

Connections Between Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement Among Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Students

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Abstract

This study used a correlational design to investigate how parental involvement and ethnicity (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic) is related to the academic achievement (measured by grade point average) of college students. Participants included 48 Hispanic and 40 non-Hispanic college students who were asked about parental involvement received during their primary education. A 2 x 2 ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of ethnicity on academic achievement ($F = 6.88$; $p < .05$), in that non-Hispanics had a higher mean GPA than Hispanic college students. However, there was not a significant main effect of parental involvement ($F = .00$; $p = .996$) and no significant interaction between parental involvement and ethnicity ($F = .69$; $p = .41$).

We live in a competitive and capitalist world in which educational attainment increases the probability of obtaining well-paying employment, ultimately leading to a higher standard of living. Students who demonstrate high academic achievement, measured by their grade point average (GPA), are more likely to graduate from college and those who graduate from college are more likely to achieve their career goal. According to Gordon-Rouse and Austin (2002), high school student participants who had a GPA greater than 2.75 were considered to be high achievers and typically demonstrated higher motivation in their education than those with lower GPAs. Rouse and Austin also suggested that those with a high GPA were more likely to prepare themselves for college and therefore have higher expectations to succeed academically. However, not all students perform well in college: the academic achievement of a student is impacted by many factors, including their ethnicity and the influence of parental involvement during their primary education.

Many studies have compared students of different ethnic backgrounds and have found that individuals of Hispanic origin continue to have the lowest educational attainment (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979). The academic progress of Hispanic students continues to remain far behind the other

ethnic groups in many different aspects (Alva & Padilla). One study found one of these aspects to be that Hispanic students are far less likely to graduate from high school when compared to other ethnicities (Mirande & Enriquez). Alva and Padilla also found that there are many socio-cultural variables that impact a Hispanic student's ability to succeed academically such as the struggle for acculturation, language barriers, and lack of role models in the school system that reflect their own ethnicity. Research demonstrates that these are only a few obstacles that may increase the difficulty of obtaining academic achievement among Hispanic students.

Regardless of ethnicity, parental involvement in a child's education has a definite impact on the child's level of academic success. Past research indicates that active parental involvement in education is important because it is positively related to a child's self-expectations for academic success (Ibañez, Kupermine, Jurkovic & Perilla, 2004). Across all ethnicities, studies have demonstrated that parental monitoring leads to higher academic achievement, if only because parental attention helps children remain focused on school (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). The few studies that have looked at parental involvement as a factor of academic achievement demonstrate that "parent involvement [is] positively

related to expectations and importance of schooling” and that by having a positive outlook toward education, a student is more likely to succeed (Ibañez et al, 2004).

Though parental involvement is clearly important for any ethnicity to succeed academically, the dynamics facing Hispanic students suggest the need for a special emphasis on parental involvement. Such involvement is especially important if Hispanic children are to overcome cultural and language challenges to their educational attainment. However, many Hispanic parents are recent immigrants with very little formal schooling and have only low-level English skills. These parents are typically unfamiliar with the American school systems and may lack the confidence to help with schoolwork (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). In addition, as a population, Hispanics tend to have a lower socio-economic status (Mirande & Enriquez, 1979). The implication of this for Hispanic children is not insignificant, for Hispanic parents who must work long hours to make ends meet might not have enough surplus time or energy to devote to their children’s education. Nevertheless, despite language barriers and long work hours, these parents often demonstrate involvement by recognizing the importance of school through actions such as making sure homework is completed. Hispanic students need the extra support of high parental involvement in their education in order to persevere and excel academically.

In organizing the current study, I set out to examine this relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement amongst Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. Based on previous research, my initial hypothesis was that Hispanic students in general would demonstrate lower academic achievement in comparison to non-Hispanic students. My second hypothesis was that college students with high parental involvement in their primary education would

demonstrate higher academic achievement in college than those with low parental involvement. By implication, I was able to predict that parental involvement would have a larger impact on academic achievement for Hispanic students than it would have for non-Hispanic students. The aim of this preliminary study was to work with a group to research the relationship between parental involvement and ethnicity among college students. My long-term plan is to extend this research by making adjustments to the survey and comparing responses from college students to responses from high school students.

Method

Participants

Participants were 40 non-Hispanic and 48 Hispanic students over the age of 18 years ($M = 21.86$, $SD = 5.79$) from a small public university in a rural area of central California. There were 65 female and 23 male participants, which reflects the overall gender ratio of that university. Survey participants were solicited by researchers who visited classes. Researchers also stood in the central quad on campus and asked students if they wanted to participate in a study. In addition, participants were recruited through an on-line subject pool. Participation was on a volunteer basis, and the participants were free to choose the time slot that best fit their schedule. At the discretion of their instructors, some students received extra credit for their participation.

Design

This study utilized a correlational, between-subjects design. The two independent variables were ethnicity and parental involvement. The two levels for ethnicity consisted of “Hispanic” and “non-Hispanic,” and parental involvement was divided into “high” and “low” involvement. “Parental involvement” was operationally defined to be the extent to which parents were attentive and supportive of their child’s primary education.

The dependent variable of this study was academic achievement, as measured by the student's current grade point average (GPA).

Measures

For the purposes of this study, the researchers created a questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section consisted of one question asking participants to indicate their primary reason for seeking a college degree, with options such as "to please my parents", "to get a good job" and "to feel better about myself." The second section consisted of 16 parental involvement items ($\alpha = .83$), such as "my parents helped me develop good study habits", "my parents checked to see if I had homework", and "I believe my parents' encouragement helped me stay focused on my education". Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strong agree). The scores from the questionnaire ranged from 21-65 with a median split of 50, so the scores ranging from 21-50 were categorized as "low parental involvement" and scores ranging from 51-65 were categorized as "high parental involvement." The final section contained demographic questions about age, ethnicity, and GPA.

Procedure

Researchers entered classrooms, gave a brief overview of the project, and asked if students would like to participate. Those who did not wish to participate left the classroom for a short break. Students who used the on-line subject pool were asked to come to a specific room at a designated time. Those students who wished to participate were presented with an informed consent sheet. The researchers then reviewed this sheet orally and answered any questions that were asked by participants. Once the participant chose to continue, he or she signed one copy of the form and returned it to the researcher. A

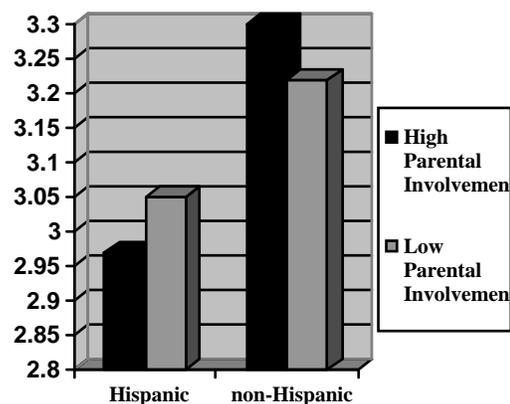
second copy was also provided to the participant for their records.

Researchers also stood in the campus central quad and asked students who passed by if they wanted to participate in a study. Researchers gave a brief overview of the project to those who expressed interest in participating and if they agreed to participate in the study, they were given an informed consent form to sign and a copy for their records. Participants were encouraged to sit down and complete the questionnaire with sufficient space between each other to complete it privately. Those who did not wish to participate were not given a questionnaire.

All participants were given the questionnaire and asked to choose the response that most applied to them or to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a statement. After completing the questionnaire and returning it to the researchers, all participants were given a debriefing form that summarized the goals of the study, provided information on how to learn about the results of the study, and provided references for further reading. All students were also thanked for their participation.

Results

Figure 1 presents academic achievement (utilizing mean GPA) for Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in relation to high and low parental involvement:



Looking at the pattern of results displayed in Figure 1, it appears that Hispanic students had lower academic achievement than non-Hispanic students. The degree to which academic achievement was affected by parental involvement, however, also appears to depend on the ethnicity of the participant. Specifically, for Hispanic students, low parental involvement correlated better with higher academic achievement than did high parental involvement; however, for non-Hispanic students, high parental involvement correlated with a higher level of academic achievement than was attained by students indicating low levels of parental involvement.

To test these apparent effects, I analyzed the data using a 2×2 , between subjects univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). There was a significant main effect of participant's ethnicity on their academic achievement, such that the mean GPA was significantly higher for non-Hispanic students ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .44$) than it was for Hispanic students ($M = 3.01$, $SD = .42$), regardless of parental involvement in their primary education: $F(1,77) = 6.88$, $MSE = 1.26$, $p < .05$. On the other hand, the main effect of parental involvement was not statistically significant: $F(1, 77) = .00$, $MSE = .00$, $p = .996$, with the mean GPA for low parental involvement ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .43$) being only slightly higher than it was for high parental involvement ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .45$). In addition, the interaction between ethnicity and parental involvement was not statistically significant: $F(1, 77) = .69$, $MSE = .13$, $p = .41$. The individual condition means were as follows: non-Hispanic students with high parental involvement ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .43$) scored the highest mean GPA. The second highest group comprised non-Hispanic students with low parental involvement ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .46$). The third highest group comprised Hispanic students with low parental involvement ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .41$). Somewhat surprisingly, the lowest scoring

group comprised Hispanic students with high parental involvement ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .42$).

Discussion

The results supported my initial hypothesis that non-Hispanic students would have significantly higher academic achievement than Hispanic students. However, the second hypothesis was not supported by the data, as parental involvement did not appear to have a significant effect on academic achievement. Nevertheless, among non-Hispanic students, those with a high level of parental involvement scored the highest mean GPA overall. The data also failed to support my third hypothesis, that parental involvement would have a larger impact on academic achievement for Hispanic students than for non-Hispanic students.

Similar to other studies (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979), the data indicated that Hispanic college students are struggling academically to a greater degree than non-Hispanic students. Hispanic students continue to remain behind other ethnic groups in all levels of education (Alva & Padilla, 1995). Although few studies have researched the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, the study conducted by Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez in 2003 indicated a positive correlation between the two variables; however, this study did not produce conclusive data to support or refute these findings.

One reason why parental involvement may not have provided a significant effect is because the sample was limited to only college students. Although the reliability analysis showed high variability among the questionnaire responses, there was clearly a consistent positive skew in most items toward high parental involvement. This indicates that most people in college have received some type of parental involvement during their primary education. My study might have yielded more interesting results if the survey

had included a question about the socio-economic status of participants. This factor could have impacted the degree of parental involvement during primary education. Parents with low socio/economic status and lower levels of educational attainment may have engaged in lower levels of involvement in their children's education. Additionally, some Hispanic respondents may have interpreted "attentive and supportive" differently from others.

A statistically significant result in parental involvement might be achieved if high school students were surveyed instead of college students. Future research of high school students would provide a wider spectrum of students with differing levels of parental involvement, as well as a wider range of GPAs. More significantly, a survey directed to this group would identify students who are not planning or qualified to go to college. Furthermore, research directed at high school students would gain access to students who

are attending school not by choice but because they are required to be there.

In light of the accumulation of findings demonstrating that Hispanic students are struggling academically, it should be clear that changes will need to occur if we are serious about wanting to improve the level of educational attainment and academic achievement among Hispanic students. Roughly 32.4% of California's population is Hispanic (Johnson, 2002). The fact that the largest ethnic minority group in California is struggling academically impacts society as a whole. This study is important because it provides useful information not only to Hispanic students and parents but to teachers and academic counselors as well. By combining the efforts of the educational system with efforts to improve the levels of parental involvement in their children's education, we can work together to improve the likelihood of academic achievement among all students.

References

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Questionnaire

The following question asks you about your current college education (check the one that most applies to you).

1. Which of the following would you say is the primary reason that you want to graduate from college? (Please choose only one response).

- To please my parents
- To get a good job
- To make more money
- To feel better about myself
- To help my parents financially
- To prove to others that I can do it

Please circle a response that indicates how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement below.

The following 23 items ask you to think about your childhood. When reading the items, please think about when you were growing up (kindergarten through high school). The term “parents” refers to your parents or other guardians.

2. My parents helped me develop good study habits.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. My parents encouraged me to get good grades.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. My parents were strict when it came to school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. My parents checked to see if I had homework.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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