Parent Involvement in Early Reading First: Effects on Children’s Learning Outcomes
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Abstract
Parent involvement in children’s education can take many forms. In this study, we focused on parent involvement in the home component of a preschool curriculum. Our research question was whether the frequency of completion of weekly home preschool-child learning activities enhances children’s academic gains above and beyond classroom influences. Participants were 120 Head Start children and their families. When classroom quality and child-level demographic characteristics were controlled, children of parents who completed more home activities showed greater gains on emergent reading and math, and a trend towards greater gains on phonological awareness. This suggests that engagement in activities that are closely integrated with the ongoing classroom curriculum is an important form of parent involvement.

Introduction

Educators often emphasize school-based forms of involvement (e.g., volunteering on campus, attending parent-teacher conferences and school events). However, home-based forms of involvement (e.g., reading aloud and other cognitive-enhancing interactions) are more closely linked with children’s academic success, at least in early childhood. (Brentz, Vogel & Martin, 2002; Fantuzzo, Winnick, & Perry, 2000).

Our interest was in a specific form of parent involvement—participation in the home learning component of a preschool curriculum. We hypothesized that more frequent completion of weekly home learning activities would be associated with stronger child academic gains over the course of the school year.

To more precisely estimate the effect of parent involvement, we controlled for classroom quality and a number of child- and classroom-level variables.

Method
Participants
Children & Families
- 120 Head Start children and their primary caregivers
- Mean child age: 4.2 years
- Mean age of parent: 31.5 years

Classrooms
- 10 classrooms from the same Head Start program

Measures
Level 1 Predictors
- Age in months
- Native English speakers (NES)
- 1st vs. 2nd year in Head Start
- Home activities completed

Level 2 Predictors
- Full-day vs. part-day schedule
- Class size

Child Achievement
- Test of Early Reading Abilities 3rd Ed. (TERA)
- Developmental Skills Checklist (DSC): mathematical and logical operations scale
- Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)
- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 3rd Ed. (PPVT)

Home Curriculum
- The Learning Connections curriculum includes weekly home learning activities.

Results
We tested several within-subjects contrasts using post hoc tests (Bonferroni correction). There were significant differences between the intervention groups on all measures, with the Exceptional Group showing the largest gains.

Conclusions
When parents completed more of the home learning activities, their children made larger gains during the school year on early math and literacy skills. These results suggest that low-income children benefit when their families engage in regular, structured enrichment activities that are closely aligned with the learning goals and content of the ongoing classroom curriculum.

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Literature Cited


