



Family Involvement in School and Low-income Children's Literacy: Longitudinal Associations Between and Within Families

Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S. & Weiss, H.B. (2006). Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 653-664. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.98.4.653.



Civilian-
Focused
Article



Longitudinal data from 281 children (collected from kindergarten to fifth grade) examined whether parental school involvement (participation in school activities) was associated with student literacy scores in a diverse, low income sample of families. Higher than average levels of parental involvement were positively associated with higher levels of literacy performance across the study time points for children from less educated families. Within families, increased school involvement over time predicted improved child literacy.

Key Findings:

- For children of mothers with relatively more education, there was no significant effect of average family school involvement on student literacy. However, for children whose mothers were relatively less educated, more school involvement was associated with higher student literacy performance.
- If family involvement was low, children with mothers with more education performed significantly better on literacy tests than children of less educated mothers. If family involvement was high, there were no differences between these groups on literacy tests.
- Increases in family school involvement over time were associated with increases in literacy performance.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could collaborate with public schools to identify strategies to increase participation in school based programs for low-income and low-maternal education families.
- Schools could create an education environment that increases opportunities for the involvement of all families, exploring creative means of decreasing barriers to involvement, e.g., child care and transportation.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend focused resources for family involvement programs in schools with high numbers of low-income and low-maternal education children.
- Policies could provide access to resources (e.g., meals, transportation vouchers) for families to be involved in their children's school-based activities.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could examine a range of ways in which families are involved in their children's education.
- Additional studies could use more diverse samples to expand these findings.



Background Information

Methodology:

- Data were used from the Comprehensive Child Development Program and School Transition Study, which involved federally funded early intervention programs at sites across the United States.
- Children from three sites were followed from kindergarten to fifth grade. Information on specific recruitment approaches and retention rates were not presented.
- Half of the families participating received the high quality preschool and education and job training for parents.
- Families completed demographic questionnaires at the beginning of the study, and data on parental involvement at 1st, 3rd, and 5th grades.
- Children completed measures of literacy performance at kindergarten, 3rd, and 5th grades.
- Multilevel models estimated individual growth curves for children's literacy performance from kindergarten through fifth grade, as well as patterns of association between family involvement in school and child literacy performance.

Participants:

- 281 children participated (51% girls).
- 15% of the children were low birth weight and 29% had parents who were teenagers at their birth.
- For 82% of the children, English was their primary language.
- Average family income across the study time period was less than \$15,000/year.

Limitations:

- Many of the demographic variables which likely changed (such as income, employment, etc.) over time were not tracked at each time point; therefore, these impacts could not be measured.
- Family involvement in school (beyond participation in school activities) was not measured; these others methods of supporting children's education may be important.
- There were higher rates of missing data for Latino and non-English speaking families compared to other families which may limit the conclusions from this study.
- The article did not provide complete information about recruitment, retention, and other methodological issues.

Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★★☆
Research Methods					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Limitations					Quality Rating:
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★☆☆
Implications					Quality Rating:
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★)	Questionable (★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	★★★★☆
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★★★★☆