

Full Length Research Paper

Academic achievement: A proactive approach to working with African-American males' school failure during their formative years

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Researches generally agree that positive parental support will make a significant difference in academic achievement of children, especially during their formative years. However, scant attention has been given to the impact parents have on academic achievement in African-American males during their formative years, which may be the most crucial time during the development and learning of the child. This article utilizes a correlation research design to explore differences in urban and rural Head Start African-American male students' academic achievement, parenting types, and socioeconomic status. The goal of this article is to help Head Start programs address academic achievement in African-American males during their formative years in order to curb high school dropout, juveniles' crime rates and reduce the pipeline for African-American boys entering the adult penal system, later in their lives. Implementation of such an effort will represent a vital contribution on the part of Head Start to address, ameliorate, and ultimately reverse the increasing high school dropout and juvenile crime rates of young African-American males by putting emphasis on education long before socially and economically disadvantaged African-American males enter the public school system.

Key words: African-American males, academic achievement, single parenting, preschool assessment, family type, socioeconomic status.

INTRODUCTION

The family is a unique nucleus that has been studied indirectly throughout history as a total system that influences member behavior and forms personality (Rivera, 1997). A number of studies have examined the effect of family dynamics on the formation of a child's personality (Griffin, 1996; Prevoo and Weel, 2014). Many researchers argue that family has a profound impact on the development of personality, behavior, and cognition, which ultimately leads to how well a child functions in society as he grows older (Eccles and Harold, 1994). However, more attention should be given to the influence the family has on a child's academic achievement, which impacts the child ability to function in society as a

healthy, productive adult in later life (Arnold et al., 2008; Parker et al., 1999).

Much has been written about intervention strategies involving parents as they relate to a child's academic outcome. It is clear from literature that parental roles are important in helping children learn and adapt to the school environment. There are various studies testing the impact family type has on academic achievement. However, many of these studies do not focus on African-American males during their formative years. Acceptance and early support for children's academic ability is difficult for many poor families due to their immediate attention on the basic necessities of life, but it is the most crucial gift

parents can give a child, especially a disadvantage child from a poverty stricken environment. When poor children feel supported and accepted, they begin to gain inner strengths and the courage to persevere (Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy, 2009).

Related literature

The literature strongly agrees that positive parental support will make a significant difference in academic achievement of children, especially during their formative years. According to Sheridan and Kratochwill (2008), the active participation of parents in school is believed to have positive effects on children, parents, and teachers. They reported that parent participation has been found to be related to significant academic progress, fewer disciplinary problems, increase self-esteem and social skills, better school attendance and study habits, and positive attitudes about the educational process. Their comprehensive review of parent involving literature suggests that parents involved with their children's teachers: (a) developed more positive attitudes about school and school personnel, (b) initiated greater community support and involvement, (c) developed more positive school attitudes about themselves and increased self-confidence, (d) reported improved parent-child relationships, (e) reported an increase in the amount of contact with the school, and (f) developed more effective skills at using positive forms of parenting and reinforcement (McCormick et al., 2013).

A family's contribution to school failure in most cases plays a secondary role. Although the school is responsible for the child's learning, parents contribute toward or detract from their child's success at school in several ways: (a) their expressed attitudes toward school, academic learning, and teachers, (b) their own competency or lack of success in school, and (c) their disinterest in or reinforcements of appropriate school-related behaviors, such as attending school regularly, completing homework, reading and studying (McCormick et al., 2013).

Research suggests that competence in school depends on the warmth and balance of parent-child interactions. Parents and teachers who communicate and collaborate with each other provide a base of strength for a student's successful education. Two-way communication between parents of students attending special classes and the special education teachers can create a communication network that maximizes student's growth and potential (Gallagher, 1988). As children grow, they rely on three major systems of support: their family, their school, and their peer group. The family provides the child's first interpersonal connection. Before children go to school, parents begin to teach social awareness and foster social development by (a) providing good models for their own behavior, (b) talking about what is the appropriate

behavior so that the child understands what is expected, (c) praising positive social behavior when it occurs, (d) organizing cooperative family activities and participation, fostering a sense of responsibility, (e) discussing interpersonal conflicts when they arise and suggesting alternative ways of handling them, (f) establishing a level of communication with children so that their problems and concerns can be shared (careful listening is as important as giving good advice), and (g) encouraging social independence and self-reliance for the child (Hammill and Larsen, 1978).

In the area of motor training, the parent can play a very significant role that can be both independent of what the school is doing and supportive of it. Researchers tend to advocate that parents not completely shelter their child, but encourage him or her to participate in group activities and in competitive games with peers. All children, but especially children who are socially and economically disadvantaged, need a stable external support system to assist them in developing a strong ego. However, the emphasis must be stability and consistency from the family system. Parents' feelings about their children determine to a great extent the children's attitudes toward both learning and themselves. Messages sent by parents and received by the child include those unspoken. Children have the ability to tune into moods and feelings around them, from body language to facial expressions (Hammill and Larsen, 1978).

Children are able to identify family stressors, recognize their parent's mood, and determine when they can depend on their parents for support and reassurance. Researchers have identified a twofold influence of parental behaviors on children: (a) the extent to which children experience a positive, affective, personal relationship with caregivers (support), and (b) the type of control exercised over children's behavior (Barber, 1992). Similar reports suggest that parental supportive behavior has been reliably related to pro-social outcomes in children of all ages and across ethnic, social, and cultural boundaries. In contrast to other studies, Barber stated that given the above constancy, there is little reason to expect that parental support would be useful in differentiating among problems behaviors. However, the role of parental control is complex (McCormick et al., 2013).

In an earlier study, Kauffman (1989) found that family characteristics appeared to predict behavioral development of the child in a complex interaction with other factors such as socioeconomic status, sources of emotional support outside the family, and the child's age. Understanding behavior includes the assumption that all aspects of a child's environment are interconnected; changes in elements of the ecology have great implications for changes in other elements of life such as academic awareness. For example, children with behavioral problems in the academic setting may be the recipient of poor parenting skills (Silver et al., 2005).

Silver et al. (2005) found that poor parenting skills predicted the quality of the child-teacher relationship and difficulty in the learning environment occurs when there is conflict between the child and the teacher.

Family relationships are important factors in a child's development. Family relationships play a dominant role in determining a child's attitude and behavior toward school functioning. The temperament, academic abilities, and social skills that a child brings to school appear to be important in influencing the child's behavioral development and school achievement.

Outside the family, school is probably the most important socializing influence on children and youth. Success or failure at school affects behaviors at home and in the community and further has effects on school performance. Success at school assumes even greater importance if a child's home and environment are disastrous. Academic success is fundamentally important for social development and post-school opportunity (Kauffman, 1992).

Wallace and Kauffman (1978) reported that children with a history of problems in school are usually more insecure than their peers. They are burdened with the knowledge that it is harder for them to learn, and they have doubts about their competency and worth. When parents try to make them fit in with peers of their own age, it becomes difficult for the child and the entire family system. Studying debilitating factors and examining negative consequences of poor academic achievement in students is a momentous task. Factors that lead to school failure and dropping out, increased juvenile crime rate, teen pregnancy, and single parenting generally remove the focus on early childhood influences. This is largely due to the immediate attention these issues demand.

Researchers suggest that poor minority parents are often less knowledgeable and may be less involved in their children's educational programs due to much of their interests, time, and attention is focused on meeting their child's basic needs, such as clothing, housing and food, when compared to European-American parents and their children in the same programs (Lareau, 1987, 1989; McCamey, 2015). Additional studies have found that family structure and social capital are related and play a significant role in children overall academic development. Each parent provides significant support that contributes to the cognitive growth and academic development of the child. When there is only one parent in the family, children receive less parental contact and do not have access to the same amount of social and financial capital (Wenfan, 1999).

The development of early intervention programs that work with the family as a whole could be a preventive and proactive measure that could assist parents and family members in helping their young children become successful students long before they enter a formal educational system. Not only would the child be exposed to learning early in their development, but parents and

other family members could also teach the child that academic achievement is important. This idea has been clearly documented throughout the child development and educational literature. It is undeniable that children whose parents are supportive and believe in their child's academic performance tend to have higher academic success than students whose parents are not involved or do not believe in their child's educational process (ACYF, 2001; Christenson, 1995; Eccles and Harold, 1996; Epstein and Dauber, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). As the agents of socialization, parents can apply human development knowledge to the greatest social advantage and thereby elevate the quality of life and general competence of family members. The variable of racial identity, family types, socioeconomic status, and self-concept are important characteristics, which are immediately perceived and reacted to by the "other" in initial social interactions (Comer, 1980). These variables attain meaning and value for individual as a consequence of maturation and social experience, as well as impact of academic achievement and cognitive development (Levine, 2002). Unfortunately, in the course of social interactions, personal characteristics are infrequently discussed with the child by significant others. Instead, important characteristics of self or identity are relegated to informal, impersonal agents of communication (e.g., television, children's readers, toys, educational materials, peers, and carelessly used stereotypical labels).

The findings on self-concept and academic achievement indicate a correlation (Ghazvini, 2011; Sanchez and Roda, 2007). Self-concept, the way an individual views himself or herself, is an essential aspect of social development. Academic self-concept is how one perceives oneself regarding academic ability (Bong and Skaslvik, 2003). Sanchez and Roda (2007) found that total self-concept was related to school performance among 6th graders. Ghazvini (2011) examined high school students and found that academic self-concept predicted academic performance in literature and mathematics. Other findings show the importance of parental support for positive self-concept. Children with high self-esteem tend to have high parental involvement (Blash and Unger, 1995).

African-American parents have a difficult task of raising their children in terms of fostering self-esteem and positive racial identity in a society that promotes racism, negative media exposure, and stereotypes (Thomas and Speight, 1999). According to Wenfan (1999), parents are the primary source that generates interest for African-American students to learn. Regardless of the degree of difficulty in raising children, educating the child is specifically the duty and responsibility of the parents (Kunjufu, 1986). However, parental supports system has proven to be an effective tool for parents to give their children a good start in pursuing academics. Olson and Kieschnick (1994) investigated the impact maternal influences have on the child and the authors concluded

that single parents who are supportive of their children's learning contribute to healthy family functioning that ultimately leads to healthier relationships with their children. The authors also found that students demonstrated heightened social and cognitive competence on the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence- Revised, the Child Behavior Checklist, and the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence when their parents had support with child care (Olson and Kieschnick, 1994).

Tiedmann and Faber (1992) conducted a study to specifically address the relationship between academic achievement, parent involvement, and home environment. A significant finding of their study concerned students who received consistent maternal support; this enhanced the preschool student's academic performance and achievement. An additional finding of this study suggests that maternal support is highly correlated to pre-numerical and meta-linguistic competence of preschool students.

In an earlier study conducted at Michigan State University in the late 1900s, researchers investigated the relationship between academic achievement and parents change agents in enhancing preschool students' developmental and structured language. Pre-test and post-test measures were utilized to evaluate children's intellectual, linguistic, and self-concept performance, as well as the quality of mother-child interaction and the mother's storytelling ability. The parents in this study were required to participate in a 12-week, 2-hour instructional session with teachers using the specific materials developed in teacher-directed workshops. The subjects in this study were all Caucasian parents and students. The results of this study showed that as parent-child interaction increased, the children's intellectual and language performance improved, as well as their self-concept. In addition, parents who continued to work with their children appeared to give them a learning advantage over other students that were worked with less.

The parent is the center of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), and exercises the most influence over the developing individual. Unity and cohesiveness of the family unit lies with the parent. The family is a social institution that contributes, positively or negatively, to the child's cognitive development and ultimately determines the academic success in the formal educational process (Burts et al., 1992; Levine, 2002; Schmitt and Kleine, 2010; Zeece and Wang, 1998). These authors believe that this relationship is a key determinate that predicts later academic success in students as they enter the public school system.

In a modified, cross-sectional, longitudinal (3-year) study, Zeece and Wang (1998) focused on the influence that family empowerment and transitioning programs have on the development of preschool children; the authors found that the children of parents who were

actively involved in the study exhibited a variety of developmental gains over time. Specifically, students whose parents participated in this study and were actively engaged in their children's learning process not only improved in their personal-social, adaptive, motor, and communication skills, they also showed significant gains in their cognitive capacity (Zeece and Wang, 1998).

According to Rush (1999), a child's interaction with parents is the first formal educational process the child will encounter. It is at this stage that language develops and promotions of early literacy skills are being developed, long before children begin to learn their ABCs, numbers, or letters. Many researchers have concluded that this process is crucial and critical. Parents who do not verbally and effectively communicate with their children prior to their preschool years create a situation where children have to play "catch up" as early as preschool (Lonigan et al., 1998).

A report on the National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration study that was designed to provide information about the effectiveness of the impact on children, families, schools and communities of 31 transitional demonstration programs in 30 states and the Navajo nation from 1991 to 1992 revealed significant results regarding parents participation. Within this multi-site study, the top 3% of children placed them in the ninety-eighth percentile nationally. More importantly, it was concluded that the parenting styles was better than other Head Start families. It is clear that parental involvement enhances a child's ability to benefit from early learning and language opportunities, as well as academic enrichment activities (Ramey et al., 2000; Reyes et al., 2012).

Halle et al. (1997) conducted a study that examined family influences on school achievement in low-income African-American children. The study focused on parental influence on math and reading. Although there was a positive correlation between the aforementioned variables, parental beliefs about their children's ability were more strongly linked with child outcomes than the parent's achievement-orientation behavior. The authors suggested that parents' beliefs in the educational process of their children produced positive academic outcomes (Halle et al., 1997).

Head Start national accountability outcome measures of 83 programs and 6,000 children and families found that 75% of the children in the aforementioned studies whose parents read to them made more positive gains in cognitive and social skills development. In addition to the above finding, parental involvement and satisfaction with the Head Start programs showed significant difference in child and programs outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012).

There are numerous studies suggesting that parental involvement is the key to a student's academic success as early as the first few months of life. Consequently, Head Start programs and other educational institutions

must collaborate with parents to develop a sound working relationship to benefit the total child. In order to facilitate this process, Head Start outcome measures have identified five objectives in their Programs Performances Standard to ensure the inclusion of family in working partnership (ACYF, 2001; Galindo and Sheldon, 2012; McCormick et al., 2013). The Programs Performance Standards are:

Objectives 1: Enhance children's growth and development.

Objectives 2: Strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children.

Objectives 3: Provide children with educational, health, and nutritional services.

Objectives 4: Link children and their families to needed community services.

Objectives 5: Ensures well-managed programs that involve parents in decision-making.

The aforementioned standards serve as a safeguard to ensure parent involvement at various levels of the child's learning. Working with the parents is a tedious process that requires a core set of skills. Head Start has identified a set of skills that is necessary in developing partnerships with parents, especially when visiting parents in their homes. These skills are outlined in the National Parents Visitor Handbook, which serves as a key source for Head Start personnel. The fundamental elements of the identified skills are (1) helping adults as learners, (2) communication skills, (3) awareness of family systems, and (4) maintain personal safety.

Many of the parents who have children in Head Start are underemployed or unemployed and have minimum skills to become gainfully employed. Subsequently, Head Start personnel serve the parents with high-quality academic enrichment service through training, workshops, and referrals for re-entry into high school or post-secondary institutions. There is no empirical evidence that suggest adults learn any differently than children; however, Head Start personnel must be careful in developing and presenting training, and workshops that are designed for parents (Gratz, 2013; Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy, 2009; Meyers and Meyers, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The score of the parent training is designed to provide information to the parent in a non-threatening manner. Parents should be allowed to be independent, to assess their own knowledge and children, learning as frequently as possible, and to assist with their independent educational plan and long-and short-term goals, as well as those of their child.

Secondly, communication with the parent is essential to developing a working relationship among the parents, children, and school. Head Start personnel are trained to be active listeners to parents. In order to work holistically with the child-parent system, teachers must have an

understanding of the parent's life situation through careful observation. Verbal and nonverbal listening, eye contact, body language, and interpersonal distance are key skills in developing rapport with parents (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002; Gratz, 2013; Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy, 2009; Meyers and Meyers, 2014).

Next, it is crucial that Head Start personnel be mindful of family systems. Head Start family systems have become increasingly diverse and included a wide array of cultures, ethnicities, and family types. When working with the various families, Head Start personnel must take into account cultural differences, practices, and norms. The holistic approach to working with the child should include identifying strengths of the family and being aware of personal attitudes of the family and possible family resources and support systems.

Lastly, maintaining personal safety is important when working with parents due to the increase in home visits and wrap-around services provided by the Head Starts program. Success of family-oriented services provided by Head Start is dependent on rapport with the family. Developing rapport with the family system often helps to reduce tension, stress, and discomfort that may be present when Head Start personnel have to be closely involved in monitoring parents in their home (Powell, 1989). Woods and Lindeman (2008) suggested that reciprocal exchange facilitates family participation and help builds rapport.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a correlation research design to explore difference in urban and rural Head Start African-American male students' academic achievement, parenting types, self-concepts scores, and socioeconomic status. Correlational research attempts to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables (Girden, 2001; Mertler and Reinhart, 2016). Generally, one of the variables is some continuous quantitative measure and is designated the dependent variable of this study that was correlated to the independent variables of family type, socioeconomic status, and self-concept. This correlation implies prediction of relationships between the above variables, not causation. The study relied on secondary data analysis to measure the subjects' academic performance on the Brigance Preschool Screening Achievement Test.

Study sample and population

The sampling procedure used for this study was probability sampling. Probability sampling allowed the researcher to randomly select students and parents as subjects for analysis from the Head Start database. The

study's population consists of 94 African-American males between the ages 3.6 and 5.2 years old. The students are members of Head Start programs in the State of Georgia. When using multiple regressions to obtain a reliable equation, attention must be given to the sample size and the number of predictors used in the study.

The recommended ratio of these two factors is roughly 15 subjects for every predictor variable (Steven, 1995). As mentioned above, there are 94 subjects or 31.3 subjects for every predictor variable in this study, which suggests that this study has a reliable equation.

One hundred and fifty African-American male students were randomly selected from the urban and rural Head Programs database to compare the dependent and independent variables of this study. Head Start directors at both programs selected 150 African-American male students from the school's database as potential candidates for this study. For each student who was randomly selected, parents were mailed a letter of permission and consent form for their approval to participate in this study. However, only 94 or 63% of the parents consented to participate in this study.

The participants were divided into three levels: Level one consisted of the younger children, with a 1-month age range from 3.6 to 4.6; Level two children consisted of a 5-month age range from 4.7 to 5.2; Level 3 consisted of an 8-month age range from 5.3 to 5.11. Level three children were the oldest students, who were judged as generally ready for first grade.

Data collection procedure and instrumentation

The participants in this study were administered the Brigance Preschool Achievement Test as part of their assessment and enrollment into the Head Start program. The results of their Brigance Preschool Achievement Test were utilized as secondary data, combined with parent questionnaires and administration of the Preschool Self-Concept Screening Test (JPPSST).

Method of data analysis

Stepwise multiple regression was used to explore the relationships between the dependent and independent variables of this study. More specifically, stepwise selection was utilized by the researcher to test the independent variables at each step to determine the significance of each independent variable being investigated, to determine which of the independent variables the best predictor of academic achievement was. Stepwise multiple regression has its advantages over standard multiple regression, in that it allows researchers to add one variable at a time and each is continually checked for significant improvement of prediction (Aron et al., 2012).

A classroom and office space was assigned as the area to administer the Joseph Preschool and Primary Self-Concept Screening Test (JPPSST) to subjects in this study. The administration of the JPPSST lasted 5-8 min and consisted of 15 questions that are designed to measure self-concept of children ages 3.6 to 5.11. The administration and scoring of the JPPSST for the 94 participants in this study was completed in three weeks.

Stage One: Before the secondary data was collected from students' Brigance Preschool Achievement Test results, all parents who had children participating in this study completed a parent consent form and questionnaire. The consent form authorized the researcher to use their children's test results on the Brigance Preschool Achievement Test, as well as to administer the JPPSST to measure the participants' self-concept. The questionnaire provided the researcher background information about the subject's home environment, family type, and socioeconomic status (SES). The questionnaire is a 20-item questionnaire, designed by the researcher. The questionnaires were mailed out several months before the initial data collection began, and attached to the questionnaires were letters and parent consent forms. In order to determine the clarity of the instructions and questionnaire items, a field test pretest was administered to 15 rural parents who normally picked their children up from school. The protocol used in all administration was oral instructions for completing the parent questionnaire, and a question-and-answer session held immediately afterward.

After completion of the parent questionnaire, parents were asked about their impressions of the survey in terms of length and clarity of information requested. The researcher did not observe any comprehension problems with that of the parent questionnaire. A response rate of 50 to 60% was desirable to ensure the likelihood of a representative and unbiased sample.

After the first 150 questionnaires were mailed, follow-up phone calls to the Head Start centers were made to track the questionnaire subjects and encourage their participation and inclusion in the study. One hundred and fifty Head Start parents representing a Head Start Program (urban and rural) were randomly selected from a population of approximately 2,000 Head Start parents of the aforementioned programs. As shown in Figure 1, 94 (62%) of the 150 parents who were mailed questionnaires returned the questionnaires.

Results from Stage 1

The demographic characteristics of the parents are shown in Table 1. As demonstrated, respondents were all African-American female parents. The majority of these respondents have children who have been in Head Start

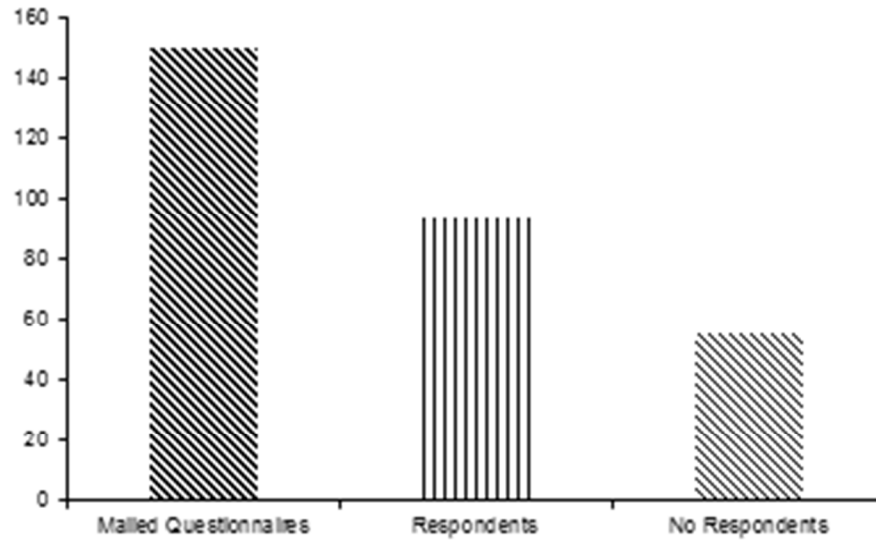


Figure 1. Head Start Parent Questionnaires Mailed and Returned.

a minimum of 3 years.

The average age of the parents in this study was 28.5 with the rural parents mean age at 26.4 and the urban parents mean age at 30.6. Rural parents appeared to have less formal education than urban parents. Only 33 (61%) of rural Head Start parents completed high school and enrolled in post-secondary education, whereas 33 (90%) of urban parents enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions.

Although 90% of the urban parents enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions, only 20% of the parents completed their programs and earned a certificate or college degree. Less than 1% (3 cases) of the rural Head Start parents who attended post-secondary education graduated with a certificate or college degree.

In terms of family type, 66 parents (70%) were single females who were reported not having assistance in the home with parenting responsibilities. A plurality of the single female parents (41 or 43%) were respondents from the rural Head Start program; whereas 25 (26%) of the single female respondents were from the urban Head Start program. 78% of the respondents (74 cases) lived in apartments, rental homes, with a friend or mother, or in Section 8 housing.

There were noticeable differences between the single-parent families and two-parent families' students' academic achievement. Students who were from single-parent homes scored much lower on the Brigance Screening Test than students from two-parent homes. For example, 14 out of 17 (82%) of students from two-parent homes scored average or above average on the Brigance Screening Test, whereas only 33 out of 77 (45%) of students from single-parent homes scored average or above average on the Brigance Screening

Test. Brigance scores of urban students from single-parent homes remained average, whereas Brigance scores of rural students from single-parent homes were mostly below average (less than 81).

In reference to income status, several of the parents (29 or 30%) reported income of \$5,000.00 or less. In addition, 20% of the respondents reported an annual income range of \$10,000 to \$15,000, and 20% of the respondents reported an income range of \$15,000 to \$20,000, with the rural program representing 23 (25%) of the lowest-reported income (under \$5,000). Despite the low reported annual income range of the parents, 55 (59%) of the parents worked full- or part-time jobs. There are observable differences between income levels of urban and rural Head Start students' parents. Parents from the urban sample reported much higher income ranges than rural parents. Although this difference may be related to increased urban cost of living and salary adjustments, urban parents reported working full-time jobs more often than rural parents, 19 out of 40 (48%) compared to 12 out of 54 (22%). Other factors that may contribute to this significant difference in annual income status of urban and rural parents is level of education, which may impact rural parents' ability to be gainfully employed or to have elevated incomes. For example, 21 (38%) of the rural parents did not complete high school compared to 4 (10%) of urban parents.

Stage Two: This stage of the study was used to measure the dependent variable, academic achievement. Academic achievement was measured by secondary data collection methods. All students in this study have completed most of their preschool readiness assessment exams. As part of this study, the students' results from the Brigance Preschool Achievement Test were used to

Table 1. Distribution of Parent Sample Characteristics (N = 94).

Variable	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	
	94	100
Total		
Race/Racial Group		
African-American	93	99
Hispanic	1	1
Total	94	
Marital Status		
Married	17	18
Single/Never Married	66	70
Divorced	4	4
Separated	3	3
Widowed	1	1
Other		
Total		
Parent Level of Education		
9 th , 10 th , or 11 th Grade	25	27
High School Diploma/GED	35	37
Some College/No Degree	18	20
Vocational/Technical School/No Cert.	3	0.03
Vocational/Technical School/Certificate	4	0.04
Associate Degree	3	0.02
Bachelor's Degree	1	0.03
Graduate School/No Degree	1	0.01
Graduate School/Grad Degree	1	0.01
Other	1	0.01
Total	94	
Type of Housing		
Own Home	16	17
Rent Home	27	29
Public Housing	7	0.07
Section 8 Housing	2	0.02
Apartment	33	35
Live With Friend	1	0.01
Live With Parents	1	0.01
Other	7	0.07

measure the subjects' academic achievement.

Results from Stage 2

The mean score for academic achievement for the 94 subjects in this study was 76.61. This places the overall group in the lower-than-average academic category compared to other students of their age. However, the urban Head Start students; overall mean score was 84.79 ($SD = 15.72$), which places them in the average range of academic achievement. The rural Head Start students' mean score was 68.43 ($SD = 24.40$), placing them in the

below average category compared to other students of their age. Paired sample t-tests found significant differences ($p < .05$) between rural and urban African-American male Head Start students' academic achievement scores. See Figure 2 for a depiction of students' academic scores as measured by the Brigance Screening Test.

These results could be explained by a number of variables, which include parental level of education, family type, and socioeconomic status. The Brigance test results of the urban and rural Head Start students were analyzed and compared using demographic and income status. As previously stated, the urban parents clearly

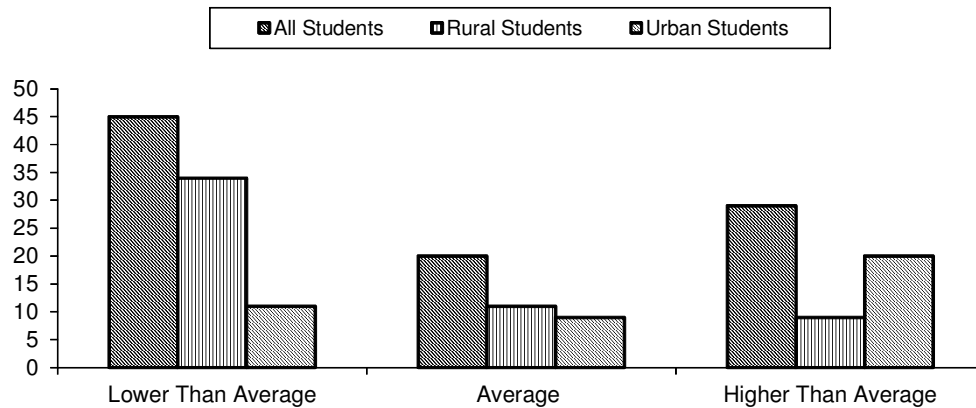


Figure 2. Depiction of students' academic scores as measured by the Brigance Screening Test.

had more formal education than rural parents as 90% attended post-secondary education whereas only 60% of rural parents attended post-secondary educational institutions to further their education. Not only were urban parents more educated than rural parents, they more likely to participate in their child's education, visiting the school periodically and/or meeting with the teachers. These data suggest that 92% of the urban parents actively participated in their child's education whereas only 48% of rural parents participated in their child's education. The results clearly support the hypothesis that students with parents who participate in their academic learning perform higher academically than children of parents who do not participate in their academic learning.

In terms of family type, 66 (70%) of the subjects in the study were from single-female parent homes; 41 (75%) students in the rural program had a single-female parent compared to 25 (62%) of students in the rural program. In comparison, the urban students' parents were more likely to be married and own a home compared to rural parents. 38% of the urban parents were married and provided a two-parent home, compared to 16% of rural parents.

DISCUSSION

An important finding of this study is that family type was significantly related to academic achievement. Subjects who were from two-parent homes scored significantly higher on the Brigance test than students from single-parent homes. The mean academic achievement score for students from two-parent home was 78.0 compared to mean score of 74.3 for students from single-parents homes. The findings are widely supported in the literature, which has found that students from two-parents homes are more likely to perform better academically compared to students who are from single-parents homes (Desimone, 1999; Wagmiller et al., 2011).

Possible reasons for the influence of family type on

academic achievement of the African-American male subjects in this study may be that Head Start single-female parents are perhaps overwhelmed with living in poverty conditions and caring for their child's safety and well-being; these concerns supersede their interest in pushing the importance of education for their child. Many of the parents also reported that their full- or part-time jobs contribute to reduced time to work on academic assignment or learning material with their child. It is also possible that single-female parents do not see the importance of focusing on academic achievement early in their child's development.

Another possible explanation of this finding may be related to the distribution of marital status within the sample. Single-females parents' families were represented more often than two-parent families at a ratio of 4:1. It is possible that the low response number of two-parent families did not provide a broad enough sample to obtain a more valid finding. However, the literature consistently supports the hypothesis that family type, especially single-female parent homes, is related to poor academic performance in children (Caldas and Bankston, 2012).

A policy implication of this finding concerning single-female parents' homes and academic achievement may be that policymakers assist parents with parenting training, parent-child interaction, and respite resources. These measures will assist with tutoring and extended-day hours to enhance a child's academic achievement. As a result of the gap in academic achievement between two-parent homes and single-female parents homes, funding initiatives should be developed to provide additional resources for Head Start programs that develop aggressive single-parent mentor programs and demonstrate effective strategies for improving academic achievement for all students, especially students from single-female parent homes.

A second finding was that those students whose parents participate in their learning experience by periodically visiting their school scored significantly higher

on the Brigance test than students whose parents did not participate in their learning. The urban students clearly scored higher academically than rural students in the study. 92% of urban parents, whose children had mean of 84.79 (SD=15.72) in this study, reported that they participated in their student's learning by visiting their school periodically, which may have contributed greatly to their academic performance. In contrast, rural students' academic scores were lower, with a mean score of 68.43 (SD=24.40). Only 48% of these parents reported participating in their child's learning. The literature supports this finding (Olson and Kleine, 1993; Tiedmann and Faber, 1992).

Parental involvement in the academic setting may be related to transportation issues. Many parents in the rural data set reported that they did not participate in their child's learning and did not visit their schools due to lack of transportation. All (100%) of the parents in the urban data set reported transportation was not a problem for them. An additional explanation is that parents who live in urban environments have better access to transportation as a result of public transportation, such as trains and bus lines that are available throughout the day. In contrast, rural communities are less likely to have public train or bus lines to transport individuals throughout the community. The rural Head Start program in this study is located in a small town in west Georgia. It has no public transportation in abundance.

A significant implication of this finding is for rural Head Start programs to organize parent visits at least quarterly for parents who are unable to visit the school due to transportation issues. The quarterly meeting could be parent-teacher conference, parent workshops, parent-child outings or parent day. Not only would this approach address the transportation issue, it would encourage parents to become interested in their child's learning. A policy implication of this finding about parent participation and transportation issues for rural Head Start parents may be that the federal government provides additional funds to Head Start programs that develop a transportation department specifically designed to transport parents to and from their center in an effort to enhance parent participation. Head Start programs that demonstrate enhance academic achievement scores as a result of developing a parent transportation department should receive additional funds to manage the department.

Limitations of the study

The research finding of this study provides beneficial recommendations to address the core issues faced by African-American males during their formative years. However, there were limitations to this study that suggest that further research should be conducted to explore the impact African-American males' emotional state and early

formulation of personality have on academic achievement during their preschool years.

The scope of this study focused on preschool African-American males' academic achievement and the impact that other variables, namely family type, socio-economic status (SES), and self-concepts, have on their academic achievement. Although self-concept was the best correlate to academic achievement in this study, further research should be conducted to explore how emotional issues and early formulation of personality impact a child's overall cognitive growth and development. Supporting research suggest that personal traits, emotionality, family type, SES contribute to academic performance (Cartledge, 1999; Millon and Davis, 1996; Weis et al., 1989).

More importantly, the aforementioned variables have proven to be highly correlated to delinquency, crime, and disorganized personality in later years in life. African-American males represent a disproportionate number of men increase in the United States. Additional research should be conducted to explore preschool African-American males' emotional stability and personality traits during their formative years (Cartledge, 1999; Million and Davis, 1996; Wilson et al., 2013; Zabel and Nigro, 1999).

According to Cartledge (1999), African-American males are the number one contender for serious emotional disturbance in the public school system, and they are one and one half times more likely than non-African-American students to be identified as having serious emotional disturbance (Coutinho and Oswald, 1998). Research suggests that early emotional experiences in childhood have been linked to problems in personality later in adolescence and adulthood (Million and Davis, 1996; Hampton, 2008).

Therefore, another area for future research involves social attachment. Attachment creates a bond between humans and is essential for healthy socioemotional development (Bowlby, 1988). Previous studies on attachment and achievement (e.g., Jacobsen and Hofmann, 1997; Omivale, 2009) show that children who are insecurely attached are susceptible to low achievement. An insecure attachment to the primary caregiver is often displayed through hostile and aggressive behaviors which affect the relationship with teachers and peers leading to low academic performance (Jacobsen and Hofmann, 1997). Further, previous findings (e.g., Cortesi, 2014; Slade, 2004) on attachment shows that attachment, socioeconomic status and academic achievement are related. Slade (2004) parents considered as low SES are more likely to have an insecure and dismissive attachment bond with their children.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare the impact

Head Start programs have on academic achievement in African-American male students in rural and urban programs. Additional variables investigated in relation to academic achievement were family type, socioeconomic status, and self-concept. This study centered on the importance of preschool African-American males developing a sound educational experience during their formative years.

The study relied on secondary data analysis to measure the subjects' academic performance on the Brigance Preschool Screening Achievement Test. The results of this comparative study provide valuable literature to the Head Start programs throughout America. The goal is to help Head Start programs address academic achievement and self-concept in African-American males during their formative years in order to curb high school dropout and juvenile crime rates. Implementation of such an effort will represent a vital contribution on the part of Head Start to address, ameliorate, and ultimately reverse the increasing high school dropout and juvenile crime rates of young African-American males.

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