**Race in Parent Involvement: For Child Educational Success**

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**Abstract**

Parent involvement is crucial for a child's academic success; However, some parents struggle to be involved with their child’s education. This study aimed to discover what needs parents have in order to increase parent involvement. Parents’ needs can vary from income, time, race, education, and more.

The study targeted parents/guardians of HeadStart preschool children (ages 3-5) from Central Virginia. Data collection involves surveys with mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). The qualitative data comes from open-ended questions, while the quantitative data comes from scaled items and participant numbers.

This study expected to find associate themes of how race affects parent involvement outcomes and that parent race influences quality and needs for involvement. However, limitations of the study include a small participant pool and geographical restrictions. Given these limitations, findings may not represent all populations. Future studies should consider larger demographics.

*Keywords*: Parent Involvement, Survey research, HeadStart

**Introduction**

Parent involvement is seen as a crucial component to a child’s success in the academic field (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Some researchers believe that race, plays a role towards the quality of parent involvement in a child’s education. Research suggest that racial disparities persist in parent involvement, making parents/guardians of color face different barriers of engagement towards their child and their education (Billings, 1995).

Parent involvement, is essential aspect to a child’s life can be defined and executed in a number of ideas and definitions. However, the overarching theme of parent involvement can be described as the parents’ fulfillment in a child’s life that has properties of education, commitment, nurturing, and gratification towards their child. Children of all ages need parent involvement to succeed in life, school, and overall grow as a person

The relationship between parent involvement and race is particularly important as it can impact the quality and outcome of the child’s education. Henderson and Mapp, (2002) note that parent involvement is linked to superior academic success in a variety of education levels. Because race plays a role towards parent involvement quality and outcome in a child’s education, this study aims to discover the role that race plays in parent involvement and the following effects it has on a child’s education.

**Literature Review**

**Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement has many variables that can affect the outcome or even potency of parent involvement. One of these independent variables is race, researchers have investigated into the correlation between race, and parent involvement. What researchers have found, is that race, does in fact play a role in parent involvement, in positive and negative aspects of a child’s life.

**Positive Research**

The positive research shown comes from studies shows a difference between the participation in education between white and black parents (Gartrell, 1999). The difference showed that black parents, had more involvement with school activities than white parents. These activities included: homework, reading, curriculum related activities, and more. The study also looked into parent involvement through school-based activities and teacher specific activities. In every activity, African American parents were more involved with their kids’ education than white parents. However, the study only looks at one particular school, making this study very limited due to the small pool of subjects and the study of a singular school. Nonetheless, (Gartell,1999) does provide spectacular insight on the positive effects of parent involvement much like the findings of Wenfan. (Wenfan, 1999) argues that the role of parental involvement, regardless of race, is detrimental to a child’s success in education. The findings of this study showed that “families of successful African American students demonstrate equal or higher levels of parental involvement than do those of successful European American students, despite the former's comparatively disadvantaged home environments” (Wenfan, 1999, pg. 19). However, the complications of this study are that they only studied a general pool between middle class European Americans, and African Americans. Another flaw this study has was it only looked into the characteristics of parent involvement for African American students.

**Negative Research**

Some studies contradict the results from the previous citations above. A study had found that racial and ethnic minorities, (particularly Black and Hispanic parents) had lower levels of involvement compared to their White counterparts (Hill & Tyson, 2009). However, this study only aimed at parent involvement for middle school students (6th, 7th, 8th) and one may argue that higher levels of education receive less parent involvement due to the independency of the child. The study does provide an excellent explanation of the cause-and-effect relationship between parent involvement and success in a child’s education. Another study found that African American showed less parent involvement due to historical and systemic barriers that have damaged these communities for many years. These disparities can be attributed to various factors, such as income, systematic racism, and area of living (Chen & Fan, 2001). Some studies believe that minorities negatively affect their children even when they are involved. A study into the cultural differences in parent involvement, have findings show that other races support is shown different ways due to cultural patterns (Rapp & Duncan, 2012). They also make note that some ethnic and cultural norms of different cultures are not seen as supportive to educators (pg. 5). Another study suggest that many educator and policy makers believe that black parents are a hindrance to a child’s development in education, however these racist ideals only stem from scientific racism, which have no regard in today’s field of science. (Reynolds, 2010, pg. 148).

**Middle Ground**

A middle ground between the positive and negative effects of parent involvement regarding race, shows that there were no differences between minorities and white families. A study looking into the relations between what they call “risk factors” (parental education, maternal depression, and single parent status) and parent involvement (Kohl & Lengua, 2000). The findings of the study showed that all though the risk factors did have consequences to parent involvement effectiveness, they found that race did not have any effect on parent involvement. Yet, they viewed the variable race, as a moderator and not as an individual aspect of parent involvement.

In all, there are many independent variables that effect parent involvement. Some may have positive and negative effects on the child’s education and future. However, the overall themes of these studies are that minority parent involvement is beneficial to the child, and in some instances minority parents are more involved with their child’s education than their white counterparts. The only negative effects that come from the correlation of race and parent involvement is that if the parents are not involved, it can negatively affect the child’s education regardless of race. There are also differences in parent involvement tactics between white and black individuals. Some researchers argue that racial stigmatization can and has influenced the way African Americans think and act at school (Bartz, 2017, pg. 7). Due to this, some tactics are more concentrated than others such as school involvement. In sum parent involvement is detrimental to a child’s educational future, race does play a role in the outcome of the child,

however, the only factor it plays is the amount of involvement a parent decides to commit which is completely arbitrary.

**Data and Methods**

**Instrument Section:**

An online survey questionnaire was created by a research collaborative at Longwood University. The survey created in Qualtrics included an informed consent question and open and closed-ended items. There are 23 close-ended items that cover parent needs including resources, demographics, comfort, time, finances and mental health needs. The questionnaire included three open-ended items. The questionnaire had an estimated completion time of 10 minutes

**Sample section:**

The sample for this project is the parents/guardians of Head Start children. The children’s ages are between the ages of three and five. This sample resides in seven counties in central Virginia. There are 119 families in this sample population. Head Start HQ e-mailed the online survey to the county Head Start teachers, the teachers than e-mailed the survey to all families in their classrooms. Surveys were e-mailed home at least three times during data collection. This resulted in 26 surveys being submitted. The response rate was approximately 25%. There are no incentives offered for completing the survey.

**Quantitative Analysis section:**

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, the dependent variable of interest was How involved do you feel you are in your child's education on a scale of 0 - 10? 0=Not at all, 10= Totally involved, the attributes of this question are numbers 0-10, the higher the number the more involved that parent would be. The independent variable was: choose one or more races you consider yourself to be: White or Caucasian, Black or African American, Native American, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander, Other, prefer not to say.

**Qualitative Analysis section:**

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

**Findings**

**Quantitative Findings**

The dependent variable of the study was: how involved are you in your child’s education? This item is asked on a 0 (not at all) to 10 (Extremely involved) scale. The independent variable is: choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be White or Caucasian, Black or African American, Native American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other. Respondents answered by clicking on the race they associated with.

The mean score for the dependent variable was 8.80, and the standard deviation was 2.06. This means that 68% of the respondents answered between the scores of 8-10. This shows that answers on this variable were similar with one another.

Table 1

*Race of Respondents*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Race | Answered |
| White or Caucasian | 5 |
| African American | 16 |
|  |  |

Table 1 shows the data from the independent variable. In the data, the majority of respondents answered that they were African American and the remaining answered that they were White or Caucasian, there were no other races answered. Of the 25 respondents only 21 of them answered the independent variable.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviation Between White and Black Respondents in Child Education Involvement*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Race | Mean Standard Deviation |
| Black | 9.66 0.07 |
| White | 6.40 3.04 |
|  |  |

Note. N=25

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation between white and black respondents and their involvement of their child’s education. The data shows that the mean of Black involvement in child education is remarkably higher than White involvement. The standard deviation between the two races were also noticeably different. The standard deviation of Black respondents is 0.07 meaning there was almost no variance in the answers of the dependent variable. As for the White respondents, the standard deviation was 3.04 meaning that there some distinction in the answers. Of the 25 respondents, only 21 answered this variable.

**Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data collected in this section originates from open-ended items from the survey. The three items that were asked was: What are some things you enjoy doing most with your child; How do you deal with stress; and; Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your needs as a parent? From these items, we found that there were themes/similarities emerged from each question giving us the ability to code these items and categorize them.

**Themes**

The similarities that emerge from the item: “What are some things you enjoy doing most with your child” are that the majority of respondents (six) informed that they play with their child; either by dancing, watching movies/shows, and even horseback riding. These answers can be simplified into the term “hobbies” as they cover a large sum of the responses that have a similar theme together. Another majority of participants replied in the same manner as educational. Some respondents answered “having conversations” (respondent 9). Conversations in this analysis will be thought as educational as they will most likely benefit the child’s communication skills. Other respondents answered in similarly like going over school work or teaching them new skills. With all of those responses grouped together, a majority of respondents answered with a theme of education. Some of the respondents replied with “everything” (respondent 27) or “anything that brings them joy” (respondent 7). Another few respondents had a similar theme of spending time outdoors with their child, such as “outside adventures” (respondent 4) and “playing at the park…” (respondent 26”). Of the 23 respondents only 18 answered this item.

As for the findings of item “How do you deal with stress?” Respondents answered with four similar themes on how they manage stress. The minority of the respondents had no

type of process to help deal with stress. This minority of respondents answered that either they no time or obligation to deal with their stress. Several respondents answered that they deal with their stress by using isolation techniques. Some of these techniques included taking a walk, alone time, or just walking away from the stressor itself. A few other respondents had a theme of using outside sources for managing their stress. Outside sources included talking with friend and family, communication, and even therapy. The majority of respondents however, had some sort of stress relief technique. Seven respondents answered that they deal with their stress by reading, breathing, yoga, and journaling. Of the 23 respondents only 16 answered this item.

The findings of the item, “is there anything else you would like to share with us about your needs as a parent?” can be summed up in two themes, No and “behavior correction.” All but one of the participants responded with “no” on the item Q29. One participant wrote behavior correction on the item, making that specific respondent a minority. Of the 23 respondents, 10 answered this item.

In sum of the findings, there were specific themes and similarities that emerged from the items. In the first item discussed, the majority of the participants responded with the themes of education and hobbies. In turn parents/guardians enjoy teaching their child various concepts or watching their child do their hobbies. In the second item, the majority of the respondents answered that they had some sort of stress relief technique. This is positive information as we know now that the majority of parents have a way to deal with stress. In the last item, all but one respondent answered that they had nothing further to share with us. The one respondent that did had issues with their child’s behavior. Further participation would aid the study and give us more concise information.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the data shows that black parents felt more involved with their child’s education than white parents. The purpose of this study was to understand what needs parents/guardians may have to help increase parent involvement outcomes. The needs of the parents/guardians were evaluated to be time, income, education, etc. In this specific paper, race was the focused topic from these needs. From the data, it is safe to assume that race does have an impact towards parent involvement in education.

The qualitative data provides answers to open-ended items that a parent/guardian must fill out to their best knowledge. In the item that states “what are some things you enjoy most with your child?” Parents of both races, (only white and black answered) had equally some sort of involvement with their child. Another item that states “how do you deal with stress?” The majority of the respondents had the similar theme of having a de-stressor technique (white and black alike). In the final open-ended item “Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your needs as a parent” all but one of the respondents answered no, the only other answer was by one respondent and it was “behavior correction.” This answer puts whites in the majority for behavior correctional needs.

The quantitative data shows that of the 25 respondents, only 21 answered their race. y. The majority of respondents answered that they identified as Black or African American (16), and the rest answered White or Caucasian, there were no other races selected in the study. The data from the dependent variable “how involved are you in your child’s education?” shows a distinct variation between white and black parent involvement. Black parent involvement was noticeably higher than White parent involvement. Black parents, also answered more congruently than white parents as they had a lower standard deviation than white parents.

What this could represent in the future, is that the children of the black parents, may be more successful in school as their parents are more involved in their education. There is a numerous amount of research to back up this hypothesis, as researchers tend to believe that parent involvement in their child’s education shows positive outcome in grades and class participation. However, because this pool of subjects is small, and the area that the research extends to is small-scaled, the results may not be similar to a larger study. Further testing with a larger subject pool is recommend in the future.

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