 2023

Abstract

In this study we examined the issue of family involvement in a low-income southern Virginia rural area. The purpose of this study was to figure out if Family Fun Time Activities affect family involvement specifically for children ages three to five at Head Start. The data collected and analyzed involves mixed methods of qualitative data collected by open ended questions and quantitative data collected through closed ended questions. Common themes that appeared in this study among the families were learned skills, quality time, and activity enjoyment. The statistical results show that the average of family involvement was 7.2 indicating that most families were engaged in the activities. The results are important because it helps support our research as well as promoting family involvement.

Introduction

In this paper the research problem of family involvement in low-income areas will be addressed. Family involvement was the focus of our study using Family Fun Time Activities. The involvement of families is important because it helps support children's success in academia, socialization, and it is foundational to their emotional and mental wellbeing. Some studies that will be examined are about family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies, parent involvement in early childhood home visiting, and lack of parent participation in early childhood. While studies have been done on family involvement there was still some lack of information leading us to conduct our own research.

The reason for conducting our own research was because of the absence of data related to our topics in the studies examined. There was a lack of connection in relation to educational systems, following up with participants, lack of collaboration, and the need for more development and research on programs. The research conducted is important because it helps provide other researchers with more information as well as helping programs and families foster more involvement with children. The purpose of our research was to see if the Family Fun Time Activities created affected family involvement.

Literature Review

This literature review will examine how family involvement and other educational attainment by parents affect children in early education. Family and parent involvement can be defined as the parents' willful participation in activities and providing help with schoolwork (Korfmacher et.al, 2008). The three topics that will be examined in relation to family involvement are low-income families, the Head Start program, as well as looking at parent

involvement. Examining these three topics is important to research because it provides us with other perspectives and influences on family involvement. This also allows us to see how those other influences affect involvement.

Low Income Families

Families who have low incomes may find it harder to participate and be as involved in the child's life as a family who is more financially stable. Parent participation occurs at home as well as at school. Low income is associated with negative effects on children's educational achievement as well as their behavior (Coba- Rodriguez, Cambray- Engstrom, Jarrett, 2020; McWayne, Bulotsky- Shearer, 2013; Yajejain et.al, 2017). Family involvement also tends to take the form that is most common with the White middle class. This can be difficult for families from other cultures who may be viewed as uninvolved if they do not take this approach (Coba- Rodriguez, Cambray- Engstrom, Jarrett, 2020). While the research was good and had beneficial findings something the researchers could do to make it better is have a larger and more diverse group in relation to educational systems for better understanding of the research. Also a problem that was discovered was that after one year the researchers could not locate some of their participants for the follow up assessment. This research however, was still beneficial and relates to the theme of low income families, early childhood education, as well as preschool and finding ways to promote younger less advantaged children in their education.

Head Start and Families

Head Start is a nationally funded program that is designed to academically help children from low- income families. One program Head Start offers is home based activities. A strong family system is essential especially when creating connections between families and

educational systems. The research found that these home-based activities were beneficial for the children academically as well as promoting the parents' participation (Fantuzzo et.al, 2004).

Programs use home visiting and home-based activities to promote family involvement without having to leave the home (Korfmacher et.al, 2008). They create a collaboration between parents and school to benefit the children by getting the parents more involved thus helping the children socially, academically, form social- emotional readiness as well as behaviorally. (Korfmacher et.al, 2008; McWayne, Bulotsky- Shearer, 2013). There has been research done that relates family engagement to a child's success in academia. But what about the caregivers such as the workers at Head Start and their relation to the child's success. They found that caregivers too found there to be disadvantages based on race, education, as well as language (Li et.al, 2022).

After examining the research something to consider is that not all of this reasearch can be applied to all children but rather only children who are associated with the Head Start program. There is also the need for further development and research on home visiting programs to find the implications. However, all these articles are related to the focus of early childhood education development as well as the Head Start program.

Parent Involvement

Using the model and theory created by Epstein (2010) of parent involvement it notes six types of involvement. It focuses on parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. All of these forms of involvement provide parents with multiple opportunities to help their child grow. However, parents may still find it difficult to get involved especially when considering collaboration. Collaboration often involves families, schools, and other outside forces to bring everyone together, which may be hard to achieve for some families whose time is stretched thin (Epstein; Peart, Bryant, 2000).

One thing for the researcher to work on would be getting more people involved with the collaboration to provide more data. Collaboration seems to be the aspect that is hard for parents and families and when they are trying to collaborate parents who do not feel as accomplished as other parents feel their voice does not matter as much and are less likely to interact. Although, the parents' effort to try to work on their collaboration is a good first step to helping their children form their future and we can relate this back to the overall idea of parent involvement as well as the theme of early childhood education.

Through this review the research has provided many new insights on family involvement. Research provided evidence that supports low- income families, the Head Start program, as well as parents and their involvement in early childhood education. It addressed issues such as children and how low-income families can create difficulties before they even have a chance at life. Another topic discussed was the idea of Head Start which is a way for low-income families to get their child's foot in the educational world. Lastly, parent involvement was addressed and how collaboration may prove to be difficult. These themes all in one way or another influence family involvement whether it is intentional or not.

Data and Methods

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by eight 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 Qualtrics. Head Start teachers e-mailed links of the survey to guardians, and children brought home books with a QR code attached.

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 need. The Clothespin Counting Wheel activities were sent home to children. In this activity the children pinned a clothespin to a circle and tried to correctly identify 10 colors and 10 numbers. With the Family Fun Time activity, a children's book with an attached QR code was sent encouraging families to take the online survey after they completed the activity. Teachers sent a reminder e-mail to parents to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in four questionnaires being completed. Overall, there was a 4% response rate. Therefore, data from previous years (2019 and 2022) 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).

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 operationalized this was "On a scale from 0 to 10, how much did this activity encourage your family to interact with one another while completing it?" The independent variable for this study is the parent's educational attainment. This is operationalized using the item "What is the highest degree of education you have completed?". Answer choices for this item are, "some high school", "high school diploma or GED", "Certification from a trade/

vocational school”, “some college”, “associate’s degree”, “bachelor’s degree”, and “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 “Do Family Fun Time Activities affect family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

The dependent variable is a self-ranked scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (a great amount). Families provide a number answer of how involved they were in the Family Fun Time Activities. The independent variable is the educational attainment of the parents. Respondents selected an answer of one of the following: some high school, high school or GED, trade or vocational school, some college, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, and graduate or more. The hypothesis is if families participate in Family Fun Time Activities, then there will be an increase in family involvement.

The mean score as shown in Table 1 for self-ranked family involvement was 7.2. The standard deviation for family involvement was 2.6. Using this data, we can see that 95.2% of families self-ranked themselves between a 6 and 8. This indicates that families did not vary greatly according to the data.

Table 1.

Means and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement

Involvement	Mean	Median	SD
	7.2	2.8	2.6

Note. N=66

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of family involvement in the Family Fun Time Activities. Responses to the dependent variable were asked on a self-ranking scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (a great amount). As shown in the table, most of the responses by families indicate that they were engaged in the activities provided to them. However, only one respondent ranked themselves as being involved as a nine on a scale of zero to ten.

Figure 1.

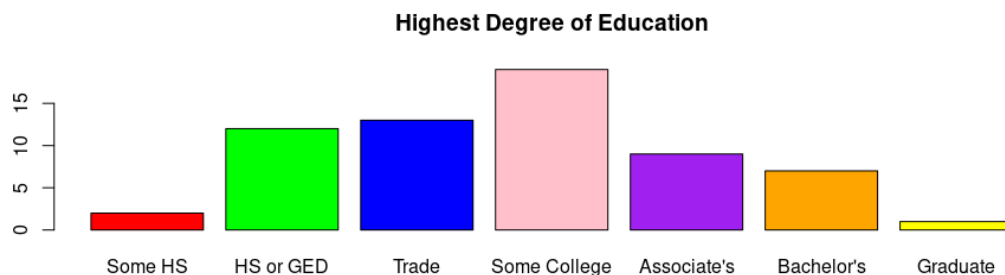


Figure 1 shows respondents with some High School education resulted in 3.1% of those who answered the survey. 19% responded with having a High School diploma or GED. 20.6% of respondents responded with Trade and or Vocational School. 30.2% of respondents had some College education. 13.3% of respondents had an Associate's degree while 11.1% had a

Bachelor's degree. Lastly, only 1.6% of respondents responded having a Graduate degree or more.

Table 2.

Means and Standard Deviation of Involvement by Education

Education	Mean	SD
Some HS	8.5	2.1
HS or GED	6.4	2.7
Trade or Vocational	7.8	2.9
Some College	6.9	2.0
Associate's	7.5	2.3
Bachelor's	6.4	4.1
Graduate or more	9.0	N/A

Note. N= 66

Table 2 shows the comparison between respondents' education and their level of involvement in the Family Fun Time Activities. As seen in Table 2 respondents with a graduate degree or more ranked themselves as highly involved with a 9.0. Respondents with a high school education or GED as well as those with a bachelor's degree ranked themselves the lowest with a mean of 6.4.

The original hypothesis stated if families participate in Family Fun Time Activities, then there will be an increase in family involvement. The mean in Table 2 however, shows a diverse number of educational levels being involved with their children.

Qualitative Findings

Family fun time activities consisted of three main themes: children learned skills which included taking turns, patience, fine motor skills, colors, shapes, numbers, and letters. The families who participated from Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center found that these activities not only encouraged their children to learn but they also encouraged quality time together as a family. Many families found that doing these activities together also created a sense of enjoyment because everyone got to be involved and participate in the engaging activities.

Learned Skills

Out of thirty-eight surveys, twenty-one had mentioned learning a skill from completing the family fun time activities. Respondent two from 2022 stated “[child’s name] learned how to cut and glue and how to trace better.” Through the response of this survey the learning of fine motor skills can be examined and supported. Another survey that supports the theme of learning skills is survey five from 2022. On this survey it was written that the child learned “colors, shapes, creativity in a fun way, [and] numbers” from these activities. Using the responses from these surveys it can be examined and supported that there is a common theme of learning skills through activities. The skills learned, however, do not only impact the child in their education but also in life. Fine motor skills are important because they can help the child become more independent and do things on their own, allowing for a boost of confidence in themselves.

Quality Time

The second theme that was consistent through the surveys of the family fun time activities was quality time. While completing the activities with their children parents found that they enjoyed being able to spend time with their children. Out of the thirty-eight surveys, twenty-three mentioned the theme of quality time whether that was through togetherness, teamwork, or bonding. In survey three from 2019 as well as survey four from 2022 both families gained “time

spent together” from completing the fun time activities. This is similar to survey eight from 2019 where another family found that they too had gained “spending time together” through the activities. The information gathered from the responses of families at Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center are prime examples that the family fun time activities do support and foster quality time among families. Quality time is important for families, especially children as it is foundational to their emotional and mental wellbeing which will support them throughout their life.

Activity Enjoyment

The final theme that was prevalent through these surveys is the enjoyment and fun that families had together while completing the family fun time activities. Out of the thirty-eight surveys, thirty-one responded with some form of response related to fun and enjoyment. According to survey two from 2019 the activities provided “fun for [the] whole family” as well as adding that “it was fun playing a game with the kids, helped for all of them” and that they “all enjoyed the activities.” Through the analysis of this it can be examined that the activities provided the families as a whole with relaxing and non-stressful entertainment. This can be said because if it were stressful, complicated, or uninteresting thirty-one families would not have reported having fun or some form of enjoyment. Another respondent from survey five in 2022 when asked what the family enjoyed most reported “It’s fun when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family. It can be a learning skill but fun for the kids.” These responses are just a few of the many parents responded back with. However, it can clearly be seen that the family fun time activities provided families with something fun and enjoyable for everyone. Fun is important for children, especially with family members as it provides bonding time and provides them with socialization, both which will help a child through life.

Through the completion of the surveys by parents and family members they have provided us with a better understanding of our research. Using the responses provided there is evidence that shows a significant number of positive responses. Many families found that the family fun time activities were educational and provided children with a skill. Families also reported that the activities encouraged quality time among family members. Lastly, the responses also reported that the families and children had fun and enjoyed the activities. Overall, the responses from Head Start as well as the Andy Taylor Center were positive and families would complete the activities again.

Conclusion

The main point of this project was for us to give Head Start families Fun Time Activities and see if those activities increased family involvement. Our findings from this research suggest that with a mean of 7.2 from table 1, most families were involved in the activities. In the qualitative findings under quality time, it can also be seen that parents too found the activities enjoyable and brought the family together. These responses on quality time and more family involvement can be tied to the literature review. There are connections between the two because in previous studies there were home-based activities much like ours. They found that the connection between school and parents helped improve the parents' involvement with their children.

The Family Fun Time Activities are important because they help promote parent and family involvement. Having an involved family is important for more than just the family. Family involvement is vital because it helps bring the family together, helps support the child's mental and emotional well-being, as well as helping the child in the future. Overall, getting

families involved is important and should be something we focus on more for the better of the children and their connections.

References

- Coba- Rodriguez, S., Cambray- Engstrom, E., Jarrett, L. (2020). The Home- based Involvement Experiences of Low- income Latino Families with Preschoolers Transitioning to Kindergarten: Qualitative Findings. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 2678- 2696. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01781-7>.
- Epstein, J (2010). School/ Family/ Community/ Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share. *Kappan Classic*, 92 (3), 81-96
- Fantuzzo, J, et al. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review*, 33 (4), 467–480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2004.12086262>.
- Korfmacher, J. et.al. (2008). Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Home Visting. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 37, 171-196. DOI 10.1007/s10566-008-9057-3.
- Li, L.,et.al. (2022). “Talk to Me”: Parent- Teacher Background Similarity, Communication Quality, and Barriers to School- Based Engagement Among Ethnoculturally Diverse Head Start Families. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 29 (2), 267-278.
- McWayne, C., Bulotsky- Shearer, R. (2013). Identifying Family and Classroom Practices Associated With Stability and Change of Social- Emotional Readiness for a National Sample of Low- Income Children. *Research in Human Development*, 10 (2), 116-140. DOI: 10.1080/15427609.2013.786537.

Peart, N., Bryant. D. (2000). Bringing Reality to the Table: Contributors to the lack of Parent Participation in an Early Childhood Service Program. *Administration in Social Work*, 24 (4), 21-37.

Yazejain, N., et.al. (2017). Child and Parent Outcomes After 1 Year of Educare. *Child Development*, 88 (5), 1671- 1688. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12688