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The effects of parental involvement on student achievement

Meghan J. Budke
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

The goal of this research paper was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the impact parents can have on their child's achievement. The introduction of this paper will cover an overview of the topic, along with the rationale, relevant statistics, and the purpose of the paper. The areas examined in this paper included the impact of family communication, single-parent families, cultural differences, and extracurricular involvement. The paper also covers the counselor's role, and how they can assist students and parents with academic achievement.

The Effects of Parental Involvement on Student Achievement

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by

Meghan J. Budke

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Linda Nebbe

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Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

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Date Received

Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

Abstract

The goal of this research paper was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the impact parents can have on their child's achievement. The introduction of this paper will cover an overview of the topic, along with the rationale, relevant statistics, and the purpose of the paper. The areas examined in this paper included the impact of family communication, single-parent families, cultural differences, and extracurricular involvement. The paper also covers the counselors role and how they can assist students and parents with academic achievement.

The Effects of Parental Involvement on Student Achievement

Many researchers have examined the relationship between parental involvement and student's academic achievement. There are many variables that have influenced the relationship, such as, the impact of family communication, single-parent families, cultural differences, and parental expectations. Current research supports the fact that student's benefit the most when their parents are involved in their lives (Pomerantz and Dong, 2006).

By having researched this topic it is clear that the way parents communicate both verbally and nonverbally can greatly effect their child's achievement (Pomerantz, Wang, & Ng, 2005). Children are smart at reading cues and can easily pick up on how their parent's perceive their competence. Later, this paper will go into detail on how parent's attitudes and perceived competence can impact their child's academic achievement.

Another factor that has been examined is the influence of single-parent families. It seems as though being a child raised in a single-parent family can be especially difficult if the non-resident parent is not involved in their lives (Howard, Burke, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006). According to Howard et al., (2006), there are many other variables that can effect student achievement including mothers' education level, job stability, and the amount time the resident parent spends with their child. Specifics on single-parent families will be discussed later in this paper.

There is evidence that supports cultural differences play a role in the effects of

parental involvement on student achievement. In a country of many cultures, it is not surprising that culture can have an influence on student achievement. Often times, the communication barrier has impacted many students in the United States (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004). Students typically speak their native language at home and then speak English in school. This alone puts students of a different culture at a disadvantage. This particular section will be explored further in this paper.

Researchers have looked at the effects of parental expectations, as well (Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006). Often times, parents have too high of expectations. This can lead to students being overloaded with extracurricular activities and the feeling like that they never measure up. It is important to have high expectations as a parent, but to be realistic in what their child can handle. Each child is different in what they can handle, so it is crucial that parents look at each one of their children individually.

Many parents are unaware of the impact they can have on their children. Parents have a huge responsibility in communicating and supporting their child throughout their academic career. Unfortunately, there are situations that do not allow parents to fully communicate and support their child. This paper touches on those scenarios and allows readers to better understand the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. It is especially important for school counselors to be aware of the factors that influence their students' academic achievement. By knowing these factors, counselors

can be prepared for appropriate techniques and interventions for both students and parents.

The purpose of this paper is for readers to gain insight on the effects of parental involvement on student achievement. As readers and hopefully fellow counselors read about this relationship they will realize the importance of it. By investigating the different variables that go into this relationship, counselors can be prepared with activities and interventions that may help students and parents.

The Impact of Family Communication

Past research has shown that family communication does play a important part in student's academic achievement (Pomerantz et al., 2006). When fathers and mothers show support and foster open communication with their child it allows them to feel comfortable asking questions on homework or other school related events. This section will focus on the impact of the parent's role, cultural differences and socioeconomic status in supporting student academic achievement.

Parental Communication

Parental involvement well into college can have a direct impact on their child's academic achievement. One study examined the perceptions of parental involvement and support as predictors of college students academic persistence. Results suggested that perceived parental involvement and support have specific roles in predicting student self-evaluation and achievement (Ratelle, Larose, Guay & Senecal, 2005). Parental

involvement in this study referred to spending time with child, being an active listener, and providing emotional resources. According to (Ratelle et al., 2005), students who have parental support are more likely to have self-determination and motivation.

Along with the previous study, another study supported that parental involvement can explain differences in GPA (Stone, 2006). Although the population of this sample was high school students, it was still able to support the relationship between parental involvement and students academic achievement. According to (Stone, 2006), sustained home communication related to higher grades and lower likelihood of dropout. Once again, the idea of parental communication is crucial in students academic achievement.

Mother's Role

Over the years researchers have examined the impact mothers can have on their child's academic achievement, specifically in the area of self-competence. Researchers have suggested that in some cases children believe that they lack the skills to do well in school. These are students who have low self-competence. However, some students believe they possess adequate skills to succeed in school. These students are believed to have had higher levels of self-competence. According to (Pomerantz, Fei-yin Ng, & Wang, 2006), mothers' mastery-oriented practices while assisting with homework enhanced psychological functioning among children with negative perceptions of their academic competence. This specific research supported that mothers' who assisted and motivated their children while doing homework can have a significant impact on their how their child perceives his or hers abilities in school.

On the other hand, research also indicated that the mothers' perceptions of their child's competence can influence children in both negative and positive ways. It would be ideal to think all mothers' view their child to have high self-competence; however, realistically mothers ' often fall short in believing what their child is capable or not capable of. Researchers have indicated that the more positive mothers' perceptions, the more positive children's academic functioning (Pomerantz and Dong, 2006). The parallels between the previous study and this one are significant in understanding the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement. The idea that mothers' attitudes toward assisting their child with homework, along with how they perceive their academic competence could have a direct impact on their academic performance. According to this study it was apparent that mothers' who had high self-competence tended to have had more of a positive influence in supporting their child in academic achievement. Another study proved that mothers' could help improve their child's achievement scores, just by being positive when helping them with homework (Pomerantz et al., 2005).

Fathers' Role

Current research has described that fathers' play an important role in their child's academic achievement. Researchers have studied the effects of children who have grown up in single-parent homes.

Some research has supported the fact that resident fathers have a better chance of having a positive impact on their child's lives; however, new research has shown

evidence that non-resident fathers' can have a positive impact as well. The assumption of past researchers has been if the father is absent from the home, he is also absent from their child's life; however, present research has proven otherwise (Howard et al., 2006). According to this research study, non-resident fathers' can still have a positive impact if they continue to stay involved in their child's life. With that being said, fathers' who had stable income and lived near their child tended to be at an advantage (Howard et al., 2006). Research conducted by (Howard et al, 2006), showed that children with more father contact had higher reading scores than children with little or no contact. One would assume then that fathers' do have a special role in contributing to their child's academic achievement.

Cultural Differences

Based on prior learning experiences/opportunities, being a minority student in the U.S. can effect students' academic achievement. This particular section will focus on how one's culture can play a role in their academic achievement.

Race-ethnicity and reading achievement. When investigating parental communication and support in the United States, caucasians tended to rank higher than those parents of African American and Hispanic children (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). This studied explained that Caucasian mothers, typically have higher education levels than African American and Hispanic mothers, thus they may be more likely to stress the importance of academic achievement. Researchers in the study also revealed that Caucasian mothers tended to be more involved in supporting their child's

learning needs by reading to them at home and taking frequent trips to the library. A possible explanation for this could be that African American and Hispanic mothers' lacked resources that would allow them to be more involved with their child's academic achievement.

English as a second language. In the United States there has been a growing number of minority children who are entering the public school system (Flores, Cicchetti, & Rogosch, 2005). With that being said, students often speak their native language at home and speak English at school. In order for students to get assistance from their parents they have to translate the school material from English to their native language. More so than not, parents find themselves struggling to help their children because they lack the understanding of the homework material (Flores et al., 2005). Most schools are aware of this and have tutors and after school programs that help them in areas their parents cannot. Some students have parents who speak English and this allows them to assist more with homework.

Parental socio-economic status. Researchers have examined the impact of socioeconomic status on children's academic achievement. One study investigated the contribution of child competencies to early academic achievement (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). The sample consisted of 195 Head Start children from 32 classrooms of a urban community. Most of these children lived below the poverty line. According to (McWayne, Fantuzzo, & McDermott, 2004), children living in poverty are at greater risk for difficulties in school performance. Parents are often working two jobs

just to pay the bills, leaving them little time for their children.

The Impact of Single-Parent Families

There is conflicting research on the topic of single-parent families and the impact they have on student academic achievement. In the past, children of single-parent families have been at a disadvantage compared to those who lived with both parents. As stated previously, there is evidence this does not always occur.

Fathers' Involvement

The types of fathering that men engage in tend to be the same regardless of residential status, yet both the frequency and the quality of paternal behaviors may be different for married vs. nonresidential fathers (Howard et al., 2006). This would suggest that non-residential fathers could still have a positive impact, but it may take more effort for them to get involved than residential fathers.

Socioeconomic Status

Often times, single-parent families have struggled to make ends meet. With that being said, single-parent families first priority is to make sure their kids have shelter, food, and clothing. Anything else beyond this is not high on their priority list. Between the cost of child care and providing their basic needs, there are not many resources left. In situations like this, it is not that the parents do not want to be involved it is that much of their time is spent working to provide for their children (Dearing et al., 2006).

One particular study focused on family involvement and low-income children's literacy. According to (Dearing et al., 2006), family involvement in school should be a

central aim of practice and policy solutions to the achievement gap between lower and higher income children. This study explained the reason for this gap was because low-income families have more stressors and less time to be involved in school.

Similar to the previous study (McCoach et al., 2006), found that socioeconomic status had a minimal impact on reading growth while school was in session; however, it had a larger impact on summer reading growth. The researchers of this study stressed the importance of preschool and summer programs for low socioeconomic status children. This would indicate that school staff supported children during the school year, but lacked reading support during the summer. Results showed that children who were read to and read themselves were at an advantage compared to those who did not read much over the summer.

Influence of Cultural Differences

Over the years, research has indicated that culture does play a role in students academic achievement. The studies in this section examined the Latino culture and students of rural communities.

The Latino Culture

The Latino culture is one of the largest growing minorities in the United States (Flores et al, 2005). Researchers have taken interest in this specific minority group and have notice some differences in academic achievement.

Family communication. By researching the Latino culture it is apparent that perceived parental support in school and family communication have strong influences on academics. One study found that adolescents' perceptions of family communication and parental support in academics were related to the likelihood of committing delinquent acts (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005). Therefore, Latino parents can prevent these delinquent acts by having better communication patterns with their child. In turn this can lead to improvement in school academically and behaviorally.

Maltreated vs. nonmaltreated Latino children. Current research on maltreated vs. nonmaltreated Latino children indicated that maltreated Latino children are at a disadvantage (Flores et al., 2005). This specific study examined the predictors of resilience in maltreated vs. nonmaltreated Latino children. Ego-resiliency and ego control, as personal resources, and the ability to form a positive relationship with an adult figure outside the immediate family predicted resilience (Flores et al., 2005). According to this study, maltreated Latino children showed fewer areas of resilient functioning. Those Latino students with higher resilient functioning were said to have had higher achievement in school than those with low resilient functioning. It is important for Latino students to form positive relationships outside of the family to have the encouragement and support they need. *Students of Rural Communities*

Most of the research on student achievement has been conducted on students who live in urban communities. One study decided to examine the impact of living in a rural community on students academic success. Unfortunately living in a rural community for

parents can mean lack of employment opportunities, poverty, and limited access to resources (Wettersten, Guilmino, Herrick, Hunter, Kim, Jagow, Beecher, Faul, Baker, Rudolph, Ellenbecker, & McCormick, 2005). Results from this study supported the hypothesized importance of social support, parental involvement, and self-efficacy in predicting the work and attitudes among rural students (Wettersten et al., 2005). Rural students with high parental involvement tended to have positive attitudes toward school, which lead to increased school performance.

Extra- Curricular Involvement

Extra-curricular involvement among upper class students has been shown to have both positive and negative effects on academic achievement. Some researchers have felt while extra-curricular involvement is healthy, overloading children with too much can be detrimental (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). This section will go further in detail on parental expectations and beliefs, parental criticism, and parents' emphasis on personal character vs. achievement.

Parental Expectations and Beliefs

Parents who are involved in their child's school work and activities tend to have a direct impact on their achievement. According to (Englund et al., 2004), it is important for parents to have high expectations on their child's academic achievement, but they need to be realistic as well. The key is that children excel in different areas and parents must understand this component in learning what their child's academic needs are. A student who struggles with math may find science easy and visa versa. It is beneficial for

students if their parents encourage and support them with their homework (Trautwein, Ludtke, Schnyden, & Niggli, 2006). In this study, one way parents showed encouragement and support was by providing enough time at night for completing and answering any questions on their homework. Children who are overloaded with extra-curricular activities find themselves too tired at night to complete their homework. In situations like this it would be beneficial for parents to set specific homework times that are not right before bed time.

Parental Criticism

Researchers have indicated that perceived parental criticism has a direct impact on students' academic performance (Luthar et al., 2006). This statement tends to coincide with perceived parental support. It seems obvious that students' who feel criticized by their parents may feel a lack of support from them as well. Another explanation could possibly be the students' may sometimes misinterpret their parents support and encouragement as criticism. Many teens have struggled with this because they want their independence, but are not experienced enough to make mature decisions. In a study using parental criticism as a family dimension, researchers found that perceived parental criticism was detrimental for both boys and girls (Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006). These students' also felt added pressure from parents, as well as, having felt like they never measured up to their expectations.

Parents' Emphasis on Personal Character vs. Achievement

Parents' emphasis on personal character vs. achievement was another family dimension from the previous study. They examined what students' believed their parents valued most, such as, being a nice person or attending a good college. Researchers found that this dimension did not have a direct impact on student achievement (Luthar et al., 2006). They found that it is more damaging when children feel their failures are render them unworthy in their parents' eyes or when they believe that their parents are uninvolved and uninterested in their activities and pursuits (Luthar et al., 2006). So it is fair to say that there is a significant amount of research to support that parental involvement does directly impact students' academic achievement.

Counselor's Role

As a school counselor there are many roles that need to be fulfilled. This section will focus on the different roles of the counselor and how they can help both students and parents. According to (Pressley, Solic, Gaskins, & Collins, 2006), effective schools are those of well-trained teachers and counselors who offer assistance to students and parents when needed.

Counselor as a Consultant

There are many times when the counselor's role will be that of the consultant. Teachers with students who have struggled with academics will often times consult with counselors on what they should do next (Pressley et al., 2006). Sometimes there are meetings with teachers, principal, parents, and the counselor. These meetings are to allow

everyone to discuss and share concerns about the specific needs for that child. School counselors will also consult with outside counselors for extra input on specific situations. For example, a school counselor may consult with a mental health counselor if there are mental health concerns with a student (Pressley et al, 2006).

Appropriate Preventions and Interventions

First and foremost, it is important for counselors to establish good rapport with students. This will allow students to feel more comfortable in a counseling setting. After the counselor and student have established a relationship the counselor can select appropriate interventions. In the case of academic achievement, students will come into the counseling office with their heads down. It is as if they feel like they have failed someone and they are waiting to be punished. So these may students may be a challenge at first, but will likely open up when the counselor and student have developed a sense of trust (Kulic, Horne, & Dagley, 2004).

Prevention groups. As a counselor, one way of dealing with academic achievement is by having specific groups that are targeted towards academic achievement. One study identified four beneficial groups, including task/work groups, psycho-educational groups, problem-solving groups, and psychotherapy groups (Kulic et al., 2004). Counselors who were trained in conducting these groups were shown to have had more students with higher achievement levels (Kulic et al., 2004).

In general, it is crucial for counselors to be educated in the area of prevention (Kulic et al., 2004). Most school counselors have used prevention methods in classroom

guidance. For example, for academic achievement counselors may have a study skills unit. As a preventative measure counselors will teach this unit at the beginning of the school year. This unit would emphasize homework organization and helpful hints in studying for test.

Interventions. Counselors strive to find the most appropriate interventions for each child. An intervention that may work well for one child may not work well for another. One study examined appropriate interventions for preadolescent aggressive boys and their parents (Lockman and Wells, 2004). Researchers in this study hypothesized that a Coping Power program for preadolescent aggressive boys would reduce delinquent behavior and increase academic achievement. The boys were in eight intervention sessions, which focused on behavioral and personal goal setting, awareness of feelings, use of positive self-coping statements, and relaxation techniques. Results indicated that the Coping Power intervention produced lower rates of delinquent behavior, but results varied on academic achievement (Lochman and Wells, 2004). Academic did increase for those students whose parents continued to show support and give encouragement.

Cultural Awareness

In counseling graduate programs students are required to take a multi-cultural class. This class gives students an idea of the beliefs and values of other cultures. In order to counsel someone of another culture it is important to be educated on different cultures. In some countries counseling is seen as a weakness and that can be challenging for

counselors. These students may tend to be more resistant at first and then open up after the relationship has been established.

Mexican American women. Mexican American women make up a small minority of the college population. In the United States, people embrace independence and self-reliance which is different from those women of the Mexican American culture. This may be one reason that has contributed to Mexican American women entering college. According to (Castillo et al., 2004), the United States beliefs and value systems, family support, and income all contribute to distress among Mexican American female college students. This study indicated that Mexican American women who lacked family support were less likely to enter or complete college. The researchers strongly suggested that counselors be familiar and educated with the Latina cultural values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research supports the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. If parents are involved students tend to do better in school than if they are not involved.

Summarize Findings

Overall, there was a significant amount of research that supported parental involvement does have an impact on student achievement. It was not only parental support that effected student performance, but also perceived parental involvement as well. In some cases, parents felt like they were involved on their child's life, but the children felt their parents spent little time with them (Ratelle et al., 2005). That mean that

parents and children had defined involvement differently.

Research also showed that socioeconomic status plays an important role in parental involvement and student achievement (Dearing et al., 2006). Socioeconomic status impacts students of both lower and upper class. Students of low socioeconomic status tend to have less parental involvement and lack the resources, which could lead to juvenile delinquency and lower grades. Students of the upper class tend to have higher grades and more parental involvement, but often times feel overwhelmed with so many extracurricular activities.

Children of single-parent families struggle with achievement scores, but only if the non-resident parent is not involved (Howard et al., 2006). It is important for non-resident parents to continue being supportive and involved in their child's life.

Implications for Counselors

Evidence shows that counselors need to be aware of how parental involvement impacts student's academic achievement (Howard et al., 2006). Counselors should be prepared with interventions that can help students who have struggled academically. It is also important for counselors to know their schools population, such as, ratio of free and reduced lunch, minorities, and average GPA of students. This gives counselor an idea of diversity in their school, which can allow them to feel prepared with their specific population.

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