

2020

## Head Start Parent Perspectives of their Roles in their Children's Preschool Education

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Fawn Thomas-Brown

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Head Start Parent Perspectives of their Roles in their Children's Preschool Education

By

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MA, Walden University, 2013

BS, St. Peter's College, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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November 2020

## Abstract

Head Start expects parent involvement as part of parents' in-kind contribution to the program, but data from a multi-center Head Start agency in the southeastern United States indicated many parents do not meet this expectation. Lack of parental involvement in Head Start children's education was the problem of focus in this study. The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. The work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler formed the conceptual framework for this study. The research questions focused on how parents describe their responsibilities for their children's education, self-efficacy in assisting their children to become successful, and feelings involving being invited or not invited to participate in their children's education. Seven low-income parents from 2 Head Start centers in the target agency were interviewed as part of this study's basic qualitative design using interviews. Data were analyzed using open coding. The findings in this study suggest that Head Start parents feel involved and take responsibility for their children's education, and they are motivated by family, friends, and their children to participate in children's education. However, Head Start parents described being involved in home-based activities and not in school-based activities considered by Head Start. Home-based parent involvement is an integral part of parent involvement and should be included by Head Start in terms of accounting for parents' in-kind contribution to the program. This study will contribute to positive social change by offering insight into Head Start parents' perspectives of their roles as well as engagement in preschool children's education, as well as ways teachers and administrators can support increased parent involvement.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Norma Thomas a woman that worked very hard to provide for me and my brothers. She instilled a love for learning from the very beginning she set high standard for achievement in my life. She has always supported and encouraged me to take the next steps when it came to my education and life. Thank you so much, Mommy.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Patricia Anderson and Dr. Mary B. Trube for their input and encouragement through the dissertation process. I would not have made it this far without them. I would like to thank my husband Cedric Brown for his patience and encouragement while I completed my dissertation. I would also like to thank my co-workers that consistently encouraged and rooted for me every step of the way as well as my brothers, Shawn Thomas and Gilbert Thomas, Jr. for their encouragement and support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study was Head Start parent perspectives regarding their role in their children's education. This study was important because some low-income parents were not involved in their preschool children's education, which may have negatively affected their children's preschool success. Head Start primarily enrolls low-income children (Office of Head Start, 2019a). This study will provide opportunities for social change by increasing understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education so educators may gain insights regarding ways to help parents be more engaged in the educational lives of their children. In this chapter, I present the background of this study, problem and purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and summary.

### **Background**

Kurtulmus (2016) suggested three family involvement dimensions in terms of promoting positive educational outcomes for children: parenting style, homeschool relationships, and responsibility for learning outcomes. Positive educational outcomes are supported by parents' collaborative actions and attitudes regarding children's learning (Kurtulmus, 2016). Wilder (2014) reported that parental involvement in children's education has been accepted as a crucial element of early childhood education. However, Longo, Lombardi, and Dearing (2017) found that parents of low-income children applied less effective discipline practices and less positive parenting techniques, as well as less

access to educational material and engagement in children's learning than parents of middle class children.

Kurtulmus (2016) found it is necessary to help parents understand the reasons to become effectively involved in their children's learning. Dove, Neuharth-Pritchett, Wright, and Wallinga (2015) found that English speaking parents of lower social economic status (SES) reported less opportunities for engagement, volunteering, and attendance at parent meetings, as well a fewer opportunities for communication with their children's school compared to what was reported by their higher SES counterparts. Dove et al. (2015) identified a gap in practice, suggesting more understanding is needed regarding parents' routines at home and school that might increase children's learning development. In this study, I addressed this gap in practice by exploring the perspectives of low-income parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start regarding their roles in their preschool children's education.

Willemsen, Thompson, Vanderlinde, and Mutton (2018) said public school teachers in Europe failed to acknowledge the positive effects of family engagement, but parents also fail to participate when they are encouraged to do so. Willemsen et al. (2018) identified several barriers to family involvement that exist in schools, including lack of time among teachers and administrators and a school culture that does not recognize parents' opinions and participation. According to Yamamoto, Holloway, and Suzuki (2016), teacher's attitudes toward parents, and the amount of effort they put into developing clear and inviting communication with them facilitate or discourage parents'

school-based engagement as well as engagement at home doing cognitive activities with their children. Fishman and Nickerson (2015) suggested that specific and direct communication from teachers encourages parents to engage in meetings, participate in educational planning, and contribute to reciprocal communications.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that was the focus of this study is that Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool child's education. During the most recent school year, in one Head Start center that was part of the target agency of this study, monthly participation among parents of children enrolled in the center never exceeded 13% of families enrolled. The total number of hours of participation averaged 30.39 hours each month across all parents (see Table 1).

The Head Start program includes a strong parent participation component. Hours of classroom or center participation are considered in-kind contributions to the program and are encouraged and tracked by the center for each enrolled family. The expectation that parents will participate in the classroom or center is included in the agreement parents make upon enrolling their child. For these reasons, low participation among families at the target center over an entire school year suggests that parents may not understand their part in assisting their child's learning. Dove et al. (2015) found that parents who receive governmental financial aid, including Head Start parents, were unlikely to be engaged with preschool meetings, teacher communications, or visits to the kindergarten classroom compared to families who did not receive aid. Daniel, Wang, and Berthelsen (2016)

indicated that low parent involvement in school-based activities was directly associated with socioeconomic disadvantages. Longo et al. (2017) reported less evidence of positive parenting, effective discipline practices, access to learning resources, and learning stimulation in low-income families, including Head Start families, compared to middle-class households regarding preschool children.

Table 1

*Family Participation 2018-2019 School Year by Month*

	# participant families	% of all families	# hours logged
Aug	13	9	54.0
Sept	20	13	58.0
Oct	20	13	*123.7
Nov	5	3	8.0
Dec	1	1	22.0
Jan	10	7	11.5
Feb	1	1	12.0
Mar	0	0	0.0
Apr	7	5	13.0
May	3	2	25.3

N= 152

*Note.* The increase in volunteer hours in October was due to a breast cancer awareness event.

According to Rispoli, Hawley, and Clinton (2018), there are advantages experienced by children when parents are involved in early education, including gains in children's print knowledge, expressive and receptive language, and reading ability in kindergarten. Epstein and Sheldon (2016) stated that family engagement that is goal-linked considerably increases child outcomes in many subjects spanning across grades. Evans and Radina (2014) found that strong school and family relationships can improve

student outcomes in Title I schools, including improvements in attendance, test scores, graduation rates, and attitudes regarding school. However, Deloatche, Bradley-King, Ogg, Kromrey, and Sundman-Wheat (2015) found that low-income parents may not realize how key their role is in their children's school success. Therefore, the problem that was the focus of this study is that Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool children's education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews with parents of children enrolled in Head Start to gain their perspectives regarding their roles in their preschool children's education and explore factors that encourage and discourage their fulfillment of responsibilities. An interpretivist perspective was taken in this study because that allowed me to explore the thoughts and experiences of participants. The phenomenon of interest was parental involvement as it relates to Head Start children.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this study:

*RQ1:* How do Head Start parents describe their responsibilities in terms of helping their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ2:* How do Head Start parents describe their efficacy in terms of assisting their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ3*: Do Head Start parents describe feeling invited to have a role in their preschool children's success in school?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The phenomenon that grounded this study was parental involvement and the perspectives of low-income parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. The conceptual framework of this study was Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parent involvement. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), parents choose specific types of involvement based on their skills and knowledge, availability of their schedule, and requests from their children and school for involvement.

The ideas of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler and later collaboration with Walker et al. provided a framework for my study because they offered reasons regarding why parents involve themselves in their children's education, as well as possible barriers that parents might believe exist. In my study, I intended to identify the perspectives of low-income parents regarding their roles in the education of their preschool children and determine what supports and barriers affected their engagement in that role. Through a qualitative interview process, I explored how parents described their roles in their children's education.

Walker et al. revised the original model to include five sequential levels that described from a psychological perspective why parents chose to be involved in their children's education. Levels two through five involve factors that affect a parent's involvement after the parent has recognized the possibility of involvement, including

allocation of resources to accommodate involvement (level 2), negotiating how to be involved (level 3), congruence between parents' and schools' perspectives of involvement (level 4), and student outcomes as a result of parents' involvement (level 5). Factors comprising the first level are foundational to action on the subsequent levels. First level factors include parents' beliefs about what they should do about their children's education, self-efficacy in terms of helping their children and self-confidence, perceptions of requests for engagement from the school, and perceptions of requests received from their children. In this study, I explored first level factors which are essential to parents' recognition of their part in their children's learning. These first level factors shaped the research questions of this study and were reflected in the interview questions.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study involved using a basic qualitative design with interviews of parents of preschool children who were part of Head Start. This design allows for deep, individualized, rich, and contextualized data that is important for understanding parent perspectives. The phenomenon under investigation was parental perspectives of their roles in their children's education. I based my interview questions on four first level factors affecting parents' involvement including beliefs about their roles in children's education, self-efficacy beliefs, and insights involving invitations communicated by their child, the school, and others. The methodology used for this study was a qualitative research design with interviews. This design was appropriate because it allowed me to

understand how parents of children enrolled in Head Start interpret their involvement experiences and what meanings they assigned to those experiences. Data were coded, categorized, and assigned themes to answer the research questions.

### **Definitions**

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015:* Act that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replaced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This law involves increasing low-income and otherwise disadvantaged children's educational achievement.

*Head Start:* A federal program which was created in the United States of America, with the goal state to help stop poverty. This education program provides young children from families living in poverty with a vision to meet their health, emotional, psychological, social and nutritional needs (Office of Head Start, 2019a).

*Low-income:* A family is considered low-income if they fall below the poverty guidelines as outlined by Head Start. Also eligible are families receiving public assistance or social security.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act:* Act which grew out of concern that students prepared by the American education system were not competitive with students from other countries. The NCLB Act holds states accountable for student academic achievement. It requires states to provide high quality yearly assessments in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Yearly states must report student progress as proficient or higher, which is referred as adequate yearly progress (Abedi,

2004). The NCLB Act required that states focus on increasing achievement of ELL, special needs students, and poor and minority children, all of whom had achievement issues compared to other students. Individual states did not have to comply, but noncompliance would cost them federal Title I money (Abedi, 2004). The NCLB Act also targets resources for early childhood education so that the very young also receive benefits .

*Parent:* The role of an adult caregiver of children, often whether or not they are not the child's biological parent. Such adults may include biological parents, foster parents, grandparents, and close family friends. For the purpose of this study, the term refers to adults who fulfill a parenting role for a particular child and are recognized in this role by teachers and administrators at the child care center under study.

*Parent Involvement:* This term refers to a parent's engagement in home, school, and community-based activities to encourage their children's growth and educational attainment (Daniel et al., 2015).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed in this study that participants provided truthful and accurate answers to interview questions about their roles in their children's learning. I also assumed that parents who participated in this study were representative of populations of parents of 3- and 4-year-old children who are part of Head Start. These assumptions are necessary in any study that relies on informant information as the basis for analysis and conclusions.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study involved the experiences and perspectives of parents of 3- and 4 year-old children regarding their roles in their children's Head Start education and factors that facilitate or mitigate against their parental involvement. This focus was chosen because many Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool child's education, and there is little literature regarding Head Start parents' engagement in their children's education. Participants included 10 Head Start parents in a southeastern state of the United States. Parents of younger children were excluded because opportunities for parent involvement such as field trip assistance were less likely in classrooms with very young children. Parents of older children were excluded, because a focus on academic skill development may be part of programs for older children and affect parents' self-efficacy regarding their educational role. Both fathers and mothers were invited to participate. Head Start centers conform to federal guidelines with regard to parent involvement. Head Start centers mainly enroll children of low-income families. This study holds the possibility of transferability because the Head Start program is offered across the United States, following federal guidelines.

### **Limitations**

Two limitations of this study were its small sample size and its confinement to a single metropolitan area in a single state of the United States. Both of these limitations were necessary to facilitate in-person interviews of sufficient depth to provide answers to the research questions. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), interviewing two or three

participants from each relevant vantage point is appropriate to achieve data saturation in an interview-based study. However, parents in different regions of the country and different parents even within the target region may respond differently than participants in this study. The study of two Head Start centers also may not represent the general population of low-income families. While these limitations may affect the transferability of this study's results, the potential significance of this study justifies my undertaking of it.

In addition, my biases may have affected this study. I work with low-income families in Head Start centers, although I do not work at the centers that were included in this study. I excluded from my study any parents with whom I have worked or whom I know personally. In addition, I used a reflective journal to record my thinking throughout the study, which helped me reduce the influence of my personal perspectives.

### **Significance**

Daniel et al. (2016) stated that minority and disadvantaged parents may experience various barriers that limit their engagement in school activities. Dove et al. (2015) stated that lack of parental engagement may be because of unknown factors. In this study, interviews with parents of children who are part of Head Start were used to help identify the extent to which low-income parents recognize their part in their children's education. This research will advance knowledge of Head Start parents' perspectives regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. It will help educators address the problem of insufficient parental involvement that has been

demonstrated to exist among low-income parents, including in Head Start settings. This study will contribute to positive social change by increasing understanding of the perspectives of low-income parents with regard to their part in their child's Head Start education, as well as identify factors that encourage or discourage their involvement in children's education. Additionally, the results of this study will assist the education community in designing interventions to help parents take a more active role. Because research has found that parent involvement is important to children's academic careers, results of this study may lead to children's school success.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I introduced foundational aspects of my proposed study of Head Start parents' perspectives regarding their participation in their children's learning. The problem that was the focus of this study was that Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool children's education. Three research questions focused on how Head Start parents described their responsibility in helping their preschool children be successful in school, how these parents described their feelings of efficacy in terms of assisting their preschool children be successful in school, and how they describe feeling invited to have a part in their preschool children's success in the preschool. An understanding of parents' perspectives regarding their roles in children's education may result in strategies to encourage engagement by Head Start parents. Such an understanding would help educators to target interventions that lead to more engagement by Head Start parents and improved outcomes for children.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was the focus of this study is that Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool child's education. The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their role in their preschool children's education. There is an abundance of literature that focuses on the fact that parent involvement is beneficial to young children's success. Han, O'Connor, McCormick, and McClowry (2017) found that when low-income parents do become involved in their children's education, children benefit in the social emotional domain and experience increasing academic success. More of an understanding is needed to determine why low-income parents including Head Start parents are not involved in children's education as other parents.

In this review, I examined literature on parent involvement and how socioeconomic status affects parents' ability or willingness to take a role in their preschool children's education. I begin this chapter with an explanation of how I searched for this literature, followed by a full explanation of the conceptual framework that supported this study. Following is the literature review that highlights definitions, evolution of the concept, and the importance of parental involvement, as well as parental involvement at the preschool level, factors and barriers regarding low-income families and their children, and Head Start. The literature review offers information regarding parental involvement and low-income families, including families of children enrolled in Head Start.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I searched ERIC database, Google Scholar, Decatur Library, and the Walden University Library. In searching this topic I used the following search terms: *early childhood, parent involvement, family engagement, Head Start parental engagement, Head Start, parental involvement, home school partnership, low-income families early childhood, parental engagement, parental involvement, and school, home, and community partnership*. . Through an iterative process, I used search terms to find additional articles that in turn led to new terms and articles. I investigated the literature to achieve saturation, so that and no new ideas appeared as I concluded my literature search.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The phenomenon under study was parental involvement as it relates to low-income preschool parents. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested that the primary reasons parents become involved in their children's education are that they have a personal outlook of the parental role which includes participation in their children's education, have a developed a sense of efficacy to help their children become successful in school, and perceive instances or demands for their involvement from the school or their children.

### **Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Initial Model**

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler initial model of the process of parental involvement suggests that parents' involvement in children's education is due to two systems of beliefs: parents' role construction of involvement or feeling of responsibility

helping their children learn in school and feelings of efficacy in terms of assisting their children to learn and experience successful outcomes in school. Biddle (1986) defined roles as socially-constructed beliefs and hopes held by groups and individuals. This implies that people often conform to the expectations of others in terms of their conduct, in addition to expectations generated by themselves (Biddle, 1986). Parent involvement must be perceived to conform to parents' social and personal role expectations regarding what is appropriate in terms of children and schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Reed, Jones, Walker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) said that when parents cede responsibility for their child's educational success to the school, their involvement is lower than when they perceive their social role as a partnership with the school.

To be engaged in children's education, parents must feel capable of being successful in parent involvement activities as well as assisting their children to be successful in school. Bandura (1986) suggested that parents' beliefs in their capability to promote children's educational success and the educational ambitions they hold for them influences their engagement in the educational process. Bandura and Barbaranelli (1996) found that parents with a high sense of efficacy toward parenting create environments conducive to developing their children's abilities and are strong advocates for their children in terms of activities concerning education. However, according to Bandura (1986), persons with low perceived self-efficacy address situations nervously which may further lower their sense that they are able to perform appropriately. Efficacy plays a main role in human functioning because it can affect behavior not only directly, but also

other variables such as goals and aspirations, affective proclivities, outcome expectations, and perceptions of opportunities and impediments (Bandura, 2006).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) stated that opportunities, invitations, and demands for involvement may influence parents' decision to become involved because the opportunity or demand characteristics so created tend to elicit and often reward involvement behaviors. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that the strongest predictors of parental involvement among families in urban elementary and middle schools were teacher programs and specific programs that encouraged and guided parent involvement. Even controlling for parent education, student ability, family size, and student level in school, parents were more likely to be engaged in the education of their child if they knew that the school maintained a strong commitment to involving parents at school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

### **Revised Model**

Walker et al revised the initial model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler to provide a five-step model which focused on the first two belief systems of the initial Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model. Step 1 of the model establishes four psychological conditions necessary for parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education, including construction of a role that is inclusive of parent involvement, self-efficacy in terms of assisting children to do well in school, as well as perceptions of invitations for involvement received from the school and the child. Once a parent makes a tentative decision to become involved, Step 2 is parents' consideration of contextual

factors such as their available time and energy, as well as specific perceptions of particular invitations that might affect their involvement action. In Step 3, parents consider their prior experience with involvement. These three first steps result in Step 4, which involves a determination between the parent's incipient choice to become involved and their child's needs and school expectations. Step 5 is parents' evaluation of the result of their parental involvement decisions with respect to outcomes for their child. To the extent that parents believe their choice mattered or did not matter, this evaluation will figure in future decisions regarding their parent involvement. The steps present researchers with a scale by which to evaluate associations between parents' mental motivations for engagement and the involvement behaviors they exhibit.

### **Suitability of These Models for This Study**

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parent involvement and the revised model of Walker, et al. supported this study because they provided reasons for parental involvement from the perspective of parents. Because in this study I sought low-income parents' perspectives regarding engagement in their preschool children's education, it was important to understand the motivators and disincentives that may be described by parents regarding their contribution in their preschool children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and Walker et al. (2005) provide a guide by which I analyzed Head Start parents' perspectives regarding involvement in their children's education. The first RQ asked in this study, on how parents describe their level of parental involvement, will be informed by the framework's information on perceived

social roles and responsibilities. The second and third RQs in this study, on factors parents find encouraging and discouraging of their involvement, will be informed by the framework's information on self-efficacy and on the importance of invitations sent and received. The work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and Walker et al. (2005) supported this study by providing a lens by which to examine factors associated to the phenomena of parental involvement among low-income parents of preschool children.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and Walker et al. (2005) were used as the theoretical framework in a study by Reininger and Lopez (2017). In this study researchers examined a sample of 516 parents of children in the first and fourth grade in a school in Chile. Reininger and Lopez explored parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of involvement invitations, perceived life context, and at-home and in-school involvement. Although Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler theorized that parental role construction is a central issue in parents' choice to become engaged in their child's education, Reininger and Lopez did not find role construction was significant. Parents' sense of efficacy was found to be significant in regards to at home involvement but not regarding involvement at school. In the literature review that follows, I examined research about parental involvement, including how parent involvement is defined, evolution of the concept of parental involvement, importance of parental involvement, parental involvement at the preschool level, factors that enhance parental involvement, factors that discourage parental involvement, barriers to parental involvement for low-income parents, and parents' perspectives of their role in their child's education.

### **Definitions of Parental Involvement**

Various terminologies are present in the literature in reference to parents' effort to create a relationship with their children's school. The literature regarding parents' relationship with schools is given three different terms: involvement, engagement, or partnership. "Involvement" is the terminology that is the oldest and is an umbrella word that labels many types of deeds that parents do to support the school and their children, and which, importantly, are usually requested by school staff (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). Originally parent involvement was defined as a one-sided tiered definition that was developed by the schools (Reininger & Lopez, 2017). According to Reininger and Lopez (2017), schools required and expected parents' compliance to middle class customs. Today the idea of parental engagement has evolved to mean a wide array of activities that parents and families participate in to support the education of children and encompass the perspective of parents, teachers, and school administration (Reininger & Lopez, 2017).

Partnership is another term used in the literature. Professionals in educational psychology, early intervention, and special education use partnership, especially in connection with parents of special needs children (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). The partnership model is one that recognizes teachers as authorities on education and parents as authorities on their children. According to Edwards and Kutaka (2015), partnerships are framed on seven values including mutual trust and respect, belief in each other's competence, open communication, commitment to the process, equality of consideration, and a sense of advocacy for the child. In partnership, professionals need to have attitudes

and skills to be able to work progressively with parents. Under the partnership model, home-school relationships are considered a responsibility or obligation of both teachers and parents, fulfilling a joint professional and parental/caregiving obligation (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). The school-community partnership was found to have minimal effectiveness in children's outcomes compared to outcomes obtained through the parental involvement model (Ma et al, 2016). Ma et al. (2016) concluded that the participation of parents (family involvement) is a more significant component than the role of school and communities (partnership development) in the relationship between children's achievement and parents' connection to the school.

Epstein (1995) and Zhang (2015) identified six aspects of parental involvement including parenting through nurturance and guidance, communicating frequently with teachers about children's progress, volunteering with class activities and in other ways, participating in school decision making, promoting learning at home, and using community resources to enrich and help their children. Epstein's categories are grounded in the perspectives of the teachers and the school. Definitions of parental involvement have expanded to include more subtle factors such as parental expectations and qualities of parent child communication (Reininger & Lopez, 2017) that might fit in the parental partnership model.

Stefanski, Valli, and Jacobson (2016) provided an outline that focused on four elements of parents' relationship to their children's school: parent-child discussion (discussions with child about the importance of education); monitoring (parents' attention

to child's behavior, particularly of adolescents); engagement in school and activities in the classroom activities; and participation in school organizations. They described a shift from mere parental involvement to an inclusive idea of parental engagement.

Involvement as it is traditionally conceived is characterized by schools identifying goals, needs, and projects, and then telling parents what to do. Instead, Stefanski et al. suggested engagement is characterized by listening to parents and understanding what they think and what they wish for their children. They described parents as key resources and collaborators, who should be important to educators.

This current study used the term parental involvement. I was seeking to understand the parents' perspective in regards to parent involvement and not the perspective of the school or center. It is important to find out what is important and not important to the parent to understand the phenomenon of parental involvement. However, to gain an understanding of the parent, it is also critical to examine the evolution of the phenomenon of parent involvement and the role parents have played historically.

### **Evolution of the Concept of Parental Involvement**

It was not until the nineteenth century that America embraced Jefferson's ideas of universal public education for every child without regard to a parent's ability to pay (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). The view of equality among classes became the sentiment of the nation. In the mid-1800s, Mann and Barnard envisioned a common school, which began the advent of public school system, in place by 1860 in every state (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Through the influence of the National Congress of Mothers, an organization created in

1897 that addressed issues with teachers and schools, the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) was formed in 1908; PTA chapters were formed in nearly every school (Gordon, 1977). Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst created the National Congress of Mothers in an effort to improve the welfare of mothers and children during an age of immigration and industrial mistreatment. (Lord, 1999). This group helped to connect school and home during the start of the twentieth century. By the 1940s all social classes were part of monthly PTA meetings, which many considered a mandatory community activity (Gordon, 1977).

Watson, Sanders-Lawson, and McNeal (2012) summarized post World War II parental involvement by noting parents' involvement in school-based events such as PTA meetings, conferences with teachers, and events, and by helping as school monitors. Most participation was focused on the mother, with roles like classroom mothers (Gordon, 1977). In the 1960s, more policies were developed that described parent involvement as a hopeful way to increase educational progress for poor and underprivileged children (Gordon, 1977). According to Watson et al. (2012), this led to a variety of parent involvement directives and prototypes of engagement that focused on community control of education, and were specific to African American and Latino families.

The movement supporting parental involvement was aided by educational researchers who began to explore parents' influence on student achievement in school. These findings, which I will describe in a later section of this review, inspired the inclusion of a mandatory parent involvement requirement for families enrolled in three

federal programs created in the 1960s and 1970s (Office of Head Start, 2019a). One of these, Head Start, was created in 1964 and was intended to serve disadvantaged children in poor urban cities. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act also required parents to become engaged as a partner in their children's educational programs (US Department of Education, 2007).

Congress also enacted legislation that required schools to develop strategies to increase parental involvement. Section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) stated that schools and districts are required to develop and pass guidelines and strategies that reach families. In addition, under NCLB, school districts must provide professional development about involvement with parents and must assist schools to develop goals-based parent partnerships. Also, under NCLB, state departments of education must distribute information to school districts regarding effective parent involvement practices and must evaluate the effectiveness of districts' parent involvement plans (NCLB, 2002). These requirements helped to redirect states and school district leadership from merely monitoring for compliance with parent involvement mandates to actively improving the quality and outcomes of parent involvement programs (Epstein, 2005). As part of NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education Title I grant provided funding for programs to enhance student achievement in schools with a large low-income population (NCLB, 2002). NCLB's goal was to increase equity of involvement by encouraging involvement among low-income and under-educated parents (Epstein, 2005).

The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2016). This act replaced NCLB and mandated that low-income and disadvantaged children's educational achievement be raised. Parent engagement was also part of this law, which outlined low-income parent's engagement in children's education. The act provided that Title I parent and family engagement be funded to provide family engagement activities (Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2016).

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Program, created by the Obama administration in 2011, sought to reduce the gap that existed between low-income children and their more affluent counterparts. This program focused national attention to school readiness and the disproportionate risk for low-income children to be unprepared to transition to kindergarten (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). Race to the Top provided development of common state standards for early childhood education and uniform assessments by which to measure student achievement, support children's behavior and health, and support families to become engaged in children's outcomes (Early Childhood Development, 2017). It is clear parental involvement is considered a critical aspect in the successful outcomes of young children, as highlighted through governmental interventions and policies.

### **Importance of Parental Involvement**

There are many aspects to parental engagement that have different effects on children's achievement. Ma, Shen, Krenn, Hu, and Yuan (2015) found a correlation

between parental involvement and educational outcomes for young children, where parent involvement included monitoring reports of children's behavior at school, engaging in strong home-school connections, and providing supervision at home, such as supporting children's completion of homework and limiting children's television viewing. Someketa, Mathwasa and Duku (2017) found that parental involvement is important to the development of literacy of young children. Ansari and Gershoff (2017) suggested that preschool children learn better when they receive support from parents in the home, so that schools that successfully extend children's learning into the home may be most successful in achieving success for children in school. There are many parent factors that determine whether parents decide to become involved in their children's education, such as socio-economic factors (Yamato, 2015).

There is an abundance of research that documents a range of academic and social-emotional benefits experienced by children when parents are engaged in their educational experience (Daniel et al., 2016; Wilder, 2014). Epstein and Sheldon (2016) introduced a theory of multiple influences that overlap and reinforce each other, which asserts that children benefit when school, home, and community work together. This collaboration prevents any discord between the entities regarding children's education. Together, the work of Epstein and Sheldon and the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler provided an understanding of parent involvement from the school's perspective and from the parent's perspective.

Family engagement in preschool classrooms benefits children, school staff, and families. Parents who are involved in their preschool child's classroom understand the educational process better than other parents (Morrison, Storey, & Zhang, 2015). When low-income parents participate regularly in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, children benefit across their entire elementary school years, in higher reading achievement, higher rates of on-track grade progression, and fewer assignments to special education (Morrison et al., 2015). Parents involved as active partners in their preschool children's development is important because of positive effects that these practices have on preparing young children for school, stopping or reducing behavior problems and increasing children's social emotional development, and developing academic success (Morrison et al., 2015). Additionally, when preschools request parents to be engaged in their child's education, and manage the efforts of teachers and parents in partnership, it provides for positive parent engagement in subsequent school years (Bierman, Morris, & Abenavoli, 2017). Parental involvement is known to educators as a means of increasing outcomes for children and is upheld by educators and policy makers in interventions and policy (Bierman et al., 2017). Parent involvement during preschool is linked with strong pre-literacy skills, attainment of mathematical skills, positive social skills, and positive attitudes regarding school (Deloatche et al., 2014). Parent involvement has been recommended as a strategy for attainment of positive child outcomes (Deloatche et al., 2014). Keys (2015) and Wilder (2014) found that policy makers have also acknowledged the importance of parents by including different aspects of parental involvement into

initiatives and reforms. Van Larere, Van Houtte and Vandebroek (2018) stated that organizations around the world have advocated for increased preschool parental involvement to close achievement gaps.

Children experiencing successful academic outcomes when their parents are involved can experience additional positive effects. Loughlin-Presnal and Bierman (2017) found that, in the years prior to kindergarten, parents' involvement helps children to develop essential non-academic skills, by encouraging them to be persistent and by validating their efforts to master new skills; this increases children's behavioral engagement as they work through challenging tasks. Daniel et al. (2016) and Loughlin-Presnal and Bierman (2017) reported parents who provide school-based parent involvement demonstrate to their children their support of the school and education in general, which encourages children to value academic learning. Parent involvement during early learning supported children's literacy skill development in the elementary grades (Daniel et al., 2016). School-based parent involvement promotes children's motivation to achieve and commitment to school by affirming the school site, staffs and the activities of learning environment (Daniel et al., 2016).

However, Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen, and Brand-Gruwell (2018) contended that parental involvement has a negative or only minor relationship to students' academic achievement. Otani (2017) reported that academic research found positive to mixed results when home-based parental involvement was examined. In general, several meta-analyses concluded that parental involvement and student achievement showed little

correlation. Busari and Hope (2019) concluded that some elements of parent involvement such as parent-child discussion have an effect on some types of student achievement. Because much of the literature addresses elementary and secondary school children and their parents, it is appropriate to examine the issues surrounding preschool and parental involvement.

### **Parental Involvement at the Preschool Level**

Although there has been considerable research about parental involvement at the elementary level and adolescent age group, there are fewer studies that examine the preschool level of parental engagement (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez. 2017). What research there is on involvement by parents of preschool children showed mixed results. For example, Van Laerea et al. (2018) found a need among families to know the happenings with their children in preschool, but families failed to exhibit this motivation by communicating with staff or even attending the school. In contrast, Jarrett and Coba-Reodriguez (2017) found that the majority of low-income African American parents of preschool children were involved in several ways, including helping in the classroom (69%), and participating in at least one parent teacher conference (81%).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) requires child care centers and preschools to engage parents as part of their accreditation (Bierman et al., 2017). Due to these requirements, many centers and preschools make an effort to include and promote parent engagement as part of their programs (Bierman et al., 2017). NAEYC has also incorporated policies that emphasize the importance of

family-teacher relationships in its Code of Ethical Conduct. It highlights that family and the early childhood professionals have a obligation to promote communiqué, support, and collaboration between school and home, which in turn enhances children's development (Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015). Head Start, which enrolls more low-income children in the United States than any other program, has developed performance standards which require programs to include provisions for engagement of families in all aspects of program (Rispoli et al., 2018). Head Start emphasizes the importance of family engagement to improve student achievement (Rispoli, et al., 2018). Current guidelines suggest that centers promote family connections among peers and the community through formal and informal networks (Sommer et al., 2017).

However, not all preschools are accredited by NAEYC or are part of Head Start. Policy statements, such as those provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED), provide guidelines for preschools regarding family engagement (US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education (HHS & ED), 2016). They describe family engagement as the methodical inclusion of parents in events and programs which enhance children's learning. They describe the integration of family engagement as the creation of a relationship between providers and families in which each regards the other as an essential partner in support of children's success. The goal of these agencies is for children to receive from their parents and from providers support for their development, learning, and wellbeing (HHS & ED, 2016). The National Institute for Early Education

Research (NIEER) reported that 93% of preschool programs that are state funded reported at least one or more types of family engagements events. Included in these opportunities were involvement at school (85%), teacher conferences or visits to the home which support communication with teacher (79%), and parenting workshops (51%) (Bierman et al., 2017). Even with these activities, family characteristics, such as income, education, language spoken at home, and parents' beliefs of efficacy, and levels of social support, determine the participation of preschool families, with more privileged families providing higher rates of participation (Bierman et al., 2017). There are many factors and barriers surrounding parental involvement that contribute to low income parents' decision about being involved in their children's education.

### **Factors and Barriers Regarding Low-Income Families and Their Children**

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (2019) reported that 21% of children in the United States live in families below the threshold for poverty set by the federal government (n.p.). However, NCCP reported that this figure is about half the number of children affected by functional poverty, defined as when a person or community lacks financial resources to meet basic standard of living. This estimate of 43% of children living in low-income households (NCCP, 2019, n.p.) mirrors the estimate of 44% made by Evans and Radina (2014), demonstrating that the percentage of children affected by low household income has remained consistent over time. In poverty, basic human needs are unmet (Chen, 2019). Yamato (2015) found that in the United States socioeconomic differences in parental engagement are prevalent even before children start formal schooling. In addition, underprivileged children are more likely to attend poorly funded schools and have access to few resources, be enrolled in classes with a large class size, and have teachers who are less qualified and experienced than teachers of more privileged children (Yamato, 2015).

Chan and Ritchie (2016) found that teachers have a narrow range of expectations for parent involvement. According to Chan and Ritchie, teachers feel that parents should follow teachers' protocols with regard to parental involvement in early childhood centers, instead of participating in decision-making with the teachers. Head Start stresses two-way communication and sharing information between teachers and parents to identify needs and strengths (Rispoli et al., 2018). Rispoli et al. (2018) noted that positive parent-school

relationships help to shape parents' willingness to engage in parental involvement, and that teachers' beliefs about parental involvement determine the effort they make to involve parents.

Bassok, Finch, Lee, Reardon and Waldfogel (2016) found a gap in school readiness by family socioeconomic status (SES). This gap portrays the differences of early home experiences of children living in poverty and higher income children. A family's SES is commonly measured using indicators such as household income or parental educational attainment, or is measured by combined information across several indicators of families' different levels of social and economic order (Betancur, Votruba-Drzal, & Schunn, 2018). Dove et al. (2015) reported that SES has a direct effect on parental involvement. They found that parents receiving governmental aid were unlikely to become involved with annual meetings, less likely to be in monthly communication with preschools, and less likely to visit a kindergarten classroom than were other parents.

Longo et al. (2017) and Daniel et al. (2016) found substantial variation between quality and quantity of parental engagement in support of young children's achievement due in part to the level of economic disadvantage. Families that face chronic poverty find it difficult to engage in continuous support and parenting of their children (Longo et al., 2017). Additionally, low-income parents find it difficult to participate in school-based involvement as well as home-school communication due to nontraditional work schedules, tiredness because of demanding jobs, and limited access to transportation to their children's schools compared to their more affluent counterparts (Han et al., 2017).

Benner and Yan (2015) determined that school characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status influence the home-school relationship. Mungai (2015) found that ethnic and cultural values influence how parents consider education and what they feel is their role in supporting their children's success in school. According to Mungai (2015), schools should consider nontraditional ways for families to be involved at school and home. Evans and Radina (2014) found that families living in poverty tend to have little trust in schools, based on their own adverse experiences with educational institutions.

The focus population of this study is Head Start parents, chosen because Head Start income guidelines ensure that participants form a low-income cohort. Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines and Section 645 of Head Start Act are used to determine income eligibility for potential participants of Head Start (ECLKC, 2019). Children whose families report income below the poverty guidelines are considered eligible to participate in the Head Start program. Children from homeless families, families who are receiving governmental assistance or social security income, and foster children regardless of income are also eligible for enrollment in Head Start (ECLKC, 2019). In addition, Head Start is mandated by Congress to support kindergarten readiness, as I will describe next.

### **Head Start and Kindergarten Readiness**

Head Start was created in 1964 as part of a tool by which to disrupt the cycle of poverty (Office of Head Start, 2019b). Head Start's mission is to help disadvantaged groups in the area of education (Office of Head Start, 2019b). The Head Start program

delivers high-quality early learning experiences as well as child development services not excluding children with disabilities (Office of Head Start, 2019b). Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 was enacted to strengthen Head Start quality, in part by aligning the Head Start school readiness framework with state early learning standards, requiring higher qualifications for the teachers, increasing monitoring of programs by reviewing child outcomes, and the establishing advisory councils on early care and education in every state (Public Law 110-134, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2007). State early learning guidelines and the requirements and expectations of schools must be appropriate for ages of children birth to five who are participating in the program. The domains of language and literacy learning, cognitive skill and conceptual knowledge, disposition towards learning, physical development and motor skills, and social and emotional development are required elements of state Head Start guidelines (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), 2019).

Early Childhood State Advisory Councils exist to improve availability, quality, and coordination of early childhood programs and services for children birth to age 5 as required through the Head Start School Readiness Act (ECLKC, 2019). An advisory council is selected by the governor of a state to implement the development of quality systems of early care programs which is to improve school readiness (ECLKC, 2019). Head Start teachers must have qualifications, training, and competencies to implement the performance standards outlined by Head Start and provide high quality services to young children as outlined by section 648A(a)(3)(B) of the Head Start Act. Head Start

staff must hold an associates, bachelor, or advanced degree in early childhood education or child development or have passed an early childhood examination such as Praxis II. Programs also have the right to require even more stringent requirements than the regulations provide (ECLKC, 2019). Public Law 110-134, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (2007) states it is important that teachers are knowledgeable about child development to implement rigorous standards held by Head Start.

The Office of Head Start assesses program compliance with the performance standards, the Head Start Act, and other policies and regulations (ECLKC, 2019). The reports provided through the monitoring process regarding program's performance include non-compliances, compliance and deficiencies. A multiyear perspective is provided to the Office of Head Start regarding grantees (ECLKC, 2019). The monitoring process and the requirement of teachers to possess degrees and have appropriate training allow for improvement of Head Start programs and providing readiness instruction to young children..

In 1993 the Secretary of Health and Human Services created a committee to recommend actions for Head Start quality and expansion (Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension, 2007). Recommendations focused on three areas: a need to improve quality, a need to expand services, and a need to form partnerships with the community which include coordination with elementary schools, states, and other local sponsored programs (Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension, 2007). The Head Start for School Readiness Act required revision of Head Start's performance

standards based on the recommendations that were made by the advisory committee. The change to the performance standards built upon the foundations that Head Start already established, particularly progress across domains of social emotional development, language and literacy, cognitive, motor development, and approaches to learning which improve a child's readiness for kindergarten (Office of Head Start, 2019b). The Head Start performance standards were significantly changed in 2016 to include findings from scientific research that incorporated best practices and integrated information from the Advisory Committee Final Report on Head Start Research and Evaluation (Office of Head Start, 2019b). The new performance standards helped to streamline the number of standards by 30% and improved transparency and regulatory clarity (Office of Head Start, 2019b).

One significant change to the new standards was requiring programs to offer longer service duration, which has been found by research to provide stronger child readiness outcomes (ECLKC, 2019). Head Start is required to offer at least 1,020 annual service hours to preschoolers by August of 2021, with at least 50% of center-based preschool slots meeting requirements by August, 2019. With these requirements in place, programs can meet children's educational needs, improve school readiness, and provide local flexibility to schedules that meet community and family needs (ECLKC, 2019).

The Head Start program performance standards outline what is necessary to deliver high-grade individualized services to promote children's school readiness and the health and well-being of children (ECLKC, 2019). The services include teaching and

learning environments that provide attentive care, organized learning environments, and effective teaching to provide healthy physical and emotional development and skills development aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ECKLC, 2019). In addition appropriate teacher-child ratios must be maintained, and the program must maintain individualized on-going training and professional development for staff (ECKLC, 2019). Teaching practices must include provision for nurturing and responsiveness, quality interactions, emotional security, use of rich language and communication, children's development of problem solving and critical thinking, language, and social emotional development, and supportive feedback regarding learning for all children (Administration for Children and Families, 2016). Isaac et al. (2015) found that staff found having school readiness goals and data on progress toward goals helped teachers work more effectively. They stated that the goals assisted teachers to be more intentional in planning instruction, identify children's individual needs, and identify areas of training needs. In addition teachers were able to communicate effectively with parents and promote parent involvement (Isaacs et al., 2015).

### **Head Start and Parent Involvement**

The Head Start performance standards provide for family involvement and require that parent and family engagement strategies must be incorporated into all systems and services to promote family welfare and promote children's learning (Administration for Children and Families, 2018). The program recognizes parents as their children's first teacher and nurturer. Head Start requires teachers and center administrators to engage

parents in the education of their children and promote parent-child relationships (US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2016 ).

Family engagement is defined by Head Start as a process through which parents or family members, program staff, and children develop positive and goal-oriented relationships (Administration for Children and Families, 2018). There is a shared responsibility of parents and staff that involves mutual respect of their roles and the strengths they contribute (Administration for Children and Families, 2018). Head Start family engagement includes family interaction with their children in the classroom, and efforts by teaching staff to work together with parents toward the goals chosen by families for themselves and their young children. Early Head Start and Head Start professionals, along with families and community partners, promote inclusiveness, equity, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness (Administration for Children and Families, 2018).

As an example of Head Start's commitment to parent involvement, a local center's family handbook describes parents and teachers as partners in the success and child development of their children. Teachers at this center send home messages outlining weekly themes, daily activities, and any concerns. Teachers may also send home activities for parents to implement at home with the child (Center director, personal communication). Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate in their child's education by engaging in activities such as field trips, lunch or breakfast, and circle time. According to the center parent handbook, parents are thought of as participants in their

child's learning. In addition, the Head Start Performance Standards require that teachers make two home visits per child each school year (Administration for Children and Families, 2018), which teachers at the target center do (Center director, personal communication). This practice is supported by the National Education Association (2019), which noted the majority of teachers report that the practice of home visits provides a lasting positive effect for the child, as well as on parent and parent teacher communication. Although Head Start, and teachers and administrators at the target centers, view parent involvement as essential to a child's education, many parents at these target centers are not fully involved. This study examined parents' perspectives as they relate to their role and responsibility in their children's education.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this study I explored Head Start parents' perspectives of parental involvement and their previous experiences with parental involvement in the preschool. The literature has detailed that low-income parents engage less in their children's education than their more affluent counterparts. The literature also has documented the correlation between student achievement and parental involvement. There is little research that addresses the preschool environment and parental involvement. This study filled the gap in practice by exploring how some Head Start parents choose to engage or not to engage in their preschool children's education. Gaining an understanding of the issue of parental involvement may help to end the achievement gap that currently exists between disadvantaged children and their more affluent counterparts.

In the next chapter, I describe the methods I used in my research in addressing the gap in literature regarding Head Start parent perspectives of children's preschool education. I solicited these perspectives by conducting in-person interviews with 10 to 12 parents of currently-enrolled Head Start students. An interview-based design has produced rich data by which to explore Head Start parent perspectives of children's preschool education.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their role in their preschool children's education. This study may help determine why some low-income parents do not participate as expected in their preschool children's education. This section focuses on the research design and rationale, my role as researcher in the study, sampling strategies and the sample, methods for data collection and analysis, elements that supported the trustworthiness of the study, and procedures I undertook to ensure ethical fitness.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Three research questions guided this study:

*RQ1:* How do Head Start parents describe their responsibilities in terms of helping their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ2:* How do Head Start parents describe their efficacy in terms of assisting their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ3:* Do Head Start parents describe feeling invited to have a role in their preschool children's success in school?

The central concept of this study was parental involvement as it relates to low-income parents of preschool children enrolled in Head Start. Some Head Start parents do not participate as expected in their preschool children's education. This study used a basic qualitative design with interviews. Qualitative methods produce rich data with details with regard to a small number of participants and cases. Qualitative data includes

direct statements and precise descriptions of circumstances, happenings, communications, and observed behaviors through observations and interviews (Labuschagne, 2003). Merriam and Grenier (2019) said the basic qualitative design involves focusing on discovery and understanding. Qualitative research was suitable for my research agenda because I wanted to understand the perspectives of Head Start parents. A quantitative design would have been less suitable because parental perspectives are not readily measured numerically. Although a quantitative approach such as a survey would have permitted me to aggregate responses from many participants, the qualitative design supported my study's purpose of garnering the depth and richness of individual thinking, which cannot be captured quantitatively.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher was the participant-observer role. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the participant-observer as schizophrenic because the researcher is a participant in the setting under study, but not to the point of becoming totally involved in the activity, nor in the way that one traditionally conducts observations (p. 146). Musante and Dewalt (2011) said that informal interviewing is part of participant-observation because the interview is like a casual conversation among acquaintances. The goal of interviews is for participants and researchers to share in constructing meaning involving a phenomenon, and permit researchers to observe interviewees as carefully and objectively as possible (Musante & Dewalt, 2011). It is the researcher's objective to discover new

insights regarding viewpoints of participants. The main rule in interviewing or conversing is letting the participant talk without interference (Musante & Dewalt, 2011).

As the researcher, I also assumed the role of insider. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), this refers to a researcher conducting research with a population of which they are a member. This status allows the researcher to experience complete acceptance from participants; therefore, participants are likely to be open with researchers and provide in-depth responses to interview questions (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I am a member of Head Start. I am knowledgeable about this population because I serve as a Family Advocate (social worker) in the organization. During the interview process, I observed participants' actions and reactions to interview questions and allowed them to freely discuss and answer questions to best of their ability. I elicited conversation to reveal true meanings and understanding of facts shared with me.

I invited participants with whose families I had no prior relationship. I do, however, have a professional relationship with other Family Advocates who work with parents at the Head Start agency. The parents I interviewed may have viewed me as someone in power because of my role as a Family Advocate within the organization, even though I do not serve any of the participants. Because the role of Family Advocate includes advising parents and checking with them to make certain critical advice is followed, a Family Advocate like me may be perceived by parents to hold a management position. To mitigate any power dynamic that may have resulted, I strived to establish a relationship with interviewees that helped them to feel comfortable about providing

information about their engagement or lack of engagement. I assured participants that my role in the organization was not associated with my role as researcher in this study, and whatever information they provided would be kept confidential, so they would feel comfortable sharing information with me with no feelings of intimidation.

I tried to refrain from any bias, but there was a possibility of bias because I work with a similar population at my center. My responsibility was to remain objective when I collected, reviewed, and analyzed the data. Travers (2001) suggested that every researcher brings some set of epistemological assumptions into their study, and these affect how the researcher comprehends and interprets qualitative data. Maintaining objectivity was a key goal for me while conducting this research. Since I work with this population, there may have been biases that would interfere with the objectivity of the research study. I used a journal to document feelings and thoughts involving bias to contain these feelings from interfering with the objectivity of the study. Chenail (2011) described this reflexive process as journaling or interactive-process recall to reflect about ideas and perspectives that emerge during interviews that might bias the collection and analysis of participants' actual ideas as shared through interviews in the study. Journaling allows the researcher to record thoughts prior to and after interviews. A notebook or recorder may be used to do this. The journaling process of recording thoughts on paper and reading helps the researcher as identify feelings, unrecognized thoughts, and impressions which could lead to bias. I presented facts that the data revealed in an unbiased manner.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

I selected seven participants through purposeful sampling. I selected participants from two Head Start centers within my organization, excluding my center since I have relationships with parents there. The organization in which I am employed is a Head Start agency with 12 centers in the state that is the location of this study. The two centers selected for this study were randomly chosen from 12 different centers within the agency. I put each center's name on a slip of paper, put them a hat, and drew two centers. Like all Head Start centers managed by the target agency, the two centers in question are federally-funded programs; they are both located in neighborhoods in a major city in the Southeastern United States.

The parents who were selected for this study have a 3- or 4-year-old child enrolled in the Head Start program at one of the two centers. All parents of 3- to 4-year-old children were invited to participate through a flyer that I placed in each child's cubby to take home to their parent and also posted at the door of each classroom. The first five parents from each center who respond to the flyer, who were identified by the center as fulfilling a parental role for a child, and who was identified as low-income, was invited to participate in the study. I selected an additional two participants as alternates in case of an emergency or a participant decided not to participate.

It is important during the data collection process to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This is achieved when there is adequate information to duplicate the

research, and when there is no new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) stated data saturation is not a number but the complexity of the data. I reached data saturation when there was no new information revealed in the interviews. If data saturation was not reached after 10 interviews, I would continue to interview the two additional participants that have been designated as alternates to reach saturation. Saturation was achieved once there was no new information revealed in the interview process.

### **Instrumentation**

In this subsection, I describe the instruments with which I collected data in this study. I also described how these instruments were developed and how issues of validity was addressed.

I was the first data collection instrument in this study. The data collected was filtered through my eyes, ears, and mind. I asked interview questions to the participants and audio recorded their responses using a digital recorder, as well as took handwritten field notes. These notes were made in a spiral notebook, on pages labeled with the date of each interview and the participant identifier. I transcribed these notes into a word processing document, so they were integrated into the data analysis. I took the steps described above to be aware of my own thoughts and biases throughout the data collection process, including noting in this notebook any thoughts or questions that arose in my mind that reflected my personal opinions.

The second data collection instrument was the interview protocol (Appendix A), created by me, that includes three questions. The instrument aligned with the research questions and asks parents about their perspectives of their role, what determines decisions about involvement in their children's learning, and their feelings of self-efficacy in helping their children. The interview was designed to fathom the perspectives of parents regarding parental involvement in their children's education, following key ideas provided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997). The interview instrument was validated by a professional who holds a doctorate in the field of education. This professional works for Head Start as a special education teacher, at a center that is not affiliated with the target agency. This professional confirmed that the interview questions were aligned with the study's problem and purpose, and they had power to answer the research questions, and confirmed the language used in the interview questions was appropriate for the population of Head Start parents. An example of the interview questions: "How much do you think it's your job as a parent to help your child learn the things that preschool is trying to teach?" I used information gathered from interview question 1 to answer the first research question on parents' sense of responsibility for their children's school success. Interview question 2 helped to answer research question 2, regarding parents' self-efficacy in helping their children learn school skills. Responses to interview question 3 were applied in answering research question 3, on parents' feelings of pressure to help or refrain from helping their children learn what is needed to be successful in school.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Once approval was granted to me by the participating centers and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (approval # 04-01-20-0269266), I began the recruitment process. I began by sending an introductory letter to the managers at the two Head Start centers described above, requested permission to invite parents at the center to be part of the study. The Head Start agency that was the umbrella organization for the two centers did not have an IRB. I spoke to the local Head Start agency vice president regarding my research and was approved to conduct my research of the sites in question. Following approval from Walden's IRB, I then distributed a flyer to children's cubbies in all the 3- and 4-year-old classrooms, and I also posted the flyer on the classroom doors. Teachers had no knowledge about the study except what was shared with parents through the distribution of the flyers. This was accomplished prior to the school day beginning. Teachers possibly witnessed my distributing the flyers but the study information was not shared or discussed.

In the flyer, parents was asked to contact me directly if they are interested in participating in the study by calling the number on the flyer or by emailing at the email address on the flyer. I invited the first 10 parents who contact me to participate (five from each center), and kept in reserve the next two parents (one from each center) who contacted me as alternates in case one of the 10 participants withdrew from the study. Once a participant contacted me I discussed with them the details of the interview process and scheduled a date and time for the interview. I also emailed each participant a copy of

the consent form, or provided a copy in person, outlining details of the interview process and their rights and responsibilities, so they may reviewed this ahead of the interview.

When participants arrived for the interview, I asked them to sign the consent form if they had not already signed and brought with them the copy they received previously. I also reviewed with each participant their rights and responsibilities and received their consent to audio recording the interview using a digital voice recorder.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. I interviewed each parent at the local public library in a meeting room with the door closed. Upon arrival I introduced myself to the participant. I advised participants that their participation was voluntary and at any time they may end the interview. Interviewees were asked a series of four questions (Appendix A). The interview was be audio recorded and I also kept field notes of body language, gestures, and key points I wished to recall later. I conducted the interviews like a conversation, making the participant feel comfortable. Once the interview was over I asked participant if they had any questions or would like to add any additional information. I thanked the participant for their time and advised them that I would provide a transcript of the interview for their review.

Following each interview the recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Participants received a copy of the transcription of their interviews to review for accuracy. Participants were able to make changes to the transcription if they were not in agreement. No participant requested or made changes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I began my analysis of the interview data by first transcribing the interviews, using a professional transcription service. Each transcription occupied a broad left-hand column on a word processing document and was labeled with the date of the interview and the participant identifier. Once transcription was complete for all interviews, I incorporated my field notes as appropriate, in a narrow right-hand column of the word processing document. I then read each interview looking for notable ideas or repeated comments by participants, in a process of precoding the data. Precoding, according to Saldana (2016), involves circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring participants' significant quotes or passages. I marked key passages with a highlighter, using different colors for different words and ideas that participants expressed.

Following this initial precoding, I continued to code data. Coding entails ways of organizing and labeling data that assist in analysis. One purpose for coding is data organization, and coding supports analysis by providing for the identification of patterns across multiple data points or sources; there is an identification of relationships within data, and the establishment of common themes across the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I coded the first participant's interview transcript, and then moved on to the second participant's interview. According to Saldana (2016), a researcher might find that the second data set will influence understanding of the first participant's data and so require recoding of that first interview. This recursive process of coding continued throughout interview transcripts from the remaining participants. Saldana (2016) also described

coding as not just labeling, but linking: it leads from the data to ideas. Coding is a method by which a researcher deconstructs and reassembles data in ways that lead to answers and to further questions regarding the phenomenon under study.

When coding was complete I generated categories from the coding. Categories were formed from the coded data, by arranging codes in a systematic order and putting data into classifications or categories. This might be described as taking codes such as lacking time, long work schedule, and conflicting schedule, to a category no availability. Then the data will be analyzed for themes which are derived from the categories. The process of coding, categorizing, and developing themes helps the researcher to answer the research questions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described themes as summary statements, causal explanations, or conclusions. In the scenario above the category *no availability* might become a theme labelled *time constraints*, which becomes part of an explanation of why individuals do as they do. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), coding provides an early analysis of the data by assigning a word to sum up participant answers to a question. I then organized these codes into categories (Saldana, 2016). Themes are formed through linking two or more categories. Themes offer an explanation of why something happened, what something means, and how the person interviewed feels about the subject matter.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness or validity refers to ways that a researcher can confirm that the outcomes are true to participants' experience. It refers to the quality and rigor of a study

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Yin (2011) describes a valid study in which the researcher has collected and interpreted data correctly, so that the findings are accurately reflected and characterize the real world that was studied. In qualitative research what is reported is reflects the researcher's selection of data from the mass of information accumulated and their interpretation of these data to understand the phenomenon of interest. It is important to understand the viewpoints of those involved, discover the complexity of social behavior in context, and present an all-inclusive understanding of what is happening (Merriam & Greiner, 2019). To improve trustworthiness I provided an atmosphere that allowed participants to be honest and open with their answers. They were asked to elaborate about their answers which provided a greater understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Credibility is the ability of the researcher to account for complex information and to describe this complexity in ways faithful to the data themselves (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In qualitative research, credibility or internal validity is connected to research design and the researcher's instruments and the data collected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved credibility through the use of an interview instrument that was validated by an independent authority, and through an interview process that was supportive of parents' frank and complete responses and was as free as possible from researcher bias. I employed reflexivity strategies to prevent the intrusion of my own perspectives and biases. Also, credibility was achieved through data saturation, as suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015). Internal validity was reached through data saturation when no new

information was forthcoming from participants. If saturation was not reached after interviewing the 10 participants then the alternate participants would also be interviewed. Finally, I asked participants to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy. This process of member checking ensures that the data I used for analysis reflects what participant parents beliefs.

Transferability describes the ability to apply the results of a study in a given situation to another similar situation. Since qualitative research provides small samples and is selected in a purposeful way it is not possible to simplify statistically (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To ensure transferability I provided a rich detailed description which is a strategy to ensure for generalizability and transferability in a qualitative study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This strategy involves providing a database that has enough description and information for the reader to be able to decide if the findings in the study apply to another situation (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I provided a rich detailed description in order for reader to make a determination if the study's findings can be transferred and applied to other settings.

Dependability or reliability refers to what extent the research findings can be replicated. In a qualitative study, this means that another reader, given the same data from the same qualitative experiences, would arrive at a similar interpretation of those data. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), what is important when discussing dependability in a qualitative study is whether the results are consistent with the collected data. Therefore, dependability is achieved when others concur regarding the results

(Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To achieve dependability I took detailed notes and recorded all interviews and established appropriate interview conditions in the research process. I then presented the data and my findings fully and transparently.

Confirmability represents the goal of recognizing and exploring ways that biases and prejudice may map into interpretation of data and monitor those feelings to the fullest extent through a self-examination process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To provide confirmability, I engaged in reflexivity by keeping a journal to track and manage my thoughts as I collected and analyzed data. I also used data triangulation to enhance confirmability of the study by collecting data from two different sites and multiple parents. The participants of the study were provided with a transcript for their review to authenticate the accuracy of the data. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), methods to reach confirmability include triangulation strategies, researcher reflexivity, and external audits.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The Walden University IRB and federal regulations set the parameters that protect potential participants of this study. I recruited participants upon receiving approval from IRB (approval # 04-01-20-0269266), and I provided a letter of consent to prospective participants, outlining the purpose for the study, explaining their role in the study, and described what will happen during the interview. I also explained to parents both in person and through correspondence that they may decline to participate or may stop the interview at any time during the interview because their participation is voluntary.

I was responsible for the generation, collection and analysis of interview data. The interviews were conducted behind closed doors at the library so participant privacy was protected. I maintained participant confidentiality by assigning a code by which to refer to each participant. These codes took the form of P1, P2, and so on, with codes assigned in the order in which participants volunteer to be part of the study. A list of participant names with their associated codes will be kept as a separate file, and destroyed when interview transcriptions are completed. The data was transcribed by a professional transcription service. A confidentiality agreement was executed by that service to protect participant privacy. There was no identifying participant information included in any dissemination of the study, including within the target agency and centers.

All material generated through data collection, such audio files, transcripts, consent forms, and my handwritten notes, will be maintained in a locked drawer at my home for a period of five years. Electronic data will be maintained on a flash drive and password protected. The only persons with access to the material are myself and, upon request, my research committee. After 5 years paper documents will be destroyed through shredding, and electronic files will be wiped using Eraser or similar software.

The study was conducted at centers operated by the agency at which I am employed. Potential participants did not know me, because my workplace is a center not included in this study. However, I took care to exclude from this study any parent with whom I have or have had in the past a personal or professional relationship. I had no authority over potential participants, nor played any role in their children's education, nor

do I know any of the children enrolled at the target centers. Participants did not receive an incentive for their participation. The parents who participated in this study were volunteers. I placed no pressure on parents to participate.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of low-income parent regarding parent involvement. The study was held at two centers and parents were asked interview questions that have been designed by the researcher. The questions explored parent perspectives about their involvement in their children's education. In addition, in Chapter 3 I outlined the data analysis plan, instrumentation, recruitment procedure and ethical procedures involved in this study. The study commenced upon receiving full approval from Walden University's IRB. Chapter 4 provides a full description of the outcomes of this study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of low income parents regarding parent involvement. I gathered information about parents' perspectives regarding family involvement through interviews. The research questions were:

*RQ1:* How do Head Start parents describe their responsibilities in terms of helping their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ2:* How do Head Start parents describe their efficacy in terms of assisting their preschool children be successful in school?

*RQ3:* Do Head Start parents describe feeling invited to have a role in their preschool children's success in school?

In this chapter, I describe the results of interviews of parents of children in a Head Start program. This chapter is organized by question and associated responses. Responses to questions are then analyzed and research questions are then answered based on data.

### **Setting**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were in their homes and I in mine. Interviewees were minority low-income Head Start parents living in the Southeast region of the country. I conducted interviews over the phone. Many participants engaged in their interview with their children in the room and with televisions or radios on. There was a great deal of background noise in the recordings, which made transcribing recordings

difficult. I was also unable to observe participants' reactions and body language because interviews were conducted by telephone.

### **Data Collection**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviews were prohibited and solicitation of participants was done via a web page that included the flyer. The link to that web page was emailed to Head Start parents. They in turn contacted me, and we discussed the parameters of the interview. I emailed consent forms to potential participants and asked them to reply to the email stating that they consented. We then scheduled times for interviews, and I called each participant by telephone at the appointed time and we proceeded with the interview. Seven Head Start parents were interviewed. Interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded with an audio recorder. Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. A copy of interviewees' transcripts were emailed to them to review for accuracy. There were no changes made to transcripts by interviewees.

### **Data Analysis**

As I read the transcripts of the participant interviews, I highlighted words and phrases that were relevant to the research problem and purpose. I then inserted the transcripts into an Excel spread sheet. I then coded data from the transcripts, grouped codes into categories, and then grouped the categories into themes. I derived 77 unique codes from the raw data. I then grouped these codes into eight categories: accountability ,

parents' expectation of self, parent self-efficacy, feelings of pressure, parent expectations for children, parent expectations for teachers, positive social influences, and negative social influences. I then grouped these eight categories into four themes: parent responsibility, parent rationale, teacher responsibility, and social influence (see Appendix B).

Discrepant cases included answers participants made to a later interview question that contradicted their answers to a previous interview question. When I noticed such discrepancies during interviews, I asked participants for clarification in the moment and amended their interview transcript to reflect the correct answer or clarification of discrepant answers. Similarly, in cases where I did not notice discrepancies during interviews, but noticed it during the transcription process, I asked participants for clarification regarding the discrepant information when I emailed them their transcripts for review. If participants did not respond to this inquiry, or if I did not notice the discrepancy until after interviews and transcript reviews were completed so the discrepancy remained unresolved, I recorded both answers for data analysis. There was one such unresolved discrepancy found during data analysis. I describe this discrepancy in this chapter.

Data suggested that parents take some or all responsibility for their children's education. Most also feel capable to teach their children the lessons preschool is teaching. Parents feel some pressure to teach, some due to self-motivation and others due to outside

sources. The data also suggest that parents would like for their children to know more than what preschool teaches.

## **Results**

### **Results for RQ1**

RQ1 was: How do Head Start parents describe their responsibilities in helping their preschool children be successful in school? The theme of parent responsibility was significant to this question. Parents expressed feelings involving partial to full responsibility for their children's education. All parents felt an obligation to their children to assure they succeeded in school. Interviewee 1 stated:

I feel it is 50/50. I think I should pick up where they [the teachers] left off, whatever the child need help in so they need extra help in counting if teacher left off at 10 then I am going to try to go to 20.

Interviewee 2 stated, "I actually think I should be the first teacher to be honest." Interviewee 5 said, "It is my responsibility for him to know what he needs to know." Other interviewees felt they were in partnerships with teachers when it came to their child's learning. Interviewee 3 stated, "Yeah, I feel like it's an equal responsibility. She only sees them eight hours a day so the other twelve is on me." Interviewee 4 said "Oh, it is extremely important [to work with the teacher]. I mean you should always be a team player because it's not just their responsibility; it's our responsibility as parents to ensure that they receive the education that we want them to have."

Parents expressed feelings of responsibility for teaching their children at home. Many parents expressed high aspirations for their children and felt that they could achieve the goals they have for their children by teaching them at home. Interviewee 4 said, “it was always my desire for to kind of give our children a head start in learning, I feel that I should try more to teach my child at home then to wait until she gets to school.” Some parents felt like their children should achieve a higher level of learning than even what the teachers were providing children. Interviewee 7 said, “Whatever I can get to get my children at a higher level I am happy.” Interviewee 1 said, “I want him to be a little above 1-2-3, ABCs.”

Parents said they spent between 2 and 15 hours a week with their children, trying to teach them the things that they are learning in preschool. The responses indicate that Head Start parents dedicate time to teaching children at home. All parents reported that their children were doing well in terms of learning the things they need to learn for preschool. Interviewee 2 reported, “she is actually doing very well.” Interviewee 4 said, “oh [its’] going very well, very well. She is thriving.” Similarly, Interviewee 3 said, “she is doing pretty good,” and Interviewee 1 said, “Oh it is good. He is doing well with that.” The data show that parents take full or partial responsibility for their children’s education. Many feel that it is very important to spend time working with their children and feel that they are in partnership with teachers. They disclosed spending multiple hours working with children at home and hold high expectations and aspirations for their children’s future. The theme of parent responsibility emerged in analysis of this research question.

## Results for RQ2

RQ2 was: How do Head Start parents describe their efficacy in assisting their preschool children be successful in school? The theme of parent responsibility and parent rationale applied to this question, in that parents expressed willingness to dedicate time and effort to teaching their children, so their children could be successful in school. Most parents expressed that they felt more than capable to teach their children so the children can be successful in school. Interviewee 1 stated:

I am 100% capable. If I think it's wrong, you know, I am going to try to teach it right so I don't care what the teacher teaching, if I don't think it is right way, I am going to try to teach him the right way.

Parents expressed feelings of efficacy as well as a history of teaching their children. Interviewees 3 said, "I feel capable. What they teach her is common sense so I can see the right way and the wrong way to do it." Interviewee 4 reported, "I feel pretty good about it. I mean this wouldn't be my first go at it though." Interviewee 6 expressed some doubt, however. She said, "I feel 50/50. Sometimes it is a little tricky because especially with my child she is really active and if it is not the right thing she might not participate the way I want." Interviewee 6 noted that the family works with the child but she finds it to be difficult at times working with her child. Interviewee 7 stated, "I feel 80% capable. If I don't know a certain way or what they are teaching about I will definitely find out how." This particular parent stated that she seeks out resources when she is not sure about how and what to teach.

The data associated with RQ2 position parents as feeling capable to teach and be involved in their young children's education. One parent said she was capable but experienced some difficulty due to her child's attention span. One interviewee expressed that when she was in doubt, she would find appropriate resources to help teach her children. Themes of parent responsibility and parent rationale emerged in association with this research question.

### **Results for RQ3**

RQ3 was: How do Head Start parents describe feeling invited or disinvited to have a role in their preschool child's success in school? Themes of teacher responsibility and social influence emerged in relation to this research question. The responses were mixed, with some parents expressing pressure as the effect of their own motivation while others saying pressure came from other people. One parent said that pressure to be an active participant in learning came from her child. Parents who expressed an inner drive to teach their children said that came from the high expectations they had for their children. For example, Interviewee 1 said "[I feel] self-pressure not from teachers." Interviewee 4 said, "Bare minimum: I pressure others; I feel no pressure." She also said, "It came from me and husband and in-laws to prove them wrong and a friend that home schools." Other parents said they received pressure from family and one parent said she felt pressure from the child's pediatrician. For example, Interviewee 5 said, "[I feel pressure from] teachers and Mom." Interviewee 6 said, "I received pressure from my Mother," while Interviewee 7 said, "I felt pressure from the pediatrician." Interviewee 3

that said invitations from her child is the pressure she receives to involve herself in her child's education. She said, "My daughter drives me to teach and my Mom too."

Interviewee 2 indicated she adopted others' expectations as her own, saying, "Others such as my grandmother at first, then it was me driving it." Five interviewees indicated that other people encouraged them to teach their children. Two said they encouraged themselves so that they were the driving force to teach their children

I followed up by asking parents if the pressure or expectations they felt influenced what they decided to do, in teaching or not teaching their child at home. Interviewee 1 responded that her own inner pressure drove her involvement. Interviewee 2 and 4 said they felt a combined influence from their inner drive and other people pressuring them. Interviewee 2 said, "My grandmother influenced me and me," and Interviewee 4 said, "Influence came from me and husband and in-laws to prove them wrong." Four parents, Interviewee 3, 5, 6, 7 said they were solely influenced by other people, saying, for example, "I received pressure from mother."

Parents were asked whether others they knew were teaching their own children and the reviews were mixed. Four parents said that other people they knew were not teaching their children. Interviewee 1 stated, "They do not help children; they rely on teacher." Interviewee 2 said, "Others are not doing much with their children," while Interviewee 4 said, "My sister's not teaching their children. They think it is up to teachers." Interviewee 6 said, "My friends are not teaching their children, kids are rapping but don't know their ABCs. They know a whole rap song but don't know A to Z.

That's beyond me." However, three parents expressed knowing others that did teach their children. Interviewee 5 said, "My sister and my friend are teaching their children." Interviewee 7 said, "A few teach and a few leave it to the teachers," and Interviewee 3 said, "My sister and god sister teach their children." More parents said friends and family are not involved in their children's education than said they are. Parents were also asked if others influenced their decision to teach. Two participants said that they were not influenced at all by what others were doing or not doing. Interviewee 4 expressed that she and her husband were the influencers of their decision to be involved in their children's education; she said, the influence "came from me and husband."

The data suggest that parents felt invited or were influenced or driven to participate in their children's education by themselves but also by other influences such as family and friends. One parent expressed that her child is the one that drives her to be involved in her education. Other parents were initially driven by others' comments and remarks, but the decision was their decision and they developed an inner drive to teach. Themes of teacher responsibility and social influence were reflected in answer to this research question.

### **Additional Findings**

During interviews, the subject of parental involvement was discussed as it pertains to involvement in the classroom. Many of the interviewees expressed a desire to volunteer more at school but many had barriers that they felt were difficult to overcome. There were two who reported that obligations at work prevented them from being as

involved with the classroom as they wished. Interviewee 1 stated, “I volunteer when I can, but I work, so [only] when I can.” Interviewee 6 said, “I have twice [volunteered] at school but working prevents me. Interviewee 4 said she has started a cake business that has had increased demands on her time. She said, “It’s [volunteering] a little less this year; my cake business has picked up a bit.” Interviewees 2 and 5 said they had other younger children and would not be able to volunteer with their young children.

Interviewee 2 reported, “Only three times [volunteering]; not as much as I wanted to. I have a two year old now and it is hard to go in.” Interviewee 5 said, “I haven’t been able to volunteer, I have a newborn.” Interviewee 7 also had the issue of having young babies and then she went back to work, so she said she is unable to volunteer at school. She said, “I used to volunteer a lot, but I had babies and I was unable to do so. Then I began working.” Interviewee 3 said:

We did maybe an hour a month. I tried my best to stay out of the classroom this year just because I knew this year was more important than anything because she would be going to Pre-K and that gets her ready for kindergarten, and it’s just like that moment where I wanted her to be able to be her in her classroom and learn and not feel pressured that Mommy’s going to pop up out of nowhere. So I tried to stay out as much as possible.

This parent did express that she talks to the teachers about what the child is learning and extends learning to the home.

All parents stated that this was not the first time they actually thought about teaching their child. Some responses were like that of Interviewee 7, who said, “Uh, well when it comes to teaching at home, even with my first one, I always try to be involved in teaching them at home,” and Interviewee 1, who said, “Yeah I’ve been doing it for a while.” Interviewee 4 reported, “this was my husband’s and my decision.” The answer from every participant was this was not the first time they thought of teaching their child at home.

### **Discrepant Data**

There was one discrepancy found during this study that was unresolved prior to data analysis. Interviewee 4 disclosed at first that her family and in-laws were pressuring her to teach her children. This participant called it “home school.” She later said that the influence to teach came from “me and my husband.” She mentioned “from the time the children were born we decided that we would ‘home school.’” I reported what she said in both instances. It is possible that both things were true: the parent felt family pressure to teach their children at home and also that she and her husband decided to home school the children. However, all parents in this study, including this parent, had children enrolled in Head Start. I did not notice this discrepancy until after data analysis was complete, and so, as planned, I included both statements in the data.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

This study followed measures to ensure accuracy of the data and of my analysis. Interviewees were interviewed and their responses to interview questions were audio

recorded and transcribed, and interviewees were given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and request changes. There were no changes made to the transcripts. In addition, I instituted journaling during the interview process to identify any biases that might affect the study.

Credibility was achieved through the use interview instrument that was validated by an independent authority, and through an interview process that was supportive of parents' frank and complete responses and was as free as possible from researcher bias. I employed reflexivity strategies to prevent the intrusion of my own perspectives and biases. Also, credibility was achieved through data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that credibility depends on faithfulness to the data at every step of the data collection and analysis process, which I have endeavored to achieve in my study.

Transferability was achieved through providing a rich detailed description so a reader can ascertain if the study findings can be transferred and applied to other settings. I provided a rich detailed description which a strategy to support transferability of my findings. Readers may determine, from the information I provided, the relevance of my study's findings to their own contexts.

To achieve dependability, I took detailed notes and recorded all interviews and established appropriate interview conditions in the research process. I then presented the data and my findings fully and transparently. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), these contribute to dependability because they permit the reader and future researchers to evaluate or replicate my study.

To achieve confirmability, I engaged in reflexivity by maintaining a journal to track and manage my thoughts as I collected and analyzed data. I also used data triangulation to enhance confirmability of the study by collecting data from two different sites and multiple parents. The participants of the study were provided with a transcript for their review to authenticate the accuracy of the data. These measures helped to reduce the influence of my own biases and improved the integrity of my results.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. Interviews were used to answer the research questions outlined in the beginning of this section. I analyzed the participants' responses to derive codes, categories, and themes as they related to parental perspectives of parent involvement. Key themes included parent responsibility, parent rationale, teacher responsibility, and social influence. The theme of parent responsibility was related to RQ1, which asked participants about their responsibility for their children's school success, but also to RQ2, which asked about parents' feelings of self-efficacy in assisting their children achieve school success. The theme of parent rationale applied to RQ2, about parents' self-efficacy, in that self-efficacy for a task is a motivation for attempting the task. The themes of teacher responsibility and social influence were related to RQ3, which focused on participants' feelings of being invited or disinvited to take a role in their children's school success. Participants in this study cited their child's teacher as a source of encouragement or

discouragement of their role. They also cited social pressure from friends and family that was directly encouraging of their active role in children's education or encouraging in its absence; several participants noted feeling motivated to do for their child what their friends did not for their own children.

I also analyzed interview data to answer to the research questions. I found that parents in this study described taking some or all responsibility for their children's education (RQ1), feeling capable to teach their children at home things children need to be successful in school (RQ2), and feeling some pressure to teach their children (RQ3), due to self-motivation, encouragement from teachers, and the standard set by friends and family. Most parents in this study described being highly motivated to work with their children at home to ensure children's school success, often giving this daily attention. In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of these findings, with reference to the literature, recommendations for additional research, and implications for social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of Head Start parents regarding their roles in their preschool children's education. The study involved a basic qualitative design using interviews with parents of children enrolled in Head Start to gain their perspectives regarding their roles in their preschool children's education and explore factors that encourage and discourage their fulfillment of responsibilities. In this study, I found that parents believed they are very involved in their children's education in the home. I found them to express high levels of responsibility for their children's education. Nearly all participants felt that they were capable of teaching their children. Parents reported that the influence of teachers, family, and friends regarding their involvement was mixed.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In this study, I found that low income parents reported being very involved in their children's education. Parents of low-socioeconomic status are less likely to be involved in children's education than more affluent parents (Daniel et al., 2016; Dove et al., 2015). This contrast may be due to differences in terms of how parent involvement is defined. Head Start, in particular, requires parent engagement as an in-kind contribution to the program, but includes only engagement that happens in the center and does not include actions parents take at home that contribute to their children's education.. Parent involvement that is limited to activities witnessed by teachers in the school setting misses involvement that takes place in the home. only 13% of parents in the target center

volunteered in the classroom in the past school year. Parents in this study confirmed that they did not participate in school-based involvement that might be observable by school personnel or researchers except for teacher conferences. Parents in my study expressed a desire to participate at school but barriers such as work and having younger children to care for hindered their efforts. However, as demonstrated by participant data, these parents described being dedicated to their children's education, teaching them at home, and making a deliberate effort to contribute to children's academic success. My study found that a focus on school-based involvement misses home-based involvement and feelings of responsibility low-income parents described in my study regarding their children's learning.

Another finding in this study was that parents reported that they are in regular communication with teachers regarding what their children are learning and how they were doing in preschool. Dove et al. (2015) said that low-income parents had low levels of communication with their children's teacher compared to other parents. Fisherman and Nickerson (2015) suggested that specific and direct communication from their children's teacher encourages parents to engage in meetings, participate in educational planning, and contribute to reciprocal communication. This was found to be true of participants of this study.

A third finding of this study was that parents were aware of what their children were learning in preschool and teach them at home. Parents reported spending between 2 and 15 hours a week teaching their children at home. All said that they work with their

children on social-emotional in addition to academic topics. Parents indicated if they did not know how to teach something, they sought out resources so they were able to teach their child. Longo et al. (2017) found low-income parents and Head Start parents in particular were deficient in terms of their use of positive parenting techniques and used less-effective discipline methods compared to middle-class parents. Longo et al. also found low income parents had reduced access to learning resources and provided less learning stimulation in low-income families.

I found many interviewees described invitations to volunteer were extended to them by their children's teachers and reported that those teachers coached parents to work with their children at home on subjects in which children needed help and were learning in preschool. Yamamoto et al. (2016) said attitudes of teachers toward parents and efforts they put into developing clear and inviting communication with them facilitates or discourages parents' school-based engagement and their engagement at home. Participants in my study valued their collaboration with their children's teachers and credited those teachers' outreach with supporting parents' educational involvement in the home.

Finally, I found that parents in this study felt committed to their role in their children's education and supported in that role through social connections that confirmed to them the value of involvement. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), parents' role construction is developed largely through observation and modeling of their own parents and friends. Parents in this study all felt responsibility for their children's

education, and most suggested this was inspired by their own parents' involvement in their own educational experiences. Parents also cited friends who were actively involved in their children's education serving as models for their own involvement. One parent reported that friends who were not involved in their child's education motivated her to set a positive example by being involved in her own child's education. Another parent noted her child expected her to be involved, and that was motivating. In addition, parents in this study felt a sense of efficacy to help their children become successful in school. Results of this study confirm that parents felt influenced and pressured to become involved in their children's education as a result of social interactions and role modeling as a result of their own commitment to their children, and feelings of self-efficacy in the role.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by a smaller participant pool than anticipated. I interviewed seven participants, not the originally intended 10 participants, due to physical and potentially emotional barriers created or potentially enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this meant I had a reduced number of perspectives from which to generate findings, findings from each participant were consistent and offered a depth of information and quality of engagement, and data appeared to reach saturation by the conclusion of the seventh interview. Saturation is achieved when there is adequate information to duplicate the research and there is no new information. In this study, it was found that after a few interviews, information was the same from interviewees, and no information was being derived. One possible effect of the small sample was that none

of the parents in this study reported being uninvolved or disinterested in their children's education, as anticipated by prior research. A larger sample may have provided a wider range of perspectives, but given the consistency of reports from the seven parents I interviewed, the intended number of 10 participants may not have offered different results. A few parents in my study said they had family and friends who were not involved in their children's education, but perspectives of such parents were not captured in this study.

Another limitation was that this study was predicated on school-based involvement, which is how parent involvement is operationalized by Head Start, and how parent involvement is constituted in much of the research literature (for example, see Epstein, 1995). However, parents in this study described home-based parent involvement. The basis for this study was a more narrow idea of involvement than what parents described and what parents and children actually experience. This forms a study limitation, because the premise on which the study was based was not broad enough to include home-based involvement, and also suggests implications for improvements in Head Start practice, which I discuss in another section of this chapter.

It may be that prior literature, that suggested low-income parents are uninvolved in their children's education compared to other parents, reflects a narrow perspective on parent involvement, and the data collected by Head Start may be similarly restrictive in how involvement is conceived. The results of this study that counter findings in the literature may not be a factor of small sample size, but a factor of how parent

involvement has been operationalized. More study is needed to discover how a larger sample of low-income parents participates in children's education and the true effect of home-based parent involvement.

### **Recommendations**

One recommendation for future research is further exploration of the effect that home-based parent involvement has on children's school success. Because low income parents in this study described many barriers to school-based parent involvement but also described extensive levels of home-based involvement, greater understanding of what parents do to educate their children at home would fill a gap in the parent involvement literature. This understanding could lead to expanding the context of parent involvement when quantified and considered by educators. Future research might explore the extent to which parents activities at home are similar in educational focus to activities teachers might assign to or expect from parents at school. A study of parent motivation for school-based parent engagement, including any possible disincentives and barriers, might inform the educators in ways to make school-based involvement more attractive or convenient.

Also, a study comparing the effectiveness of school-based involvement to home-based involvement, and exploring interaction effects when parents engage in both contexts for parent involvement, might further contribute to understanding of parent involvement. Requirements for school-based parent involvement, especially among low-income parents, suggest that parents are considered by educators to be ineffective in supporting children's learning without professional guidance and supervision. Because

many participants in my study reported knowing parents who do not teach their children at home, more study of parents' efficacy in at-home teaching might inform the range of parent-supported educational engagement. While parents in this study largely were confident of their ability to teach their children, an evaluation of the actual effectiveness of home-based teaching might provide a basis on which to determine how home-based involvement should be supported by teachers.

Additional research should examine a wider pool of parent perspectives. Because this study may have attracted only parents who were involved in their children's education, a larger sample might capture the perspectives of parents who are not involved in their children's education. In particular, understanding the perspectives of parents who chose not to get involved in their children's education (and who chose not to participate in this study) is pivotal to understanding parents' perspectives in general. To that end, future researchers might also consider offering an incentive to encourage participation by parents who may not feel motivated to participate in a research study, including parents who are not involved in their children's education. While the results of my study are encouraging, presenting as they do a picture of parents as engaged and committed to children's education, an understanding of the feelings of a wider sample of parents that I included in this study will assist educators to plan strategies to engage all parents in their children's education.

## **Implications**

Several implications for practice derive from this study, including implications for parents, teachers, school administrators, and policy makers. Policy makers might acknowledge home-based involvement as an important aspect of parent involvement, especially for families that experience barriers to school-based involvement. Policies should be redesigned to increase equity of involvement by encouraging home-based involvement among low-income and under-educated parents. Current parent involvement policies, such as those created by Head Start for Head Start parents, often are exclusive to activities at the school. However, my study demonstrated that home-based involvement plays a great part in children's school success. Stronger policies supporting home-based parent involvement would contribute to children's success in their preschool education and would encourage parents to take an active role in their children's education.

The implications of this study for school administrators include a new mindset about parent involvement. Head Start and childcare center directors should develop policies to include at home-based involvement as a main component of their parent involvement efforts, and as part of in-kind contribution to the program. Directors could create ways to validate parent involvement at home and to add such involvement in their reports of parent involvement. Especially when families are required to complete a predetermined number of hours of involvement to stay in good standing with the school, home-based involvement should be counted as at least part of that requirement. In addition, in my study parents reported barriers to school-based involvement that center

administrators should strive to overcome to increase levels of school-based parent involvement. Center directors might enact supports such as child care for parents with younger children, scheduling flexibility to accommodate parents' work schedules, and a greater variety of involvement activities so parents might be able to become involved in the classroom and feel more welcomed.

The implications derived from my study for preschool teachers include adopting the new mindset regarding home-based involvement as a valid alternative to school-based involvement. Head Start teachers already provide parents with take home activities to work on with their children, but these activities are not counted towards the parent involvement requirement when teachers document involvement of individual parents. By changing how parent involvement is defined to include home-based involvement, the true effect of parents' encouragement of their children can be measured. Teachers also should provide considerable support to parents, such as materials and strategies to help children learn, that might encourage more and better home-based involvement. Although parents in my study seemed to know how to engage with their children in learning activities, other parents may not or may lack materials to do this. Teachers must support parent efforts in the home.

Implications of this study's results for parents include that they should encourage other parents to be involved at home. Parents in this study reported feeling motivated by home-based involvement they witnessed in their friends and relatives, and what they remembered of their own parents' involvement. A parent-led support network,

educational materials bank, and cooperative effort to participate in school-based involvement might all contribute to a feeling of energetic engagement in children's education. Because results of this study demonstrated that home-based parent involvement is valued by children and parents alike, a home-based parent network might increase levels of parent involvement among low income parents.

Finally, implications of this study for the field include a reexamination of the concept of parent involvement. Parents in this study were deeply involved in their children's education but out of view of the Head Start center their children attended. Center administrators, who followed Head Start's guidelines for accounting parents' in-kind contribution to the program, overlooked the contributions parents make through home-based involvement. The conventional view of parent involvement (see Epstein, 1995), as something that happens in the classroom or at the direction of teachers, is inadequate to encompass the full range of parent engagement in children's education.

Implications of my study for positive social change can be gathered from the implications just described for various stakeholders. When home-based parent involvement is recognized and supported by policies, center programs, and teacher practices, low-income parents will feel welcomed and supported in their efforts to contribute to their children's education. A lively network of parent and teacher support for home-based involvement, supported by family-friendly policies and programs, might invigorate parent involvement and contribute to children's educational success. This study may lead to positive social change for children, families, and preschool programs

when home-based involvement is recognized as an important supplement to children's education.

### **Conclusion**

Parental involvement has been demonstrated in prior research to be a necessary part of providing children with opportunities for success in school (Kurtulmus, 2016); Wilder, 2014). It is clear that policy makers and educational professionals place great value on school-based parent involvement, but they have ignored the rich experience of home-based involvement discovered among participants in my study. Researchers have also described low-income parent's participation as little to none but they overlooked the efforts parents make to support their children's education at home (Daniel et al., 2016), Dove et al., 2017; Longo et al., 2017). Reporting of parent involvement among low-income preschool families has been limited to school-based activities that can be monitored by school officials and tracked, but my study indicated that parent involvement has a home-based parameter that is lost by policy makers and educational professionals. Low-income parents are very involved in their children's education but not at the school. Policy makers and teachers need to understand the point of view of low-income parents to capture a true understanding of what the perspectives of parents are and to develop ways to attract and support parents regarding in their children's education. This study offers for consideration an expansion of what could be considered when accounting for parental involvement of low-income families. Much parent involvement happens at home.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

How much do you think it's your job as a parent to help your child learn the things that preschool is trying to teach?

- a. What sorts of things is your child learning right now in preschool?
- b. How is that going for him?
- c. How much do you help your child learn what he needs to learn in preschool?

Teaching children things like that can seem sort of complicated, like there might be a right way and a wrong way to do it. How capable do you feel about teaching your child the things the preschool is trying to teach?

What things do you feel pretty confident about in teaching your child and what things do you feel less confident about teaching?

Tell me about a time you tried to teach your child something that was sort of a school-skill. How did that go?

Sometimes parents feel pressure to teach their kids at home or pressure to NOT teach their kids at home. How much pressure or expectations from other people have you felt to teach or not teach your child school-skills at home?

Did that pressure or those expectations influence what you decided to do, in teaching or not teaching your child at home?

How much do other parents you know – maybe your own parents as a child, or your friends, or your grown brothers and sisters – how much do parents you

know teach their own children school-skills at home or avoid teaching them at home?

How has what you've seen other parents do, with regard to teaching or not teaching their children, influence your decision about teaching your child school-skills at home?

And, finally, is teaching your child at home or not – was that an actual decision for you, or is this the first time you've really thought about it much?

## Appendix B: Data Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Picking up where the teacher left off I am the first teacher It's an equal responsibility. It's our responsibility as parents My children say I am not a teacher but I say I am It is my responsibility	Accountability	Parent responsibility
I should try more to teach my child It is more left to the parent it is our responsibility Committed to four hours a week Parent commitment to 2 hours of teaching I teach 15 hours a week. Need to learn how my children learn Teaches three hours a week Spend 2 to 3 hours in the course of a day. It is hard to teach sometimes because he doesn't always listen. As long as it takes I am going to try to teach him the right way Would volunteer more if able Volunteer when can - works Less school volunteering this school year. Unable to volunteer because of business Volunteered 3 times - not as much as wanted No school volunteering I have child Don't volunteer at school have a young child Parents need to encourage themselves	Parent's expectation of self	
I feel pretty capable I can see the right way and the wrong I feel pretty good about it Sometimes it is a little tricky Started teaching when child was in the womb I need to learn how my children learns Lack confidence teaching social emotional I will definitely find out how	Parent self-efficacy	
Well I pressure myself I feel no pressure I do feel pressure I have felt pressure since my girls were born I do feel some pressure I feel pressure from my child I do feel kind of pressure because I feel I do work too much Mom and teacher pressured me Pressure from the pediatrician	Feelings of pressure	

<p>I want him to be a little above 123 ABC'S  Where he ends up in life is important  Doing well in school  This is very new for her and she actually did very well.  I want him to love to learn and school.  I provide information to my child so he can be smart  Whatever I can do to get my kids at a higher level  Barriers to teaching short attention span  I want my children to be creative; that's why I teach them  Want children to learn manners and responsibility from us.  Confident in answering easy questions.  My child needed help</p>	Parent expectations for child	Parent rationale
<p>It is up to teachers   A few parents leave it to the teachers  There is no influencers for me to get involved  Teacher influenced [my] involvement  [You] need to ask your teacher for help  Teacher responsibility  Feel it is the teacher job</p>	Parent expectations for teachers	Teacher responsibility
<p>Friends don't help their children  Friends not teaching  Others I know are not doing much  My sister and god sister teach  Sister and friend teaching  Sister influenced me  Friend encourages me to teach my children new things.  Friends are teaching their kids  Teacher responsibility until there is a problem</p>	Positive social influence	Social influence
<p>Friends not involved  My sister avoids teaching her children  Friends not involved with children  My friends, I know, I don't think so.  Feel it is the teacher job  They don't go the extra mile</p>	Negative social influence	