

Family Fun Time Activities and Family Involvement

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Abstract

Family involvement seems to be crucial for children's education. The purpose of this study was to find if Family Fun Time activities increase family involvement at Head Start. This study was mixed methods with both open and closed-ended questions as well as qualitative and quantitative data. Some common themes in the surveys received were learned skills, family enjoyment, and quality time spent. For the quantitative data, overall there wasn't a large difference between education level and family involvement. This research showed us that family involvement did increase due to the Family Fun Time activities seen in the evidence shown by the surveys.

Introduction

People wonder why family involvement is decreasing over the years and what family types have worse involvement in this research, it gives some incite to that question. The students at Longwood University partnered with Head Start to create some Family Fun Time activities to give to the parents at this school. We sent surveys using mixed methods to answer various questions about the activities as well as family involvement and demographics. We dive into whether socioeconomic status affects the levels of family engagement as well as the benefits of these Family Fun Time activities and what benefits do they give the children.

Literature Review

Parent involvement is defined as the behaviors parents have that help improve and assist children's mental growth. This can be simply seen as reading with your child, communicating with them and the school, helping with homework, and much more. This gives a kick start to the growth of your child and research shows families with poor family involvement reflect less growth from the children (Juvonen, J., Le, V.-N., Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C., and Constant, L., 2004). There are many programs and methods that schools and the education system showcase today that help improve family involvement. Epstein (2010) states that if teachers only think of the ones they educate as students it neglects the family, if they think of them as children it then looks into the family aspects and what can be done at home as well to improve the education for the better. If the teacher and family of the child work together to have family involvement matched with good teaching it can create better opportunities for the child. Perriel (2015) states that most families think that the three biggest parts of family involvement include assisting their children in education, supporting them in educating and helping them complete assignments. These points are more available to families if the schools help educate parents and children on

them. The more schools follow the external model and interact with other schools, programs, and communities and work with the families of their students can help have similar traits and beliefs about education this will help create a culture in the children to work hard, think creatively, and be more involved and interested in school (Epstien, 2010). Like Epstein's findings, children who have access to early education or programs to stimulate their minds and learn the basics of education and how to focus and learn have had huge improvements to children's foundation of learning thus creating better future students (Gershoff, 2016). Community involvement as well as school climate and various programs and support have been shown to help improve parenting skills thus improving the children's advancement throughout their education. If a school's involvement in the children is higher it tends to trickle into the family's involvement (Epstein, 2010). Gershoff (2016) saw a connection between Head Start schools and increased family involvement. These parents started doing more activities and increased their family involvement thus creating students that have more cognitive skills and absorb education better. There also were links in the behavior of these children becoming more mild and corporal punishment was lessened in these families due to the lack of acting out. Epstein (2010) states that family-like schools make the school feel like a family and the children are meant to feel special; this has been shown to improve student and family involvement greatly. Since children come home and tell their parents about their education this brings a bond between the parents and the school creating a want to get involved and help. Another aspect of family involvement is how families with lower incomes have lower levels of parental involvement. Families with lower socioeconomic statuses tend to have less educated parents in the family unit. This along with the lack of programs and pre-kindergarten schools or facilities really hinders a lot of lower-class children's school readiness (Dotterer, Iruka, and Pungello, 2012). The trends show with

lower-income families and family involvement the financial stress model shows a shift negatively between parents struggling with money and well of parents' behavior, time with their children, and accessibility to programs for the betterment of their children (Dotterer, Iruka, and Pungello, 2012). Like socioeconomic status and parent involvement, race and single-parent households also seem to play a large role in parent involvement. Epstein (2010) states that in single-parent households where the parents work data shows significantly lower family involvement unless the schools promote programs and resources for them. The Head Start program has been shown to help single-parent households as well as the African-American community by offering these programs to lower-level earning families (Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez, (2015) stated that research shows African American kids in these low-income areas are much more likely to not be ready for kindergarten. This unready entry-level kindergarten can cause serious damage to children's education in the future. Head Start combats these issues by being available to these communities. Hindman and Morrison (2011) state that the Head Start program gives access to an adequate level of education for these students as well as adding family involvement techniques. Going off of Epstein (2010) this creates a family-like structure with the students, school, and family and builds these skills parents can follow and turn over to their children increasing their desire for learning and opening up their cognitive skills for all classes and races. Though a lot of the data seems to have improvements to the children's cognitive function results still vary in parent involvement and increased educational benefit (Domina, 2005).

Data and Methodology

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by 10 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation Team at Longwood University. The survey consisted of 15 questions, 12 close-ended questions, and three open-ended questions. The first questions 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 emailed links to 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 needs. We sent Family Fun Time activities to the families at Head Start. For this activity, we sent a sensory writing bag home and a book with a QR code attached. The sensory writing bag is an activity where the guardian and child will add shaving cream to a bag with food coloring. After the bag is created the guardian will demonstrate, then the child will write their name and then count the number of letters in their name. After that, they will then be free to draw animals or other letters on their own. This activity is designed to help increase the child's motor skills as well as their ability to write letters, write their name, count, improve fine motor skills, and draw animals. Teachers sent a reminder email to guardians to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in four surveys 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 closed-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The item from the survey that was used to operationalize this was, “On a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (a great amount), did this activity encourage your family to work together?” The independent variable is measuring socioeconomic status. The item from the survey that was used to operationalize this was, “What is the highest degree of education you have completed?” The answer attributes options for this question 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?”, “Typically, what activities do you do with your child?”. To answer the research question, “Does participation in Family Fun Time activities affect family involvement?” Inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

Findings

Qualitative Finding

The Family Fun Time surveys shared three themes: the first theme was learned skills such as shapes, colors, numbers/counting, cutting, patience, and creativity. The next common

theme was how to find enjoyment from learning. The final theme found was quality time spent with the family.

Learned Skills

From the surveys, 32 out of 35 surveys mentioned that their child learned something from completing their Family Fun Time activity. Respondent 22_01 stated their child learned “practicing with scissors, listening and following instructions, and practicing counting.” Another respondent 22_07 provides more evidence following the learned skills through family fun time activities “My child learned how to be creative.” Another respondent 19_18 stated, “Working well together just takes a little patience.” Another respondent 22_12 stated their child learned “Shapes, finger toys, coloring, and colors.” The overwhelming majority of surveys received stated that their child learned a skill. Those skills varied such as learning colors, learning teamwork, learning patience, learning how to use scissors, and much more. This shows that the children at Head Start learned useful skills by completing the Family Fun Time activities.

Enjoyment of Learning

From the Family Fun Time surveys 25 out of 35 surveys mentioned that their child was having fun or found enjoyment out of learning. Respondent 19_05 stated “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” Another respondent 19_11 further provides evidence that these children are learning how to learn and have fun “fun learning activities that we can keep playing in the future.” Another respondent 22_05 stated, “It’s fun when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family.” Further gaining evidence on this respondent 19_10 stated “The animal dice game got the family active. Great way to promote healthy family activities making it fun!!!” This shows that the children at Head

Start learned how to learn and have fun or gain enjoyment from learning by completing the Family Fun Time activities.

Quality Family time

From the Family Fun Time surveys 26 out of the 35 surveys mentioned that their family spent quality family time together. Respondent 19_05 stated, "Time spent together and being able to do crafts opened the door for other simple activities." Further supporting this claim respondent 19_15 stated "It provided us with family time." Expanding on this respondent 19_19 stated, "My family gained quality time and it helped my child understand things about his feelings, and I am thankful." This shows the families at Head Start gained quality time with their children due to the Family Fun Time activities.

By looking at the surveys there were three main themes that stood out: learned skills, enjoyment of learning, and quality family time. Each of these main points was spoken about repeatedly in the qualitative section of the survey. For the learned skills many families that filled out the survey stated that their children learned different skills such as coloring, counting, reading, cutting, patience, how to work together, and much more this shows that the Family Fun Time activities did what they were supposed to and the majority of participants learned something from this. For enjoyment of learning again the majority of surveys satiated something about how they enjoyed the family fun time activities and made learning fun. This shows that the Family Fun Time activities overall had a positive effect on the children of Head Start not only teaching them but also teaching them that learning can be fun promoting more learning. Finally, for quality family time the majority of surveys received stated they enjoyed spending time with their family during the Family Fun Time activities.

Quantitative Findings

In this research, the dependent variable was family involvement and the independent variable was the highest degree of education. The hypothesis was that families with a higher level of education would have more family involvement.

Table 1.
Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement

Involvement	
Mean	7.2
Standard deviation	2.8

Note. N=66

Table 1 shows how the mean of 66 parents' family involvement equaled 7.2 with a standard deviation of 2.8.

Figure 1.

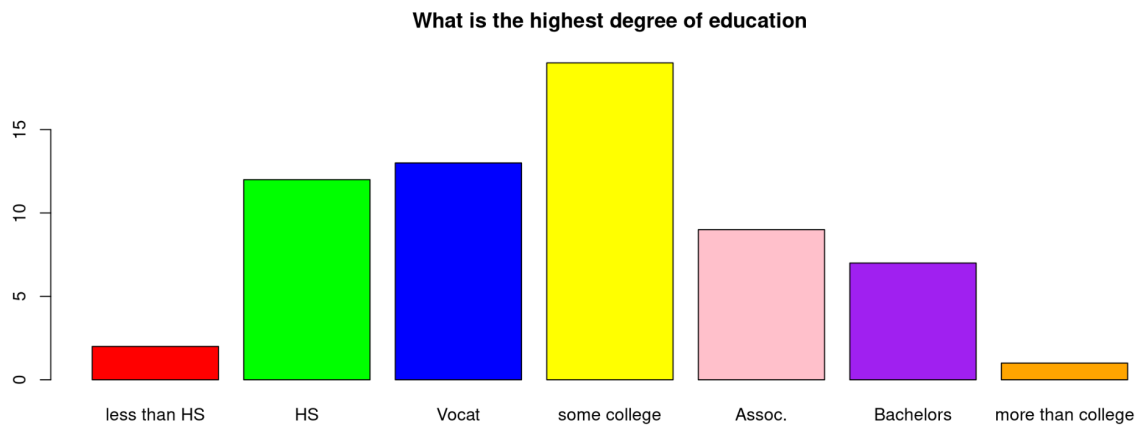


Figure 1 shows a bar graph of the parent's education level. The graph reads that the overwhelming majority of parents attend college to some degree.

Table 2.
Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement and Education

Education	Mean	Standard Deviation
Less than HS	8.5	2.1
HS	6.4	2.7
Vocational School	7.8	2.9
Some College	6.9	2.0
Associate's Degree	7.6	2.3
Bachelor's Degree	6.4	4.0
More Than College	9.0	N/A

Table 2 shows the relation between family involvement and the parents' highest level of education.

The hypothesis was that the higher level of education the parents received the higher the family involvement would be. The data received from the Head Start families, Family Fun Time activities showed that the majority of parents had higher education and overall it did not affect the level of family involvement.

Conclusion

Overall this research paper had a few main points. Firstly, the Family Fun Time activity surveys from the previous years showed a few similarities across the board: the children learned or improved on new skills, the children learned how to get enjoyment out of learning, and the family got to spend quality time together. These three points proved that the majority of parents who completed the Family Fun Time activities got a constructive takeaway from these activities. Another surprising point was the hypothesis that the higher education the parents had the more family inclement there would be turned out false. The data we gathered from the parents at Head Start showed that the majority of parents had some level of education and the family involvement levels were similar across the boards. Overall this research proved that having

activities provided to families such as the Family Fun Time activities at Head Start should improve the family involvement and positively benefit the children.

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