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Abstract

Parental involvement (PI) is an important factor in children's academic learning. In this study, teachers' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement on inner city children's academic success were examined. The setting of the study was in an inner city Title I elementary school with a 90% African American student population. A purposeful random sampling method was used in the study. Fifty five parents and 14 teachers participated in the study. The Parental Involvement Survey was used to collect data from the 69 participants. Collected data were analyzed with SPSS. The findings revealed that parents and teachers perceived that family, extended family, and community support were important for inner city children's academic success. Teachers and Parents differed significantly on parental expectations, rewards, and educational decision making for the children. The paper discussed the implications of the research findings as well as suggestions for future research.

Keywords

parental involvement, urban education, elementary education

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Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement on Inner City Children's Academic Success

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Abstract: Parental involvement (PI) is an important factor in children's academic learning. In this study, teachers' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement on inner city children's academic success were examined. The setting of the study was in an inner city Title I elementary school with a 90% African American student population. A purposeful random sampling method was used in the study. Fifty five parents and 14 teachers participated in the study. The Parental Involvement Survey was used to collect data from the 69 participants. Collected data were analyzed with SPSS. The findings revealed that parents and teachers perceived that family, extended family, and community support were important for inner city children's academic success. Teachers and Parents differed significantly on parental expectations, rewards, and educational decision making for the children. The paper discussed the implications of the research findings as well as suggestions for future research.

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Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement on Inner City Children's Academic Success

Parental involvement (PI) is an important factor in children's academic learning. It is a social, cultural, and cognitive construct that may be helpful in improving educational learning outcomes (Creech, 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). As a matter of fact, parental involvement has been identified as a priority for the education of inner city children (Jackson, 2008). In addition, family plays an essential and immediate role throughout children's development (Woolfolk, 2013). Researchers have found that strong parental involvement correlated with positive attitudes toward education, school attendance, readiness in school, behavioral performance, and better academic achievement (Cambpell, 2008; Kauchak & Eggen, 2011; Parry, 2010).

Although parental involvement was studied, there was no common definition found in the literature. Issues related to engaging parents from diverse backgrounds in their children's education were a challenge for schools (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2010). Turkey and Kao (2009) found that Hispanic parents and Asian parents are more likely to report feeling not welcomed at school. Black, Hispanic, and Asian foreign-born parents faced substantially higher levels of barriers than White native-born counterparts (Hornby & Witte, 2010).

Literature Review

Many factors are thought to be involved with parental involvement. Research has indicated that factors such as education attainment, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, employment and SES impact the level of parental involvement (Tezel-Sahin, Inal, & Ozbey, 2011; Skaliotis, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009). The more education parents

have, the more active parents become in their children's education. At times when children have behavior problems, fathers become more involved than mothers do. Black parents were twice as much as likely to report that they are "highly involved" in their children's education than their white counterparts. Mothers who are employed part-time tended to have more involvement than full-time employed mothers (Christensen, Schneider, & Butler, 2011).

Parental involvement is more complicated than the factors discussed above. Although economic resources were necessary in getting parents involved in their children's education, children from disadvantaged homes were found to be successful when they have parents who had high aspirations for their children and had provided significant educational support to them. Other factors that contribute to our understanding of parental involvement include individual parent and family differences, individual differences among children, parent-teacher and child-teacher interactions, and societal and psychological factors (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Parental involvement (PI) contributes to building partnership between schools and children's educational success. Parents bring the social psychological capital to schools. Their involvement provides informative feedback for the school's curriculum (Hornby & Lafaele, 2010). They provide social networks and resources for schools (Turney & Kao, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2010). Parents who served as supporters of learning at home help create learning environments and educational activities that indirectly support teachers (Hirsto, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Yet schools still bear the hallmarks of formality, inflexibility and timetabling that characterized schooling historically, which remains counterproductive to form the best parent-school relationships to support children's learning (Hornby & Witte, 2010).

Parental involvement (PI) has been practiced in different forms and to different degrees. Some research studies showed that the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) assisted in helping parents organize their participation and self-review in schooling activities, such as family projects. Prizes and ceremonies for the celebration of children's successes help to improve PI (Hornby & Lafaele, 2010; Sanchez, Plata, Grosso, & Leird, 2010). Parental engagement in their children's education increases even more with home schooling. More African American parents have made decisions to home school their children for reasons of safety and healthy learning environment (Field-Smith & Williams, 2008).

To increase PI in students' education, more flexibilities could be made available to parents. Work place schedule could be more flexible and family friendly so that parents could have time to address children's basic learning needs and to engage in school related activities. Parents' engagement in those activities can enhance children's emotional, social well-being and academic performance (Christensen, Schneider, & Butler, 2011). Technology use could offer more flexibility for schools, parents, and work places, such as telecommunicating, email, and newsletter. Services that enable parents to access relevant sources at school could engage parents and support their children's success as well (Hornby & Lafaele, 2010).

Summarizing, PI practices, cultural differences, individual differences, family system, heritage, country of origin and technology use may influence parental involvement practices (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Defur, 2012). Considerations on parents' values, beliefs, cultural orientations and attitudes are needed when developing skills of non-judgment and respect for diversity to work with parents (Defur, 2012; Sanchez, Plata, Grosso, & Leird, 2010; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Furthermore, literature suggested the use of culturally responsive strategies when working with culturally diverse parents (Hornby & Lafaele,

2010; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Bowen & Griffin, 2010; Kiyama, 2011). For example, Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) planning and meetings were used to engage parents, educators and students to work together. To work better with parents of English Language Learners, translation for parents and students' work were used. Some schools provided parents with connections to local ethnic communities to help develop parental self-efficacy. Training staff to be multicultural competent to work with families could be an effective strategy as well.

However, teachers reported professional training on how to work with parents has not been sufficient and very limited economic resources are available to help develop PI (Horny & Lafaele, 2010). Hirsto (2010) concluded that it was critical to prepare and train preservice and inservice teachers with skills, knowledge, and attitudes to work with parents and families.

Research Study, Setting, and Research Questions

In this paper, parental involvement is examined. The perceptions of the teachers and parents in a southern inner city school were studied. The inner-city school in the study was located in a lower ranking county in terms of K-12 education in the state of Georgia. The County had an enrollment of 32,000 students and it ranked 156th of the 164 school districts in the state of GA at the time of the study. Over 45% of the residents in the county were from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds. African American population in the county is over 30%, which is 2.5 times that of the national average (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

The school was a K-5 elementary school with an enrollment of 500 students. The demographics of the student body were 90% African Americans, 8% European Americans, and 2% Hispanics. The school employed about 35 teachers and 20 staff workers at the time of the study. Majority of the teachers were African Americans.

Two research questions were addressed in the study:

- 1) How do parents and teachers perceive parental involvement on inner city children's academic success?
- 2) How different are parents' perceptions of parental involvement from those of teachers'?

Research Methodology

The study was a quantitative study. Purposeful random sampling method was used to collect data from elementary school parents and teachers. The *Parental Involvement Survey* was the instrument (see Appendix A). It has eight 5-point Likert scaled items (from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”) on parental involvement. The Cronbach's alpha reliability index was 0.88. Fifty-five parents, 14 teachers participated in the study. Data were collected from paper copies of the survey distributed to teachers and parents of the elementary school.

Data Analysis and Results

Data collected were entered into Excel and SPSS for data analysis. Returned surveys include 39 from Parents, and 14 from Teachers. Seven surveys, 4 by Parents and 3 by Teachers, did not have complete data therefore they were not used for data analysis. Data from 35 Parents and 11 Teachers, a total of 46 participants' data, were analyzed. Parents and Teachers were coded by using 1 and 2 for data analysis (1-Parents, and 2-Teachers). The subgroups within parents were coded by using 1 to 3 to represent each subgroup, i.e. 1-first grade Parents, 2-second grade Parents, and 3-third grade Parents.

Table 1 and Table 2 below showed descriptive statistics by Item, and by Parents and Teachers. The mean score for Parents was 20.17 and 19.00 for Teachers. The third grade Parents had the highest mean score. First grade Parents had the largest range from as low as 15 to as high as 24. Overall Teachers had lower ratings than Parents. Similarly, both Parents and Teachers

rated item 1 the highest and item 8 the lowest. Three items, 4, 6, and 7, had a difference in the means larger than 0.50 between Teachers and Parents. Teachers' mean score for item 4 was higher than Parents. The mean scores of items 6 and 7 were lower for Teachers than for Parents.

Table 1

The Mean Scores of Teachers and Parents by Item

Variable	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
Parents	4.63	4.20	1.77	1.89	2.14	2.11	1.77	1.66
Teachers	4.92	4.33	1.67	2.50	1.75	1.42	1.17	1.25
Overall	4.7	4.26	1.75	2.03	2.05	1.94	1.63	1.56

Note. $N=46$.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics by Parents and Teachers

Variable	Category	<i>M</i>	Maximum	Minimum	<i>n</i>
Parents	First Grade	20.00	24	15	11
	Third Grade	20.30	24	16	10
	Fifth Grade	20.21	32	16	14
	All Parents	20.17	32	16	35
Teachers		19.00	22	15	11
	Overall	19.87	32	15	46

Note. $N=46$.

Table 3

The results of the t-Test between Teachers and Parents

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Parents	33.69	4.05	
Teachers	35.5	2.5	
Parents*Teachers	19.94	9.71	8.44*

Note. *N*=46.

A two-tailed *t* test was conducted to determine the significance between variables Teachers and Parents. A significant *t* was found between Teachers and Parents. The $t(45) = 8.44$ ($p < .05$). (See Table 3). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) between Parents of three grade levels was found to be significant, $F(2, 34) = 22.06$ ($p < .5$). (See Table 4).

Table 4

The Results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Scores of Parents

Variable	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Between Groups	34	63.62	1.87	22.06*
Within Group	8	152.17	19.02	

Note. *N*=47.

* $p < .05$.

Discussion

As revealed in the findings, Teachers and Parents had different ratings on Parental Involvement (PI). Teachers rated PT significantly lower than Parents. Both Teachers and Parents agreed highly that parents should be involved in children's academic learning outside school. Both Teachers and Parents disagreed that "Extended family/community support does not influence children's learning." A further analysis revealed there was a significant difference between Parents as well. Third grade level Parents had the highest rating on PI. The reason could be that third grade is the grade level when students take high stakes tests and face high stakes decisions on grade retention and promotion. Parents could have increased involvement due to the nature of the high stakes of their children's academic performance in third grade.

In answer to the first research question (how do parents and teachers perceive parental involvement on inner city children's academic success?), the results of the study showed that Parents and Teachers both thought that parental involvement and family and community support influence children's academic success. In answer to the second research question (how different are parents' perceptions of parental involvement from those of teachers'?), the results of the study indicated a significant difference between teachers and parents regarding PI. Parents tended to report more PI than teachers did.

Parents and Teachers differed in areas such as the use of rewards and incentives, parental expectations, and decision making for children. Teachers tended to embrace rewards and incentives more than Parents. Parents did not seem to think high expectations and decision making for children's education correlated with children's academic success as much as Teachers did. The difference in perceptions on motivation factors between Teachers and Parents could be caused by parents' lack of knowledge and training. Research supports that higher

expectations lead to increased motivation and a higher level of academic achievement (Rimkute, Hirvonen, Tolvanen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2012; Woolfolk, 2013).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is revealed in the study that Teachers expected more parental involvement in children's education and Parents reported more parental involvement by constructing a positive estimation of their performance. Shafir & LeBoeuf (2002) found there was no correlation between behavior and justification and obviously Parents and Teachers were on different pages regarding PI. Although Parents and Teachers both acknowledge the importance of parental involvement, Parents think they were already involved. Therefore, to expect parents to become more involved and to provide more motivation to their children's learning is likely to backfire on the parent-school relationship. Literature suggests it is necessary and critical to train teachers to be culturally responsive, non-judgmental, and respectful when working with parents (Defur, 2012; Hirston, 2010; Sanchez, Plata, Grosso, & Leird, 2010).

Future research could focus on how to build strong school-parent relationships to convince parents that more from them is needed to ensure inner city children's academic success. Future studies could also focus on how parental involvement may translate into students' academic success in inner city schools empirically and factors that contribute to the significant difference among parents about parental involvement.

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Appendix A
The Parental Involvement Survey

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	No Opinion 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1. Parents should participate in academic support activities with their children outside of school.					
2. Parents need education and training to help children's learning.					
3. Volunteer for school does not help children's learning.					
4. Parental support through rewards and incentives could negatively affect their children's learning.					
5. Parenting style does not impact children's learning.					
6. Parental expectations had little to do with children's academic learning.					
7. Parents should never make decisions for their children in their education.					
8. Extended family/community support does not influence children's learning.					