

Sociology of the Family

Parental Engagement in Education

An evaluation of the impact of socioeconomic status on engagement.

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Line of research

Academic Achievement (AA) is attributed to many diverse factors in a student's life. For the purpose of this study, I am interested in reviewing the influence parent engagement has on AA. More specifically, I am interested in the way parent engagement in education shifts in its effectiveness across socioeconomic status (SES). Currently, the rhetoric surrounding parent engagement in a child's education accepts that parent engagement is an influential factor in AA. So my line of research will focus on the similarities and differences that present themselves across differing socioeconomic statuses. For the sake of this research, SES will primarily represent household income, immigrant status, and maternal education.

Purpose

In a nation constantly striving to improve measures of academic achievement, it is fundamental to our academic success as a nation that we comprehensively understand the factors holding influence in the field of AA. In addition to interpreting the factors at a holistically influential level, it is also crucial that we take a step closer and analyze the factors that influence each macro level influential factor. For that reason, I have decided to further research the extent of the impact SES has on the quality of parental engagement in their child's academic achievement. In addition, the following analysis will outline successful parent engagement and interpret the impact successful parent engagement has on AA. With an in depth understanding of the influence of SES on parental engagement, we will be able to better understand its role in working towards increased AA and we will be able to provide adequate solutions and interventions to students.

Research questions/hypotheses

There is an abundance of research into the role parent engagement plays in improving academic achievement. The majority of the research looks at the relationship between parent engagement and AA. While this approach is necessary, I feel understanding the motivational factors behind parent engagement will lead to a more actionable conclusion. In a review of a pilot study regarding parent engagement, Alameda-Lawson discusses the strongly supported conclusion that parent involvement and AA are positively correlated when analyzed independently from other socio-demographic characteristics (Alameda-Lawson 2014). This consistent positive association assures in me the idea that we need to identify ways to strengthen the quality of parental engagement. This notion, coupled with my desire to research the ways minority populations experience systems, has lead me to pose the following research questions:

- RQ1 What are the characteristics most closely aligned with successful parent engagement in their child's academic success?
- RQ2 What impact can successful parental engagement have on a child's academic achievement?
- RQ3 In what ways does SES impact the quality of parental engagement?

With these research questions answered, I will have a strong understanding of the role SES plays in parent engagement in education as well as a strong understanding of the role parental engagement plays in a child's AA.

Literature review

Alameda-Lawson saw a need to run a pilot study of an alternate form of parent engagement that focuses on building communities of support among parents. The pilot study use a group of 16

parents who had completed an outreach training and had at least one child in at least the third grade. The study struggled to find a control group but eventually composed a group of students who shared the same classroom, gender, and ethnicity as children in the test group. The study collected data from parents in both the control group and the test group and incentivized the data collection process. The study by Alameda-Lawson looked at child's academic achievement in comparison with parent empowerment and school-directed parent involvement in an attempt to find a difference between the social based pilot and the traditional forms of engagement (Alameda-Lawson 2014). Altschul looked specifically at the involvement of parents of Mexican American youth. The study analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study from 1988. The NELS is nationally representative. They analyzed the NELS with respect to 8th grade parent involvement and compared this to 10th grade academic achievement. The study looked at parental involvement with school organizations, discussion of school-related issues between parents and students, parental help with homework, parent and child involvement in enriching activities, educational resources in the home, and allocation of resources to extracurricular instruction. The study by Altschul controlled for generation, child's sex and family income (Altschul 2011). In contrast, the study by Dumont and their team conducted in 2014 looked at the quality of parental homework involvement. Similarly to the study by Altschul, the study by Dumont analyzed data from a past collection. This study used data from the Tradition and Innovation in School Systems Study. The average age of students analyzed was 11.10. This study measured parental homework involvement and compared it to students' academic functioning, reading achievement, reading grade, reading effort, homework procrastination, socioeconomic background (occupational status, educational background and immigrant background).

McNeal, in 2001, looked at how socioeconomic status impacts parental involvement and the subsequent influence on cognitive and behavioral outcomes. This study is similar to the study by Altschul (2011) in that it used data collected from the NELS. The final sample used to measure drop out was made up of 15,663 cases and the final sample used to measure behavior outcomes was 11,401 cases. The study looked at four distinct factors: parent-child discussion, parent-teacher organization involvement, monitoring, and educational support strategies. The factors were weighted and compared with academic achievement (McNeal 2001). Finally, Park and Halloway (2013) studied the direct impact of SES on the quality of parental involvement in adolescents' education. Their study used nationally representative data from the Education Survey of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program. With this data they then selected all Black, White and Latino participants who had a child in high school. They ended up with 3,248 respondents. Park and Halloway measured school outreach efforts and parent satisfaction, parental motivational beliefs, and parent involvement and compared them with parent demographics to identify demographic based trends (Park and Halloway 2013).

Parents are just one half of the parent school equation. Much of the rhetoric in the field of parent engagement in education reviews the quality and quantity of school outreach to parents and how that outreach is perceived by parents. In a study evaluating the impact of SES on parent involvement, Park and Halloway collected data on the perception of school outreach and how this perception impacted the quality and quantity of engagement of parents. Park and Halloway reference a 2007 study by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HDS) that outlines the three most influential factors in parent engagement. The second of these factors is the parent's perception of the school's outreach methods. Through their research, Park and Halloway concluded that the quality of a school's outreach methods was strongly associated with level of engagement. More

importantly, the study concluded that the parent's perception of the authenticity of the outreach strongly correlated with the level of engagement for black families (Park and Halloway 2013). The discussion surrounding the influence of school outreach on parent engagement is expanded by Ralph B. McNeal Jr in a 2001 study. To expand upon the research in this field, McNeal posits that school outreach is mediated by the parent's social capital. He discusses that without significant social capital, the parent does not have the capacity to absorb invitations from schools to be involved. McNeal analyzed data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to interpret the social barriers present between school outreach methods and parent engagement. This analysis states that minority families and families from poor households experience social capital differently. Their students are expected to perform more poorly in academic settings and, in response the teacher outreach efforts are reduced (McNeal 2001).

In many developed nations, child learning does not stop at the classroom door and neither does the opportunity for parent engagement. Research surrounding parent engagement into homework is primarily focused on the quantity of homework engagement and less focused on the quality of homework engagement. In Altschul's 2011 study, they concluded that parental engagement with homework is negatively correlated with academic achievement. In other words, parent engagement in homework support is correlated with decreased academic achievement. This is especially true with children of low income families of color. In their study that looked specifically at Mexican American youth, Altschul surveyed parents to find that on average parents engage in homework help 1-2 times per month (Altschul 2011). Park and Halloway also interpreted the role SES plays with regard to parental engagement in home-based support. With regard to SES, they found that high-SES parents were less likely to provide home-based support

than low-SES parents (Park and Halloway 2013). Dumont et. al found in their 2013 study that immigrant status was the strongest predictor of the quality of parental homework engagement. Time is of the essence in the study conducted by Dumont and their team. They discuss the shifting role parents play as their child ages through education. Specifically, they discuss the detrimental impact of parental homework control (Dumont et. al 2013).

In a strong majority of the research, parent beliefs, parent self efficacy and parent empowerment have a strong correlation with academic achievement in children. Park and Halloway discuss the role parent educational expectations play in the AA of children. They found that income, mothers' education, and being a black participant all had significant impacts on educational expectations. The first of the three influential factors outlined but the HDS model is parents' belief in the efficacy of their school engagement (Park and Halloway 2013). In a pilot study, Alameda-Lawson found that parent empowerment is positively and significantly associated with reading scores but not math or language scores. In other words, when parents experience high levels of empowerment their children are more likely to receive increased standardized reading scores. To measure parent empowerment, Almeda-Lawson used the Empowerment Outcomes Assessment – a 25 item Likert scale assessment (Almeda-Lawson 2014).

A family's socioeconomic standing significantly impacts the family's access to resources. This remains true as a family attempts to incorporate academic resources into their out of school support. In their study of Mexican American youth and the quality of parent academic engagement they receive, Altschul quantitatively measured the number of school-related items that may contribute to AA. They found that parents investing money to improve their child's AA

in the form of resources or extracurricular instruction had a greater impact than parents investing their time (Altschul 2011).

The research provides reason to engage in the improvement process for parental engagement because the outcomes are mostly positive. Park and Halloway discuss the importance of parent engagement in their research. They comment to parent engagements ability to increase academic achievement, increase child engagement in education, and decrease dropout rates. They reference the inclusion of parental engagement as one of the six points outline in the No Child Left Behind Act (Park and Halloway 2013). McNeal goes further with the discussion to outline the varying affect present in parental engagement across SES. For example, McNeal concludes through his research interpretation of the NELS that children of parents with social capital are more likely to have increased achievement and reduced non-normative behavior. In addition, McNeal concludes that parents from high SES are more likely to have the ability to call upon their social capital to increase their child's AA. In an overarching conclusion, McNeal states that the positive influences attributed to parental involvement are only present in families with high-SES. Not only do families from high-SES experience more parental engagement but they also engage in consistently higher quality parental engagement (McNeal 2001). In their focused analysis of parent involvement in homework, Dumont and their team conclude that parental involvement with homework can have both positive and negative effects on AA. They state that parental control is detrimental to AA while parental structure promotes increased AA (Dumont et. al)

Discussion

The research in this field is similar in many methodological ways. The majority of the studies used data pools that were nationally representative. This adds validity to the results and makes the findings more applicable to the general population. Uniquely, the study by Alameda-Lawson

(2014) focused on the data of an alternate solution and the likelihood that it will produce more significant results. Each article addressed the interconnected nature of race and SES by controlling the appropriate factors.

Through the research, it is clear that parent engagement has significant opportunity to positively correlate with academic achievement. That being said, for families living in lower socioeconomic statuses, access to high quality parent engagement is often restricted. Successful parental engagement is attributed to an interlocked system of support composed of self-efficacy with regard to engagement, increased presence of school-related resources, high quality homework structure, and authentic high-quality school outreach. Reduced socioeconomic status often provides barriers to each of these components of successful parental engagement. If successful, parental engagement can correlate positively with increased academic achievement and reduced behavior problems in school.

References

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