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Head Start Program Staff Perspectives on Fully Engaging Families

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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

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Abstract

Research indicates family engagement yields positive outcomes for children. However, data indicate that educators struggle to engage families. Current evaluation methods assess the number of family services offered and not how families are engaged. It is not known how the Head Start program staff fully engages families. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how to fully engage families in Head Start programs as perceived by staff. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and the complexity theory comprised the conceptual framework. The research question explored perspectives of Head Start staff about how to fully engage families. Selection criteria for participants required a minimum of one year of Head Start experience. Four teachers, four family service workers, and two curriculum specialists participated in semistructured virtual interviews. Data were analyzed with NVivo to identify 5 themes: Family engagement, process of engaging families, engagement activities, barriers, and successful engagement. Six barriers to engagement emerged: COVID-19, lack of trust, pride, home environment, parents with multiple children, and administrative paperwork. Two sub themes, communication and child and family relationship building emerged from the barriers. This study contributes to positive social change by helping families understand work program staff 's desire to assist families and inform educators on the need to transition from an academically focused approach to a whole child approach that engages their families.

Head Start Program Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Family Engagement

by

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BS, Georgia Southern University, 2015

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my supportive family and friends. First, a big thank you to Ms. Mahaelia Lango for encouraging me to even start my graduate journey. Thank you to my husband, Jon, for encouraging me and trying to help by reading my assignments. Thankful for mother Sabrina, grandparents William and Carrie, aunt Deb, and little brother Ronald for being my cheerleaders every step of the way. Thank you to Ashley for encouraging me and celebrating every milestone along the way. Also thank you to all my other family and friends who continued to motivate me and listen to me say I'm almost done 1500 times! The ultimate celebration time has finally arrived.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the history of Head Start to provide clarity on the

program's purpose. The background section includes discussion of researchers' views on

the importance of family engagement, Head Start's family engagement framework, and

the challenges and barriers that may occur with families and staff in the program. I

discuss the purpose of gaining staff perspectives on fully engaging families, the research

question, the framework, the nature of the study and the design, the significance of this

study for research, and the positive social change implications. The Head Start program

uses the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) and the Program Information

Report (PIR) to evaluate the number of family services offered but not the engagement

level. Head Start is a federally funded program started by President Lyndon B. Johnson in

the United States of America in1965. The program's inception included a focus on

preschool education and social services for lower-income families to provide a head start

in their child's educational journey (Leong et al., 2019). Head Start's social services have

expanded to focus on successfully engaging families by using the two-generation

approach to focus on the children and families (Leong et al., 2019). The two-generation

approach for Head Start means that all families should be involved in all aspects of the

program and the center should provide family services to ensure involvement and

knowledge in their child's development (Ansari & Gershoff, 2015). Creating positive

relationships between families and educators has been shown to help students be

successful in their development and academic journey (Baker et al., 2016; Ferrara, 2017;

Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016; Smith et al., 2019). Positive relationships and strong partnerships create positive outcomes by increasing family engagement (Knight-McKenna et al., 2019).

Despite overwhelming data that supports the positive impact family engagement has, educators still complain about the struggles with engaging families in educational programs (Baker et al., 2016; Leo et al., 2019). Possible barriers to engagement are in two categories: structural/logistical barriers and psychological/attitudinal barriers such as culture, language, employment, school, and socioeconomic status (Garbacz, 2018). Head Start staff are provided with results on family engagement based on data. Yet, the FACES and PIR results do not clearly view how staff fully engage families in their program; they focus strictly on the services staff offered.

Background

Philosophy

Parent involvement and parent/family engagement are often used interchangeably, but the terms are characterized differently by different researchers (Baker et al., 2016). Researchers describe parent involvement as something actionable by parents, while engagement is about the partnership between the family and education system/ school (Baker et al., 2016). Children and families with low socioeconomic status and those who are culturally and linguistically diverse have positive developmental outcomes from family engagement (Anguiano et al., 2020; Leo et al., 2019). Children who live in poverty are at a higher risk for education gaps; therefore, it is crucial to engage families early (Jeon et al., 2018). Programs like Head Start provide an opportunity for these

families and the focus emphasizes engagement by developing the ongoing relationship with families and program staff not just their involvement (Aikens et al., 2017).

Head Start Framework

Head Start uses the parent, family, and community engagement framework (PFCE) in hopes to assist program staff by helping them recognize the role they play in positive family outcomes (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2011). The framework is a guide to assist staff and families to work jointly in achieving school readiness goals and life success for children and families. The PFCE identifies four essential areas when promoting positive relationships and potential actions to meet those areas. The four areas are program foundations, program impact areas, family outcomes, and child outcomes (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2011). The focus on family outcomes details seven family outcomes that are research-based and promote positive child outcomes (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2011). The family outcomes include: family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, families as learners, and families as lifelong educators, family engagement in transitions, family connections to peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders.

Challenges

There are several barriers noted from educators on how to fully engage families with the framework and knowledge of the importance of family engagement. Some barriers or complaints include the number of years in the program, culture, and language. For example, in Head Start's Early Head Start Program (EHS), families can stay for 3 years, but studies have shown that 35% of children leave EHS early. It is unclear why

participating families leave the program early (Jeon et al., 2018). Latino immigrant parents whose children attend Head Start have low engagement due to language barriers and job inflexibility (McWayne et al., 2016). The Latino population makes up 38% of children Head Start Programs serve (McWayne et al., 2018). The barriers of language, income, and low engagement affect Latino children's positive outcomes. Although the PFCE Framework includes culture and inclusivity, cultural differences may also reflect a unique way of family participation that does not align with staff perspectives.

Head Start Evaluation Methods

Head Start conducts the FACES Study using various surveys developed for parents and staff input. When gaining staff perspectives, the study collects information on what services are offered (Aikens et al., 2017). This study takes place every 2–3 years, but it does not gain staff perspectives on how they fully engage families in the program. Program staff has opportunities to engage with families every day, however, identifying staff perspectives was needed to fill a gap created by FACES.

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Problem Statement

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Current evaluation methods like FACES and PIR only assess the number of family services offered, not family engagement. Family engagement yielding positive outcomes for children is widely researched and focused upon by educational researchers and policymakers (Leo et al., 2019). Despite the data, many early childhood educators still struggle to fully engage families in their child's early educational careers (Leo et al., 2019). It is not known how the Head Start program staff fully engage families. FACES is an evaluative tool used by Head Start programs to measure and self-report family

engagement opportunities; it does not measure engagement by families in these opportunities. Results from the FACES survey only provide information on a specific cohort of children, parents, and staff to represent the national view of Head Start and not all individual programs (Aikens et al., 2017). FACES incorporate parents and family support staff's perspectives through interviews about engagement opportunities and offered services. In this study I gained a more in-depth view from staff on how they engage families instead of a quantitative perspective on the opportunities offered.

Along with the FACES study, the Head Start Family Voices pilot study used new instruments to better understand family engagement in Head Start programs (Aikens et al., 2014). The Head Start Family Voices pilot study was conducted from 2012–2014, and it was not an evaluative method used consistently. Orte et al. (2016) emphasized programs that intervene for families or offer family services, like Head Start, need to be evidence-based to ensure the success of their family engagement implementation. However, Head Start's evaluative method focuses on what services and opportunities are offered, not the staff's engagement process (Orte et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how to fully engage families in Head Start programs as perceived by staff. Through this study, I have contributed additional data regarding Head Start's family engagement by obtaining various staff perspectives on how to increase engagement. The results of my study contributed to the existing literature on family engagement by obtaining information from staff, family service workers and curriculum specialists. I also added to the research by uncovering the methods program staff use to fully engage families. I addressed the gap in the research using a qualitative approach. I used interviews to collect and analyze the responses from 10 different Head Start programs.

Research Question

Research Question (RQ): What are the perspectives of Head Start staff about how to fully engage families?

Framework

This study's conceptual framework included Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and the complexity that may arise within systems' interaction. Bronfenbrenner's theory described children as being a part of an ecological system that consisted of multiple familial systems that can affect a child's development (Xu & Filler, 2008). In this study, I addressed the Head Start program staff's perspectives on fully engaging families. Family engagement should be central in early childhood systems, with families and staff partnering promote children's health and wellness (US Department of Health and Human Services, & Department of Education, 2016). Head Start staff are a

part of the microsystem in the ecological system, which is the immediate environment children experience and live in.

Complex systems consist of a collection of many elements or relationships that work and interact together (Joksimović & Manić, 2018). Educational systems have complex systems that involve many relationships and interactions amongst families, students, teachers, and policymakers (Joksimović & Manić, 2018). Causation is complex and includes the notion that outcomes are not by one single cause but are composed of several varied factors (Mason, 2008). The complexity of the relationships and interactions within the Head Start program could have arisen with the Ecological Systems Theory. As a federally funded program, Head Start has a political element in addition to the educational system. Policymakers and the United States government are a part of the complex system with an essential relationship with Head Start as funders and decision-makers (Mead et al., 2016). The federal government needs valid data collection methods to allow federal officials to detect trends and patterns that maximize outcomes for Head Start children and families (Mead et al., 2016). The political system has a vital role in this complex system as it is a determining factor for the Head Start program and its need for federal support.

Nature of Study

I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews to gain the perspectives of Head Start Staff on fully engaging families. I conducted semistructured interviews with 10 staff members of various roles at three different Head Start Programs in the metro urban city. Patton (2015) suggested that a minimum of participants' size should be used

and can be changed later when conducting qualitative research. Patton also noted that many studies use participants by 10s, and during interviews, researchers eventually began to receive the same responses and reach a level of saturation (Patton, 2015). Using semistructured interviews was the best approach to achieve the participants' perspectives; Creswell et al., stated this type of interview gives a general explanation of the evaluative process, which made this study a qualitative research design (2006). I analyzed the data from the interviews using the NVivo Qualitative Analysis software. Education is a part of social science, and many who study this field have an interest in life and practice, which can be best approached through a qualitative research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Definitions

I used the following key terms throughout this study.

Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for each has to offer the roles and strengths. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2011).

Head Start, a federally-funded, congressionally-mandated program whose purpose is to promote school readiness among children ages 3 to 5 from low-income communities via intellectual, social, emotional, and physical support (Keske et al., 2016).

Low-income, Children from birth to age five who are from families with incomes below the poverty guidelines are eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services.

Children from homeless families and families receiving public assistance such

as TANF or SSI are also eligible (Sec. 645. (i)(ii) Head Start Act).

Parent involvement, "a one-way connection between parents and their children's

education. The connection was visualized as a "flow of information from school to

parent." (Ferrara, 2017, p. 146).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants use the PFCE Framework as a guide for promoting

positive family outcomes. I also assumed that the staff would provide honest answers

about the pros and cons of fully engaging families. I assumed that families want to

participate in their child's learning and development; there may just be outside barriers

that are not known. All assumptions were necessary for this study to maintain staff and

families' integrity and their willingness to collaborate for positive child and family

outcomes.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the Head Start Program staff's perspectives on how to

fully engage families. Participants were from three metro urban city Head Start Programs

in the south of the United States whose roles varied from teachers, family services

workers, curriculum specialists, directors, or other roles. There are over a million children

served through 1,700 agencies. This study's delimitation was that I only gathered data

from three metro urban city Head Start programs (Office of Head Start, n.d.). Only

collecting information from this small pool is not be representative of all programs. The

metro urban city has some of the largest counties in its state, providing programs that are

more extensive in size and varying staff to interview. I also excluded non-Head Start programs due to the overwhelming data and history Head Start has for high-quality early childcare and education. I did not use structural functionalism for this study. The theory focuses on society's structure along with the roles of people, institutions, and its goal is to explain how these working together contribute to society's stability (Garner, 2019). I did not use it for this study because I did not seek family engagements impact on society, yet the perspectives of staff who engage families. Hoyland states that studies with transferability have detailed and descriptive results, therefore this study has transferability, although the researcher does not determine its transferability, the reader does (Hoyland et al., 2017).

Limitations

Head Start services include 1,700 agencies and I conducted this study using three programs, which is a small percentage of those they serve. I used urban programs residing in the metro area that may vary in representation from those in rural areas. Lastly, as a former Head Start employee, my personal experience and bias could have been challenging during this study. To reduce the potential of personal bias, I repeated or verified the responses with participants to ensure my interpretations echo their beliefs. Also, I was able to minimize influence during interviews, I controlled my body language and refrained from using language to influence an answer.

Significance of the Study

I sought to fill a gap in understanding Head Start program staff's perspectives on fully engaging families. My approach was unique because I addressed staff perspectives,

which are not highly researched. According to Aikens et al. family service workers revealed that various staff members contribute to the families, which is why I also addressed the need for gaining a multiperspective view by collecting data from a staff of varying roles such as family service workers, teachers, and curriculum specialists (Aikens et al., 2017). My goal was to provide the needed insights from a multi-perspective view on family engagement in Head Start programs. Gaining multiple perspectives from the Head Start program staff could positively influence the work of those who interact most closely with children birth through five and their families, thus promoting positive social change. In the early childhood education field, family engagement has been made a significant priority of research (Bibbs, 2018). Therefore, by researching how to engage families, I have contributed to existing literature.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I provided Head Start's history, researchers' views on the importance of family engagement, Head Start's family engagement framework, and the challenges and barriers of fully engaging families. I discussed the research question, framework, the study, and the design. Finally, I discussed the study's significance for research and the positive social change implications. Research has shown family engagement promotes positive child outcomes. However, despite the research stressing the importance, Head Start educators are still struggling to engage. I designed this study to add a perspective from staff on how best to fully engage families. Chapter 2 will include a discussion and review of the current literature on family engagement, implementation, and Head Start programs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the current literature on differences in definitions and expectations for family engagement versus family involvement. In this review, I also present the perspectives of families and schools on the barriers and challenges to family involvement. Lastly, the literature review includes research approaches to measure or improve early childhood programs' family engagement goals. Current evaluation methods like FACES and PIR only assess the number of family services offered, not families' engagement. It is not known how the Head Start program staff fully engage families. The purpose of this study was to investigate how to fully engage families in Head Start programs as perceived by staff.

Literature Search Strategy

Research for this study I gathered by using Walden University's online library and various databases that include EBSCO, Education Source, SAGE Journals, ERIC, and PsychARTICLES. Lastly, Google Scholar is an additional credible source I used to find relevant literature. I used terms such as *preschool, childcare, head start, family engagement* were initially used to locate relevant research. Other terms, like *family involvement, parent involvement, and early childhood,* were used to broaden the search. In this review, the literature I selected was relevant to family engagement outcomes,

barriers and challenges, and early education program implementation. Some research

highlighted evaluation methods that may help improve implementation in programs.

Literature Review Related to Key Variable and Concepts

Family Engagement

Family engagement in early childhood education programs such as Head Start has

an integrated a plan to provide families with high-quality childcare experiences.

According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and Department of

Education (USDHHS & DOE), families should be recognized as essential partners.

Programs that offer services to aid in children's positive development must have staff that

nurture positive relationships between families and staff, and support families (USDHHS,

& DOE, p.1, 2016). The USDHHS & DOE policy statement also details that "Strong

family engagement in early childhood systems and programs is central—not

supplemental—to promoting children's healthy intellectual, physical, and social-

emotional development; preparing children for school; and supporting academic

achievement in elementary school and beyond" (USDHHS, & DOE, 2016, p. 1).

The Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center notes, "Family

engagement is a collaborative and strengths-based process through which early childhood

professionals, families, and children build positive and goal-oriented relationships"

[ECLKC, Family Engagement, n.d., p. 1]. An abundance of research has shown its

importance, but very few on who and how this engagement should be implemented (Leo

et al., 2019).

Family/Parent Involvement

Some researchers defined the word "parent involvement" previously as a one-way connection between parents and their children's education (Ferrara, 2017). In later years, with the help of theorists like Bronfenbrenner, he helped make a distinction between family involvement and engagement with a framework. The accumulation of research on the importance of family involvement in children's lives, especially children from economically disadvantaged families, supports the need and existence of Head Start and Early Head Start programs (Jeon et al., 2018). In their quantitative study, Jeon et al. (2018) used secondary data from the Early Head Start Family and Child Experiences Study to explore predictors and pathways relevant to children's dosage in Early Head Start (EHS).

The shift from one-way connection to partnership is significant for economically disadvantaged and culturally and linguistically diverse families that Head Start serves. In the past, they were often treated as clients and not stakeholders in their children's educational journey (Leo et al., 2019, p. 256). Educators are encouraged to take more of a reciprocal approach versus the previous one-way approach and establish community partnerships on the primary and secondary school level to meet parents where they are (Leo et al., 2019). Leo et al. found that there must be an initial push for family involvement and promoting positive parent-caregiver relationships to increase a child's EHS dosage. The dosage refers to the time the child spends in the EHS program. More research is needed on the family risks and protective factors that could benefit EHS families and increase the longevity of their enrollment and involvement in the program

(Jeon et al., 2018). Other research found that early entry and sustained enrollment in high-quality ECE programs positively affect dual language learners, such as in better receptive language skills. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017), family involvement refers to participation in various activities and family leadership opportunities (as cited in Jeon et al., 2018, p. 292). Research found that parent-teacher relationships are associated with increased family involvement in such programs, showing that increased involvement contributes to low dropout rates (Jeon et al., 2018).

The achievement gap between White students and Black and Latino students is still prominent, regardless of civil rights increases in the last 50 years. The achievement gap is attributed significantly to parents' inability to be able to be there for their children in the same way parents and families of students with high achievements (Marschall & Shah, 2020). Marschall and Shah (2020) conducted a comparative study that addressed the efficiency of parent involvement and engagement initiatives in schools of predominantly Black, White, and Latino children. Researchers sought to investigate how these schools fostered parent engagement in their child's education and fostered a difference in parents' behaviors. Using a previous study model, researchers evaluated segregated schools and predominantly white schools' parent involvement policies. By doing this, researchers were able to assess the opportunities and resources each school received by race.

The study's findings suggested that there is no one size fits all approach for parental involvement from parents of different races. Schools of predominantly Black and

Latino students responded well to parent contracts, parent conferences, and open houses versus predominantly White schools. Predominantly White and Black charter schools have a higher parental involvement rate than those of the Latino race.

Formosinho and Passos conducted a 3-year qualitative case study to investigate the importance of family participation in children's well-being and early learning and development (2019). Their primary research question was: what is the role of the educational team? (early childhood teacher and educational assistants), the child, and the families in the co-construction of parental and family involvement? (Formosinho & Passos, 2019). This case study researchers used the praxeological nature, based on the theory that humans engage in purposeful behavior. The study addressed the continuity of care in the early education program of five children and their families. The researcher used instrumentation pedagogic documentation. Over 3 years, families showed significant parental involvement, increasing from occasional participation to consistent involvement.

Barriers

Educators' Perspectives

As stated by Baker et al. (2016), a barrier to family engagement is the lack of communication and poor communication between the school and the families. The researchers conducted a study using family and staff focus groups from six schools in a Midwestern state. The principal selected participants, and diversity was ensured through race/ethnicity, staff/teacher experience, age, socioeconomic status levels, and role within the school. There was a total of 126 participants, 50 parents, and 76 staff members. The

researchers' focus was to ask questions about the overall school experience, including family involvement, policies, and school disciplinary reform. The study's findings showed that both families and staff felt there were barriers to engaging with one another. Some other barriers were improving communication, creating a welcoming environment, scheduling conflicts, and transitioning from involvement to engagement. For example, when it comes to creating a welcoming environment, school staff and educators' attitudes towards families are important. If those attitudes are perceived negatively, it leads to parents' lack of motivation to participate (Baker et al., 2016).

Ferrara (2017) stated that many teachers, specifically in the secondary realm, have limited skills in connecting with families due to the lack of emphasis during preservice schooling. Most preservice programs concentrate on areas that will prepare teachers for their certification exams. Researchers have found that preservice programs focused on early childhood and elementary include courses on involving families in their children's education (Ferrara, 2017). Research from this study resulted in creating and implementing an online family engagement course for preservice teachers who were preparing for student teaching or actively a student-teacher. Findings showed that ongoing professional development and a one-time course from preservice programs or school districts are not enough for teachers to be prepared.

Knight-McKenna et al. (2019) studied the influence on undergraduate students using the academic service-learning (ASL) survey to prepare them to establish family partnerships with diverse families in the early childhood education field. The participants were culturally and linguistically diverse families, undergraduate teacher preparation

students, and children 2–5 years old who attended the local preschool program. The findings showed that students were uncomfortable and nervous, but there was also an interest and need for families to engage. The ASL survey showed that it is a great tool to prepare future early childhood education practitioners. The authors Knight-McKenna et al. (2019) suggested that they have a larger sample size and that surveys may not be the best method due to students answering how they think their instructors may want results to be.

Prieto (2016) conducted a qualitative study about prospective ECE educators engaged with the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Simulation (PFCE). The participants were from a sample of 97 college students who took classes that integrated the PFCE Simulation into the curriculum during the 2014–2015 school year. The study wanted to understand how useful the PFCE Simulation was in preparing prospective ECE teachers to engage and establish relationships with families to promote student readiness. The findings showed that the simulation helped develop a sense of positivity when working with families as well as the importance of their involvement.

The foundation for engagement is communication between parents and educators (Jeynes, 2018). The cultural and racial gap between students and teachers has made it increasingly difficult to build relationships with families (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Sanders-Smith et al. (2020) sought to examine the teacher's recognition of families' habitus and the philosophy of engagement in the school. Researchers draw from the literature on the positive outcomes of family engagement and its importance for low-income families. The participants were 18 teachers from a Florida school district that

served families from majority low income, immigrant, and dual-language homes. In contrast, the participants were from generational middle-class families. Sanders-Smith et al.'s goal was to investigate teachers' perspectives on what prevents them from having positive, culturally responsive family-school partnerships (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020).

The Sanders-Smith et al. (2020) study's foundation was built on the Bourdieusian theoretical framework. Researchers used this theory to illustrate the recurring disconnect between families and public schools. Researchers believed that if schools view themselves as members of the field with specified roles, duties, and responsibilities to be followed, this could bridge the gap. Data collection methods included using focus groups and interviews with teachers and principals. The main participants who contributed to the study's data were teachers and principals. Their interviews provided contextual information (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). To be considered for participation, teachers had to complete a graduate course on family engagement, and the focus groups were conducted 15 months later. For analysis, researchers gathered interview data from the focus groups and they were plotted in NVivo 10 to identify emergent themes. Findings showed that teachers recognized the need for families to be supported in understanding the school's expectations, but they did not promote culturally sustaining practices. The negative outcome of no culturally sustaining practices created additional barriers for families in the eight research schools (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020).

Parent Perspectives

Sanguiliano et al. (2019) sought to fill the gap in the literature of economically disadvantaged parents' perspectives regarding family assets and student achievement.

Over time, because of the importance of family engagement and policies like the No

Child Left Behind Act, community and education programs aim to close the educational

gap for economically disadvantaged families. Still, there is no research on how these

activities impact student achievement (Sanguiliano et al., 2019). Sanguiliano et al. (2019)

study took a qualitative approach while using a community participatory-based research

(CPBR) design. An outcome of this study was a partnership in research with university

public affairs doctoral research practicum and The City Project, a local community

agency (Sanguiliano, 2019).

   Kocyigit (2015) sought to gain perspectives from preschool teachers,

administrators, and parents of the problems that arise during involvement in preschool

activities and solutions for the problems. The study took place in preschool institutions in

a city called Erzurum in the country of Turkey. A total of 30 participants from five

schools consisted of two preschools, three kindergartens, 10 parents, 10 teachers, and 10

administrators (Kocyigit, 2015). Researchers took a qualitative approach and used

semistructured interviews as its method of data collection. All participants had the choice

of how they wanted their responses recorded. Kocyigit used themes for data analysis

purposes to align specific interview questions and responses to the themes before the

interviews (Kocyigit, 2015). Findings revealed that teachers and administrators provided

many family involvement activities, and parents did participate in at least one. Parents

gave several barriers to their lack of participation, including fatigue, irrelevance, lack of

expression, favoritism, financial difficulties, etc. Parents expressed that to be involved,

the solution was to set aside time, express themselves, communicate, and get assistance (Kocyigit, 2015).

Cultural Differences

In this qualitative study, McWayne et al. (2016) used questionnaires to explore culture-specific patterns of family engagement from low-income Latino families of preschool-aged children with primary caregivers of 650 Head Start children in New York City. Findings showed that there were differences amongst language groups and their patterns of family engagement. Culturally Latino families preferred at-home engagement in their child's education. There are still potential barriers, such as language and work inflexibility, that can reduce their engagement in the program (McWayne et al., 2016). Immigrant families who are new residents of the United States are not knowledgeable of the expectations and culture of family engagement versus those who have lived in the United States longer (McWayne et al., 2016). Therefore, the researchers found it important to identify parental support behaviors at home.

In a later study, McWayne et al. (2018) examined the psychometric functioning for measuring family engagement, specifically developed for Latino Head Start families. The participants were from 54 Head Start classrooms in two urban centers in the northeastern United States, with eight hundred and fourteen Latino Head Start families. The findings showed that it is imperative to have "culturally relevant assessment tools" to aim for effective programming. The study also addressed how culture might influence how people engage versus the program staff's dominant cultural group. There are cultural

practices at home that teachers can implement to engage with families to prepare and support children in the program. Children and families are often marginalized because of culture or low income which can often cause them to have a disconnect with program staff because the parent-child engagement is not viewed or is misunderstood (McWayne et al., 2018). Program staff should become more culturally aware of Latino families to serve them better and to see engagement (McWayne et al., 2018).

In a study by Ferrara (2017), teachers noted that professional development was a barrier, because families' differing cultures made it difficult. Based on their culture, language, beliefs, and race, families' individual needs are crucial factors for teachers to be well-versed and prepared to engage families. However, Leong et al.'s (2019) qualitative study used data from the 2009 Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) to determine variables associated with family involvement amongst immigrant families using bivariate and multivariate regression. Findings suggested no difference between the levels of involvement between immigrant families and U.S. born parents.

Leo et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study in the 2017–18 school year, is a part of a more extensive mixed-method multiple case study that addressed what family engagement looks like in schools with economically disadvantaged populations consisting of African American, Hispanic/Latino, English language learners. Schools were selected based upon student graduation outcomes. The use of interviews and focus groups were the data collection methods. There was a total of 63 participants in the study who completed 26 interviews and focus groups. Researches used qualitative software to support coding, and thematic findings showed family engagement as a theme for the

schools' positive performance. Findings implicated that both schools showed shared patterns of family engagement with high graduation outcomes.

When school staff does not understand immigrant and refugee parents' expectations or experiences, many misinterpret these parents' engagement in their children's academic lives (Snell, 2018, p. 114). The purpose of the Snell study was to gain perspectives, expectations, and funds of knowledge from immigrant and refugee linguistic minorities and promote positive relationships between families and the school. Funds of knowledge is an approach that simply states, people are competent and already possess the knowledge (Snell, 2018). The researcher used a qualitative approach and used native language interviews as the data collection method. The funds of knowledge framework were used to analyze transcriptions from the interviews. This framework was built on the construct to acknowledge that immigrant families have previous knowledge and use that in the classrooms (Snell, 2018).

Teachers can use the framework to incorporate and engage the families in their classrooms. Teachers need to know the barriers immigrant families can face and not focus too much on the challenges because it can become problematic and disempower them (Snell, 2018). The Snell study sought to gain immigrant families and refugee families as there is a literature gap for their perspectives. The study was conducted in Arizona with 11 family interviews that were also focus groups and one interview with a teacher. All families spoke a different language at home, mostly being Spanish (Snell, 2018). Findings revealed that parents felt like collaborators with the school and had high respect from their children's teachers. Conversely, there was confusion on the roles that

the parent and teacher played in engagement. For example, parents felt they were responsible for teaching manners, and teachers focused on academia, while teachers wanted parents to engage in academia, also (Snell, 2018).

Ishimaru et al. (2016) examined cultural brokering by individuals within three organizational contexts using a comparative case study approach. As previous studies mentioned the disconnect between educators and families of differing cultures, in this study Ishimaru et al. sought to examine the phenomenon of using cultural brokering to bridge the gap between home and school for culturally diverse families (2016). Cultural brokers are responsible for making a safe environment for families and help them transition and understand the differences and expectations in the educational program's culture that may vary greatly from theirs (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Research questions sought to examine how staff responsible for engaging families enacted cultural brokering and how organizational and contextual factors may have enabled or constrained them from reciprocal cultural brokering approaches. The study's participants were all from three programs and part of the "Pathways Project" that receiving funding and support to improve parent engagement in the community and school districts (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

The Ishimaru et al., (2016) study's region is remarkably diverse, including at least 160 languages spoken, and many families have low income status. Since the study is building from a larger study, researchers used several data collection methods, including observations, interviews, focus groups, reports, and documents (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Four data analysis levels included transcribing and coding, Vivo codes, triangulation, equitable collaboration framework for coding, and data display matrix for cross-case

analysis. Results showed that individuals in family engagement work enacted cultural brokering strategies to socialize families into school norms and expectations (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

FACES Studies

In a mixed-methods study, Aikens et al. (2017) used various surveys and interviews among 60 programs with nearly 2,000 participants that included parents, teachers, and family service staff to collect and report information on programs in the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) areas to see who is excelling and what areas need support. The findings showed that parents and teachers noted that they often engage, and there are many activities offered. Still, additional support is necessary for program staff to engage with families using a collaborative approach (Aikens et al., 2017). There were also discrepancies in staff and parents' reports on how their cultural values were implemented in services. Data collection methods included interviews with both families and family service workers that allowed them to detail their family engagement experience and service provisions broadly (Aikens et al., 2017). The interviews detailed the services offered and their experiences.

Hodge et al. (2017) sought to study the factors contributing to health service program implementation and sustainment in Australia's Indigenous/ disadvantaged neighborhoods. "Historically, research in this area has often failed to provide clear definitions of concepts or examples of factors, based the evaluations on weak measures and simplified designs, and lacked an overarching conceptual framework (Hodge & Turner, 2016)." (as cited in Hodge et al., 2017). The factors found were strong and

transparent partnerships, ongoing professional development, and sustainability planning. This research contributes to how programs that support children and families of disadvantaged communities can contribute to the program's sustainability and have intentional practices.

Jeon et al. (2020) conducted a study that examines the multidimensional aspects of family engagement. Researchers cited a gap in the literature on examining family engagement in a holistic construct or examine each dimension separately instead of all dimensions together. Structural and relational dimensions are two examples of the many dimensions of family engagement (Jeon et al., 2020). The structural dimension in family engagement consists of the combination of family involvement at home and in the program. The relational dimension of family engagement is the positive and warm relationship families have with program staff. This study used the Early Head Start (EHS) Family and Child Experiences Study to gather family profiles of family engagement in two EHS programs that are home and center-based.

Participants were children in the EHS program for at least two consecutive years, as those families who left the program early family engagement profiles are significantly different (Jeon et al., 2020). The study used descriptive analysis using difference tests, FACES family engagement indicators, child, and parenting outcomes at age 2 and 3, and child and family characteristics. Three profiles were created: profile 1 indicated low home involvement and low parent-staff relationships. Profile two indicated a high home and low program involvement and profile three indicated a high involvement in both. There were fewer child problem behaviors, and more child engagement increases in

profiles 1 and 3 than in profile 2. Profile 3 showed higher social competence than profile 2. Profiles 2 and 3 had fewer results in child emotional regulation than profile 1. The study's goal was to fill in the gap and show the associations between family engagement and child and parenting outcomes versus previous studies that showed associations between family engagement and child development outcomes (Jeon et al., 2020). The researchers suggest that in future studies to use the causal inference model to clarify the direct associations between family engagement and child and parenting outcomes, meaning using data to infer causes of something.

Measuring Engagement

Biag (2017) conducted a study on research-based partnerships with schools or programs to improve childhood outcomes. The participants were various community schools/districts looking to gain more knowledge on family engagement and implementation. The findings were that schools were more informed on improvement measures with researchers who collected data and had the same interests. The authors suggested that family engagement or improvement programs for youth are better implemented and maintained when they have evidence-based data and a partnership with qualified researchers who share the same desire.

Garbacz et al. (2019) explored families receiving the Family Check-Up Intervention Protocol (FCUI) and the family support or engagement received at home. This study's theoretical foundation is the ecological systems theory, in which family-school engagement and their parenting skills support a child's learning across the different systems. The participants were the families or primary caregivers of 321

kindergarten children who lived in an urban city or suburban area in the Northwest region of the United States. The findings were that parents who participated in FCUI family-school engagement at home were more impacted than those who did not participate. Researchers suggested when interventions are more family-centered, it is likely more family engagement can take place at home.

In a mixed-method study, Orte et al. (2016) had 154 participants that were from families all in a risk situation, to examine two of the measures in the Spanish cultural adaptation of the Strengthening Families Program (SFP). Data collection methods used the Delphi technique, using a collection of experts, and self-evaluations of facilitators and families. This study took place for 24 months using a previous longitudinal study. There were two aspects evaluated, the role of the facilitator and the family engagement techniques. The Delphi technique was used with 16 participants to evaluate the roles of facilitators. Professional external assessors were used to observe 14 sessions to assess family engagement techniques (Orte et al., 2016). Chi-square tests were used to test association patterns amongst high marks for family engagement techniques that were performed and for observed outcomes that showed compelling results. The study's findings implied that family engagement techniques should incorporate more discussions and group activities that can lead to better engagement outcomes, or facilitators must understand the program's theory of change. The study also showed that facilitators must be competent and equipped with training to implement family engagement in programs.

Sabol et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of family engagement evaluation using the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). Participants were from 14

childcare centers in Illinois that were a part of a quantitative analysis led by the state's

QRIS department. Results showed that the center's families have many variations of

needs and implemented activities and differentiation in scores that QRIS needs to have a

rating system that can meet all needs. The two centers that had the highest scores also had

access to high-quality resources.

Research has often associated family engagement/involvement with positive child

development outcomes. The following study explores the association between parent

involvement and pre-literacy skills in preschool-aged children. DeLoatche et al., (2015)

explored the impact of an intervention on parent involvement (PI) with first-year

preschool parents and parents who have had children in preschool for more than one year.

Participants were from fluent English Head Start; children and their caregivers were from

three different Head Start programs. Researchers used Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early

Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Preschool Early Literacy Indicators (PELI) to gather a

baseline for children that may be at risk (DeLoatche et al., 2015). Lastly, the Family

Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) was used as a parent rating scale. Results found that

Head Start children and parents who led their own early literacy intervention were

associated with significant gains in HBI (DeLoatche et al., 2015). The study also showed

no significant increases in SBI or HSC from families who conducted home-based early

literacy interventions.

Rural and Urban

Many studies have identified challenges with family involvement in schools of

families living in rural communities (Parks, 2018). Particular challenges are a lack of

economic resources, teacher quality, and lack of parental education. Research documents the positive outcomes family involvement has on children and families but not the impact rural locations have on family involvement (Parks, 2018). Parks' qualitative study, which derives from a long-term ethnographic project at a rural school, used interviews to discover how African American mothers felt welcomed by staff during their child's early learning years. The study's foundation uses the theoretical framework of strength-based learning from the field of social work (Parks, 2018).

In Park's study, the approach when interviewing was to view all participants as experts in their own lives. This approach was also used to appropriately analyze the data gained through the interviews so that a rural location could be viewed as a parent's strength and used to encourage positive engagement with their children's school during the early childhood years (Parks, 2018). Despite the challenges, many mothers spoke positively about their relationship with the school due to the accessibility, quantity, and length of their relationship. Many mothers had an issue with their children having access to more advanced courses (Parks, 2018).

Cummings et al. (2017) used a qualitative approach to explore parents' perspectives of infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays from rural communities and their development while parents are engaging with their child's school. Three focus groups were used to gain perspectives on parental engagement. Participants included parents of children aged six months through 3 years old that were enrolled in a North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program. These parents and children were from rural counties that consisted of approximately 250 people (Cummings et al., 2017). There was

a total of 14 participants, 13 being mothers and one a father. Researchers used a focus group protocol, demographic form for participants, and field notes to explore the parental engagement and ecocultural influences. Researchers also used for coding and thematic analysis for the data gained from the focus groups.

Cummings et al. (2017) conducted a study about parents' perspectives on the influence of ecocultural features that may have enhanced or prevented sustained engagement. The participants also are families of children with special needs, and the Infant-Toddler program is designed for the children. The findings were that what many would think are barriers to engagement did not influence these families. For example, their employment, accessibility to health care, education, and the neighborhood does not affect their engagement with their child.

Keys (2015) found that while research addresses the importance and validity of family engagement, it does not include the two types of communities Head Start children may live in, rural and urban areas. Keys conducted a cross-sectional study that examined the family engagement of families from different regions in Southwest Missouri. In the limitations section, his findings indicated a need for future studies to continue to focus on the differences between urban and rural areas in Head Start programs (Keys, 2015). Specifically, Keys mentioned studying aspects of the Head Start Program "such as the program environment, family and community partnerships, and teaching and learning activities (2015, as cited in The Head Start Parent, 2011).

Leo et al. (2019) studied two schools and their achievement with family engagement integration. Their study found that one school, School A where many

families live in a rural area faced many challenges that made it difficult to engage families. Although under-reported, the families' demographics show they are at a highly economic disadvantage, which increases mental health concerns and substance abuse (Leo et al., 2019). Many families have job inconsistency, lack of transportation or long rides for students, and lack access to resources due to their homes' geographical location. Hour-long rides to and from school cause visible stress, and often the school can have attendance issues. The staff sought to address these needs to fully engage the school's families by offering numerous support options (Leo et al., 2019). The principal stated that they take the whole family/child approach when engaging with families.

Conversely, the second school studied, School B, has a different demographic of students who are mainly immigrants. Many of the families, unlike School A, live in the community and in close proximity to the school (Leo et al., 2019). Their immigrant status and frequent travel back and forth to their homeland cause extended interruptions to the children's education. Educators at this school, like School A, focused on meeting the social and economic needs of families while also providing other opportunities to engage through educational programs and workshops (Leo et al., 2019).

Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2018) conducted a study on children's kindergarten transition from low-income African American homes. The research behind the importance of kindergarten readiness is prevalent. Still, families' demographics have also shown that children from these homes are statistically less successful than their peers (Jarret & Coba-Rodriguez, 2018). This study sought to gain these families' perspectives on preparing their children for kindergarten transition based on their family beliefs and

practices. This study's findings showed that many of the families had several risk factors for ineffective kindergarten transitions. Although these mothers presented risk factors they still ensured that their children were prepared by assessing their school readiness (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2018).

Frameworks

Cohen and Anders used the theoretical model of pedagogical quality to investigate the effects of family involvement on preschool children's social-emotional and language skills (2020). Researchers filled the gap by creating one of Germany's first studies that analyzed the research questions on what activities are offered for parent-school connection, parents and teachers' satisfaction, and teachers' characteristics that will predict parent cooperation/involvement. Researchers used the theory to illustrate that parent involvement is a part of high-quality early education. This study used data collected from a previous quasi-experimental study designed to track parents' cooperation trends. Participants were 146 families from 46 preschool centers in Germany. Headteachers used questionnaires to gather data on parents' cooperation with center activities. Two questionnaires were used to determine parents' satisfaction with the activities and the staff's satisfaction with their cooperation/involvement.

The Cohen and Anders study used three scales used to assess the children's social and emotional skills, including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (VABS), and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The participants were children whom the majority were three years old, and the teachers' median age was fifty-one years old. Parents' satisfaction with the

school showed associations between further training, job experience, and parent involvement activities. The teachers' questionnaire resulted in positive associations with parent cooperation and children's problematic behavior and receptive language and prosocial skills of the children. The results showed that early childcare centers should receive more professional development on what family involvement activities to offer. Lastly, the study also showed that the childcare staff and parents were both overall satisfied but had different expectations for involvement.

Conceptual Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) and complex systems theory are the frameworks for this study. In this section I detailed the ecological systems theory and how Head Start, and family engagement are a part of children's immediate environment. I also discussed the complex systems theory and how the Head Start program's complexities may affect children and families.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the ecology of human development as the changes in a person's lifespan that occur within their immediate environment and broader social contexts. The ecological systems theory is comprised of systems that are nested within one another. The four systems are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Head Start would be a part of a child's microsystem, which is the immediate environment of relationships in a developing child's life that would include the home, school, and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child's positive development in this immediate environment is not solely in the setting, but the way others interact and are

in relation to the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem consists of

more social constructs such as governmental influences from the local to the national

level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Particular standards or laws that come from these political

institutions, like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, do not involve a

Head Start student or family directly. Still, their actions can influence a child's

development or a family's engagement in the program. The macrosystem is the more

extensive system that encompasses the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem,

including culture, subculture, socioeconomic status, and political systems

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, Head Start serves families that have low incomes

below the poverty threshold. A family's differing culture observed from staff can

influence a child's immediate environment through engagement due to their cultural

differences or job inflexibility. Bronfenbrenner describes that this can only be found and

valid by having a theoretical model that can be used to observe these interactions

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Complexity Theory

The theory of complexity is a systems theory as it creates a framework on how we

view the changes that we see in the world, early education programs, or families (Larsen-

Freeman, 2017). The theory is multidisciplinary, making it hard to identify the exact

origin (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Often organizations like Head Start who are in

educational development, are dependent on other entities for funding, like the United

States Congress (Szekely & Mason, 2019). A program like Head Start working in

educational development has complexity because of the different stakeholders and the

"unequal distributions of power and resources…" (Szekely & Mason, 2019, pp. 669-670). The complexity lies within Head Start and the topic of family engagement, as it can be found under multiple disciplines.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I provided an in-depth review of current literature on parent and family involvement and engagement. I provided literature on defining family engagement and involvement and their differences, barriers to engagement, FACES studies, measuring engagement, and engagement in rural and urban areas. The literature reviewed supported the importance of engagement, positive child outcomes, positive engagement, and cultural differences that contribute to establishing engagement in early childhood settings. Gaining perspectives of all stakeholders in a child's education journey may help to increase and continue positive engagement in such programs. In Chapter 3 I will detail the research methodology, design of the study, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate Head Start staff

perspectives on how to fully engage families. In this chapter I describe the study's

research design, research design justification, methodology, and qualitative tradition. I

also discuss the description of the role as a researcher, participants, ethical principles of

research participants, and data collection methods. Additionally, I discuss my role as an

interviewer and the ethics and procedures.

In my study, I explored the following research question.

RQ: What are the perspectives of Head Start staff about how to fully engage

families?

Research Design and Rationale

Family engagement is a widely researched topic, particularly regarding its

potential impact on positive child outcomes. Head Start Programs have consistent

evaluations to measure the services offered but not the level of engagement (Aikens et al.,

2017). Parents have expressed that engagement activities are created, yet additional

support is necessary for program staff to engage with families using a collaborative

approach (Aikens et al., 2017).

Qualitative research is normally an inquiry in a participants natural setting;

however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic remote sessions took place. Face to face

interviews follow a structure (Santhosh et al., 2021); although the interviews were

remote, they followed a structure like face-to-face interviews. Qualitative research gives

voice to the participants that may not have been heard on specific topics (Surmiak, 2018). Through my study the participants shared their perspectives on engaging families in Head Start programs.

The basic qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because I sought to investigate people's attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Other approaches such as ethnography, case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology would not be appropriate. Ethnography focuses on beliefs and behaviors, but on social groups and how these factors define a culture (Sharp, 2018). Researchers that use the case study method focus on a particular case, but in this study I wanted to investigate multiple perspectives. The grounded theory seeks to retrieve information and use that data to support a theory (Chun et al., 2019). Lastly, phenomenology is similar to a basic inquiry by researchers investigating beliefs, opinions, and feelings, but it also seeks to understand the live experience deeper (Qutoshi, 2018).

Using the basic research approach, researchers seek to gain experiences, and in this study I sought to gain staff perspectives and add to the existing literature about family engagement. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was the most appropriate methodology for this study. Qualitative research aims to understand people's experiences and how they interpret them in the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In-depth staff perspectives on engaging families are not well known in the literature, and a qualitative research design gives participants the opportunity to add their perspectives.

Basic qualitative research requires semistructured interviews because it helps researcher seeks to gain real world information from participants (Ahlin, 2019). Unlike

the other approaches using the basic approach participants can contribute a broad range

of opinions and researchers can ask follow-up questions to gain more knowledge (Ahlin,

2019). I gained rich data with the use of one-on-one interviews through open-ended

questions from staff, individually. I used semistructured interviews to collect data.

Semistructured interviews are designed for in-depth interviews where participants have

preset open-ended questions (Haugstvedt, 2020). Semistructured interviews can be used

with individuals or a group format. In brief, the purpose of semistructured interviews is to

gather information from participants who have individual experiences, attitudes,

perceptions, and beliefs related to the research topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to gain Head Start staff's perspectives on ways to

engage families fully. In qualitative research, a researcher's role is to retrieve participants'

thoughts and feelings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This study I collected data that would

gain new insights into staff perspectives on engaging families. To collect this data, I

interviewed 10 Head Start staff members who all have a role in family engagement. I

used semistructured interviews for data collection. As a former Head Start employee who

has worked at three different centers in various roles, interviewing previous professional

colleagues was a potential conflict. I alleviated this conflict through the consent form

ensuring them that decline or participating in any form would not negatively affect our

professional relationship.

Interviews

According to Busetto et al. (2020), interviews are the most common data collection method in qualitative studies. I conducted interviews of the staff virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. I created the interview guide using current literature and the study's research question to guide the development of the questions. Interview guides help researchers to explore necessary questions needed to answer the research question (Busetto et al., 2020). My interview tool is not a previously published one so I created it.

Bias Prevention

The interview questions were aligned with my study and were not established preset questions. Researchers are the instruments that collect and generate data through the social process (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). As a former Head Start employee, I know there is a possibility for personal biases that may influence responses during the data collection process. Korsten & Moser stated that as the data collector and having an inside experience, it is possible that a researcher can limit their openness to the participant's responses and only collect the information I think I know (2017). While conducting the one-on-one interviews, I restated their answers to ensure my interpretation aligned with their thoughts at the end of the interview. This accuracy is important as a researcher so that the thoughts, feelings, and views of participants can be interpreted and reported on for readers to learn from (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Another way to prevent bias is the use of the coding system used to transcribe the audio/video interview and extract themes from an objective approach. It is also important as a researcher that I safeguard participants and their data. Participants gave their

perspectives as it related to their job. Participant information may be personal views, and the safety of that information must be taken seriously (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Selection

In many qualitative research studies, a random selection of participants is selected to alleviate external variables' influence and ensure results' reliability. In this study I used purposeful sampling Some studies need participants that are informed and have experiences relative to the topic to gain well-informed data (Sargeant, 2012). Participants were Head Start staff of various positions that may include family services coordinators, curriculum specialists, teachers, assistant directors, and directors. Each participant must have had at least 1 year of experience working in a Head Start program. I created this criterion in order to get more in-depth responses based on the level of experience and professional development relevant to Head Start's mission and family engagement framework.

The program staff also came from a highly populated urban area of Georgia, where Head Start programs serve a large population. Staff came from three of the 32 Head Start Agencies in a metro urban city.

Data Saturation

Patton (2015) suggested that a minimum participant size should be used and can be changed later when conducting qualitative research. Patton also noted that many studies use participants groups of 10 and during interviews, you eventually begin to

receive the same responses and reach a level of saturation (Patton, 2015). Therefore, 10 staff members were research participants from three Head Start Programs in the Metro Atlanta area.

Instrumentation

According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), the purpose of semistructured interviews is to gather information and participants' perceptions and beliefs related to the topic of interest. I created my own semistructured interview guide (Appendix A); an interview guide keeps the interviewer focused on answering the research question (Busetto et al., 2020). Creating an interview guide is for the researcher to write questions that are relevant to the study's topic and research questions, and then explore those during the interviews (Busetto et al., 2020). Interviews can retrieve more rich data than other data collection methods, such as surveys and focus groups (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Interviews with participants one-on-one may make them feel more comfortable having a conversation with the researcher, rather than completing a survey or sharing their experiences with a group of people (Boyce & Neal, 2006).

The interview questions I developed helped me seek to gain demographical information on the participants' role and gain perspectives on how their role engages families in the Head Start program. After each question, I was sure to repeat their responses to ensure their perspectives had been translated correctly. I used semistructured interviews, consisting of six probing interview questions and five follow up questions. Audio/video interviews recorded through Zoom were the method data collection. Virtually, I took handwritten notes during the interview, but that is not always reliable

according to Busetto et al.(2020). Therefore, I used virtual screen recording, due to COVID-19 restrictions. I used these methods to help establish validity in this study.

Procedures for Recruitment

Recruitment

After Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study (05-19-21-0633193), I contacted the family service manager to request and collect emails of potential participants identifying their various roles. I recruited participants by posting the approved flyer to LinkedIn and Facebook. Individuals who expressed interest were sent a formal email. I informed individuals on the purpose of the study, the length of the interview, their rights, and permission to ask any additional questions, and to stop the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The email also included details on when they should confirm their participation and the next steps. In another email, once participation was confirmed, I sent a consent letter via email.

Participation

Participants must have had at least 1 year of experience in a Head Start program and professional development. I selected these participants based on their qualifications in response to their expressed interest. I wrote down the details of their role, previous roles, and years of experience in Head Start. I selected participants by years of experience in their roles at Head Start. Once those participants were selected, I sent a letter of cooperation/ consent form via email. Once participants granted permission to participate in my research study, they confirmed via email, then I scheduled participants for virtual interviews.

Interviews

The researcher's role in a qualitative study is to retrieve research participants' thoughts and feelings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018)). Therefore, I used semistructured interviews to gain perspectives from participants. Interviews should include open-ended questions that also have probing questions to gain detailed and rich information from participants, therefore I used semistructured interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). My interview questions asked specifically their role and how that specific role engages the family to gain rich and differentiated data. Although the interview questions were prepared, the setting was comfortable and more conversational. This is to respect the participant's role and not appear only to be interested in gaining data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). I interviewed participants via Zoom, virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. The interview with participants took approximately 45 minutes to complete. I recorded the virtual interviews via Zoom, and I scribed a written record of the interview. I also used Otter transcription service to record and transcribe the interview.

Data Collection

Before the interview began, I introduced myself, the study's purpose, and the participant's rights. I began my audio recording and proceeded with the interview questions via zoom. I used a notebook that is strictly for interviews and wrote the participants' responses. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the research and I reminded them that their responses will be protected, and if they would like to receive results after it is complete, I would send it. I also reiterated their responses to ensure the accuracy of their perspectives.

According to Busetto (2020), using a general interview guide approach can be an approach that is useful for qualitative analysis. The questions are structured and flexible, allowing the interviewer to have a conversational approach while retrieving the data needed (Busetto, 2020). Informal conversational interviews are not structured and made up as they go along. As a researcher, I did not immerse myself in the participant's environment; I wanted to understand their perspective with specific questions. Using the general interview guide I was able to deviate from the structured questions and ask follow-up questions based on the participants' responses to the main questions. Through interview guides the researcher not only gains rich data but has flexibility and adaptability (Busetto, 2020).

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative research methods result in unstructured, text-based data that include audio and video collection (Busetto, 2020). This method of documenting the interview is used to ensure accuracy and reliable analysis. Therefore, I used the QDA software known as, NVivo. This software organizes data to help identify patterns and themes. The connections and themes found using the software, might not be capable through handwritten coding. Below is a list of data analysis steps:

Step 1: All audio data was uploaded into the NVivo analysis software.

Step 2: NVivo analyzed and organized my transcriptions of the interviews.

Step 3: I used the "node" mode of NVivo to begin coding.

Step 4: I created a visualization to show my coding themes using the software.

Further information on the analysis steps is in my results section.

Issue of Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness is connected to the researcher's trustworthiness and the data analysis instruments used to collect and analyze the data (Patton, 1995). Trustworthiness is considered one methodological rigor dimension and helps create useful results (Nowell et al., 2017). As a researcher, I established trustworthiness by ensuring accuracy in participants' responses, detailed processes, results, and peer debriefing. Also, to establish and demonstrate trustworthiness, I established and discussed the specific paradigm for qualitative inquiry consisting of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 1995).

Credibility

Using NVivo to identify themes from the transcripts, it is important to have integrity in the analysis by testing rival explanations (Patton, 1995). Looking for competing themes, as a researcher, I must reexamine the data and look for logical possibilities and if they can be supported by the data (Patton, 1995). Not only using data analysis to establish credibility, but I used reflexivity. Reflexivity is a researcher making a conscious effort to explain to readers their biases, beliefs, and individual experiences to the topic and establish a boundary between researcher and participant (Dodgson, 2019). As the researcher, I am responsible for interpreting data and results, and it is important to practice reflexivity. After each interview, I reviewed all the responses I had recorded to ensure accurate interpretations of the information given. After the interview, I conducted member checks with participants to ensure accuracy. As a former Head Start employee in

various positions, it is important to practice reflexivity and address it for readers because it also deepens the readers' understanding of the work (Dodgson, 2019).

Transferability

In research, transferability is when the researcher provides contextual information so that readers can decide if the results can be "transferred" in various situations (Johnson et al., 2020). In this study, participants' requirements helped establish detailed information by stating their center location, number of participants, the various job roles, and years of experience. Some of these descriptors are also established during data collection via the interview questions. Researchers should provide detailed information using descriptive and rich language, for example, using descriptors like the number of participants, the study's geographical location, and the period between data collection and analysis (Johnson et al., 2020).

Dependability

Detailed information is important when establishing trustworthiness in research, as dependability requires the researcher to have well-documented steps showing that the study could be repeated (Johnson et al., 2020). The research method was well documented in the participant logic section in pair with the participant criteria, I ensured both dependability and transferability (Hoyland et al., 2017). It can be difficult to establish the study's dependability and overall trustworthiness if there is insufficient documentation of the analysis process (Johnson et al., 2020).

Confirmability

During this study's data collection process, I repeated my interpretation of the participants' answers to interview questions as the researcher. Taking this approach informs readers that the results reflect the participants' perspectives and not the researcher's interpretations (Johnson et al., 2020). This study has open-ended interview questions that I was able to confirm participants' answers, which increases the credibility and confirmability of the study (Johnson et al., 2020).

Ethical Procedures

Recruitment

Ethical concerns for recruitment would be privacy, as my intended method was to email a flyer to the family services manager to send to potential participants. Employees may feel pressured to participate because he sent the email. Therefore, an ethical consideration that was implemented for the family service manager was to let all potential participants know a researcher will be sending a recruitment email. There was also an ethical concern if the staff did not participate due to time constraints. I prevented this by recruiting more than 10 people needed to interview just in case I needed to contact other participants for the study.

Confidentiality

When conducting qualitative research, there can be many ethical concerns, specifically anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent (Cypress, 2019). In a researcher and participant relationship, it is important that the meaning of confidentiality is conveyed clearly. It was important to accurately convey the interview data as it was used for data analysis purposes. Data collected in this study remained confidential, and

all participant names or school names remained anonymous. This was a concern as staff members were discussing how they carry out their job as it relates to family engagement. Protections were in place because I assured participants of this policy, using different names in the results of the study, and allowing only myself, the researcher, and chair members access to the data. First, I used my Walden email, solely for communication for this project and not my personal email, to create a safe platform. Also the data was stored securely on NVivo, which deletes all media data after 90 days of the last transcript edit and is backed up and then permanently deleted after another 90 days. Transcripts have to be manually destroyed and they will be destroyed after data is completed for the study after 5 years. The chair members and I are the only three people who have access to the data. During the interview, I protected participants' privacy by having zoom calls where only the participants and I could hear and view. Participants' self-identifiers, like their names, were replaced in the study by pseudonyms such as Participant 1. The original master list with the identifiers was secured by the main researcher (Allen, 2017).

Informed Consent

The researcher's responsibility is to ensure participants are aware and clearly understand the process of data collection and their role in the study (Cypress, 2019). Before the interview took place, participants received a flyer detailing the study's aspects and their role. The flyer was concise and I provided the details needed for understanding the study. Before the start of the interviews, I briefed participants again on their rights as participants and the aspects of the research process and were asked to confirm their understanding.

Summary

In Chapter 3, a research design and rationale were presented, supported by credible resources for selecting a basic qualitative approach. It also fully details the research methodology, participant logic, sampling method, data collection, and analysis. This chapter also detailed how this study established trustworthiness using the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical procedures were also addressed, including the researcher's role, ensuring ethical practices through IRB and ethics between researcher/participant concerning data collection and analysis. The next chapters provide detailed findings from the study's data collection.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how to fully engage families in Head Start programs as perceived by staff. I explored and detailed Head Start program staff perspectives on engaging families, barriers, and successful ways to engage. The research question that guided the study was: What are the perspectives of Head Start staff about how to fully engage families? In Chapter 4 I discuss the data collection and analysis and presented the results of the study. First, the setting and demographics of the study, followed by the data collection process, data analysis, and a summary of the study results.

Setting

Due to COVID-19 and the importance of social distancing and local child-care guidelines, face-to-face interviews were not allowed. The setting for the interviews was online via the Zoom platform. The Zoom has face-to-face conference capabilities with the participants virtually through a web camera. The recording feature was also beneficial for me during the transcription process of the study. Participants were able to interview alone in their homes or offices. There were no known personal or organizational conditions that would have influenced participants during the study.

Demographical data were collected during the pre-questionnaire portion before the interview began. I asked participants their ethnicity and education level. There were eight participants that were African-American, one White, and one White/Hispanic.

Figure 2, shows that five of the 10 participants had a master's degree, four had a

bachelor's degree, and one had a high school diploma.

Figure 1

Demographics
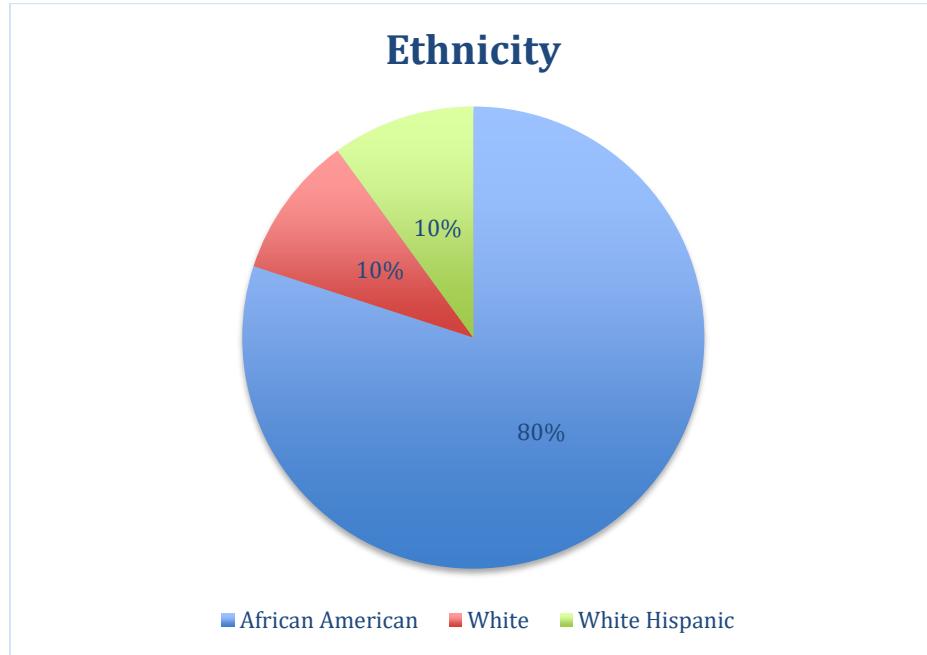
Figure 2

Staff Education
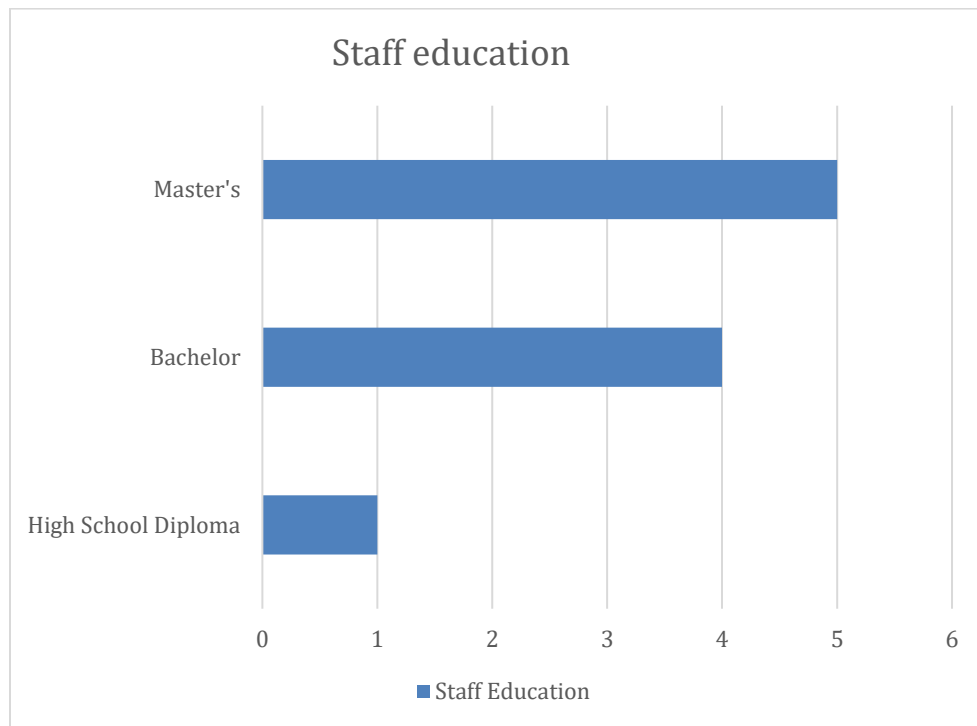
Data Collection

In order to begin data collection, I achieved IRB approval. IRB approval took 6 weeks to complete. IRB approval is critical in ensuring that the research process is ethical and protects the human rights of individuals. There was a rigorous process of answering questions and providing evidence to support my study's intentions and methods of ensuring the protection of human subjects. All materials that were to be used, such as recruitment tools and interview questions, were submitted and approved by my chair and IRB. This was an iterative process that consisted of two drafts before achieving approval.

After receiving approval, I posted the recruitment flyer on social media where my professional network members are active. I posted on two professional networking sites, LinkedIn and Facebook. This also offered the opportunity for my colleagues to share with those I do not know in the field. This method is known as snowballing and it helped me to widen the search pool for potential participants. Individuals were very receptive and expressed interest in taking part in the study. Those that were interested emailed me at my Walden University email; then, I emailed individuals the consent form along with an introduction to be read and reviewed for understanding. Individuals consented within a week via email by saying, "I consent." Once individuals consented via email, a date and time were scheduled for the virtual interviews.

Recruitment

There were 13 individuals who expressed interest, but only 10 participants chose to be a part of the study. Three participants expressed interest in the study but never followed up on scheduling an interview. The participants were from various Head Start programs with multiple positions such as assistant teacher, lead teacher, curriculum specialist, and family service coordinators/supervisors. There were two assistant teachers, two lead teachers, two curriculum specialists, three family service coordinators, and one family service supervisor.

Semistructured interviews took place on the virtual platform Zoom; many participants worked from home or were in their offices alone during the interview. I used Zoom video chat to have the face-to-face interviews virtually. I recorded using Zoom, which recorded the audio as well as the video chat. During the interview I also audio

recorded with OTTER to transcribe the interviews. Once the interview was completed both audio and video recording ended and I saved it on a secure cloud. Transcripts were then reviewed, revised, and I uploaded them into the NVivo platform.

Data Analysis

Using NVivo, I uploaded all my interview transcripts and created a file and case to organize and analyze the data. The word query tool I used to identify common words throughout the transcripts, beginning with a broad range of word returns grouping similar words together. The first query generated about 1000 words, and that wide range was decreased to 10 by a second query. The identified words I narrowed down by reviewing the 10 words based on their occurrence in transcripts and relevance to the study, and then I created codes using them.

I identified the codes as community partnership, engagement/definition, engagement needs, barriers, guide/foundation, success factors, and successful engagement. A subcode was created for the word "engagement," named "definition," because of the broad range of data contributing to the code. Engagement during the interviews was referred to as definitions as well as actual engagement activities. After creating the codes, I went through each interview transcript and manually coded them by highlighting specific words and passages relevant to the code. I also used stripe labels on the side of the interview transcripts to show the use of each code in each transcript. Going through each stripe label, I reread the information highlighted in the transcripts to identify major themes. To reduce the codes to develop themes I analyzed the occurrence of the

codes throughout all ten interviews. Community partnership, engagement needs, guide/foundation were not occurring at a high rate throughout the interviews. There were one to two people that briefly mentioned these codes. Therefore, the remaining codes were developed into five themes. The five themes were defined as: family engagement, process of engaging families, engagement activities, barriers, and successful engagement.

During recruiting I aimed to have different positions/roles participate in the study so that I could have various staff perspectives. I did not have to decline any interested individuals, because I received participants with various positions/roles. There was no clear intention of what their various position/roles would reveal in the data, I just knew it would be different.

Interviewing Data Collection

Interviews were initially set to last for about an hour, including member checking. However, the average time of interviews was 45 minutes or less due to participants being very clear and knowledgeable of the topic of engagement. All interviews I recorded using Zoom's recording feature and Otter transcribing services. I manually transcribed the responses during the interview, as well. Once the recording was completed on Zoom, I uploaded it to my secure cloud drive, and then videos were deleted from my computer. Once the Otter transcribing services were completed, I uploaded and saved them in a protected folder on the platform.

During the interview, I asked participants six probing questions and five follow up questions. Based on participants' answers, some follow-up questions that were not written were asked to gain a better perspective, such as how do you overcome your

ethnicity being a barrier with families? The interviews were semistructured, I had flexibility to gain rich data based on participants' responses, through the data collection method. Being able to ask for clarity or explore deeper into a reply provided the ability to gain their perspectives.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

During interviews, the researcher may eventually begin to receive the same responses and reach a saturation level when using participants by 10s (Patton, 2015). This study included10 participants who met the participant number. In the consent form I addressed ethical concerns, especially since most participants were former or current professionals in my professional network. The consent form detailed that participation is voluntary and that our professional relationship would not affect their choice. Measures were taken to ensure participants knew their rights and understood the process. After I gave individuals the consent form, before the interview began, they were reminded of their rights again, and privacy of information such as their names and roles were reassured. During the transcription and coding process, I assigned each participant an identifier to ensure privacy.

Credibility

Moon (2019) stated exploring the credibility of results through member checking is useful, and was used in this study. After the interviews were completed, participants were able to review the transcript to ensure that their responses were captured accurately. Any clarity or changes were updated on the written interview transcript.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is not for generalizing but to show that research findings can be transferable to other studies or settings (Daniel, 2019). This study is transferrable to those who work in early childhood education settings or work with children and families. Participants could give different perspectives on engaging families due to their separate roles in the educational program. Implementation of this study did not change, thus not affecting the transferability of the study.

Dependability

Dependability requires the researcher to have well-documented steps that the study could be repeated (Johnson et al., 2020). I created detailed notes throughout the research process documenting the data analysis process. I wrote recruitment procedures, data collection, and analysis in a thorough yet concise way to ensure the study could be replicated. Additionally, I used the code-recode method when analyzing the data to ensure dependability. As stated previously, after recoding, I had to create a subcode for the word engagement because the word had two different meanings throughout the interviews. Participants responses defined engagement, and described it as an action, with participants detailing their activities to promote it. I was able to refine the themes that emerged and create subcodes through recoding.

Confirmability

Lastly, confirmability refers to the neutrality of results, meaning other researchers can confirm these results, and they are not made up by the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The process of analysis did not deviate from the initially intended process.

Therefore, using an audit trail detailing the consistency of the process compared to the

original data collection and analysis method ensures confirmability (Korstjens & Moser,

2018). During the interviews I wrote down participant responses on paper to keep track

as well. I conducted the audit trail, and the trail showed no deviation, and participants

were all asked the same questions on the guide. Participant's responses were similar but

differed with their activities for engagement.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

The five emerging themes were defined as: family engagement, process of

engaging families, engagement activities, barriers, and successful engagement.

Engagement activities are broken down by each position/role of participants and their

responses; their responses differed based on their position/role.

Family Engagement

Participant responses showed that family engagement was defined by stating

families were to do more than just participate in activities, but for the program to be

involved and create a partnership with the whole family. Participant 001 stated*:* "Being

involved not only with the child with the entire family to make sure that the parent is

okay. I know that if the parents are okay, the child can have a better chance in life."

Participant 002 defined family engagement as:

> Participant 002 stated:
>
> I would define family engagement as parents being able to play an active role not
>
> only within the classroom but outside of the classroom. It also requires as
>
> educators that we keep our parents in the loop of what it is that we are not only

teaching our kids but also how they can better assist us in reinforcing learning outside of the classroom. And lastly, I think the biggest aspect of family engagement is making sure that they fully understand what it is that we are educating their children on, as well as making sure they fully understand what it means to engage their children outside of our rooms.

Participant 003 and 004 also defined family engagement as the following.

Participant 003 stated: *"*knowing that you have a relationship with the entire family, whatever that looks like for that particular, you know, family unit, and that it's reciprocated, not just with myself but also with the teachers, and whoever the caregivers are."

Participant 004 defined "family engagement as an opportunity to have the families have not only a voice, but to participate in various activities around the center, in and out of the center that can look a lot of different ways, because we're in a pandemic."

Participant 005 defined family engagement and detailed their difference of engagement versus public schools.

Participant 005 stated:

Getting all the family, whether it's the mother, father, uncle, grandparents, Whoever was involved in that child's life. At school, that's what we try to engage in getting involved with, and what it is we have been called 2 Gen, so I know a lot of times, public school private school, they just focus on the child. But we do family engagement, and we focus on the child's education and social ability but

also we engage the parents because parents have needs. So how, how well the parents go that determine the future for the child as well.

Participant 006 defines family engagement as "not just having the families participate in the program because obviously it's an optional program and they've chosen to enroll their students when they're already at a level of participation and engagement is making meaningful connections, designing programs and services so that the families, gain the most knowledge that's needed for them." Participant 007 stated: "as a family support, family engagement on this aspect is more so of making sure the family's needs are met, to support the child."

Participant 008 defined family engagement as "an open communication line between teachers and parents and family supports and just kind of make sure that every entity is feeling supported when it comes to servicing the child." Also, Participant 009 stated: "just parents and teachers cooperate with each other to ensure that the child gets the best education that they can." Participant 010 shared: "Family engagement is beyond involvement and creating a partnership with families and the program and staff."

Most of the participants shared similar definitions of family engagement regardless of their various roles. This showed that although they came from different Head Start facilities, they shared similar definitions.

Process of Engaging Families

Many participants said COVID-19 changed how they typically engage face to face. Although they were no longer able to engage face to face, participants stated that family engagement increased due to the use of virtual platforms.

Participant 006, "being able to transition into a virtual meeting space has increased our family engagement." Due to the use of technology, parents can get online and attend various meetings or engagement activities. Also, using virtual platforms for meetings and using different apps to communicate with the families about important information regarding them or their child has been another way to engage families.

Teachers have used apps to keep parents included in their child's development, such as sending pictures of classroom work or videos of their child completing an activity and even touring their classroom because families have not physically met them or seen the space. Family service workers have also used apps to keep in contact with parents; due to COVID-19, parents are not allowed in the building.

Participant 003 stated, parents are getting younger and younger, and they really enjoy having something instant where to then they're just like texting me or like messaging me but it's also the remind app, and that allows me to send pictures, we have done several events don't look the same. We've done several like engagement activities where I'm asking them to do things at home and send me a picture, send me a link to a video or whatever.

Participant shared their use of Zoom meeting for engagement. Participant 006 stated, So I've had a lot of families showing up for zoom meetings, that would have never been able to get into the school for a meeting, but now they're checking in on their lunch breaks or you know they're able to get other things done with their life while being on a meeting.

Staff have used very creative ways to engage their families, even during a global pandemic. The use of apps and virtual platforms has catered to many families whose communication needs differ and have allowed families to attend meetings.

Engagement Activities

Teachers

There were four different roles in the participant sample: assistant teacher, lead teacher, curriculum specialist, and family service coordinators/supervisor. All participants engaged families somehow, but how they engaged families differed based on their position/role in Head Start. Teachers stated that they engage families but on a different level versus those in management outside of the classroom. Teachers used the child to engage families by sending home engagement activities based on their development, parent communication apps, phone calls, and classroom family volunteers. Participant 009 stated, "either incorporating newsletters, parent involvement they read books, invite them to come and just be a part of their, their child's classroom." Other teachers described their engagement activities below.

> Participant 008 stated, By having lots of meetings with my parents. I'm sending home letters, no, no. I'm keeping them abreast on what's going on in my classroom, um, specifically with their child, sending home examples of work and different things like that so that they can see, you know, what their child is doing without always having to come up to the school to see, you know, providing some at-home examples and things like that.

Participant 002 stated, engaged families through phone calls, called sunshine calls, the sunshine call is basically parents get so wrapped up in hearing about the negatives of their kids that they never actually hear the positives, and so they dread those phone calls the sunshine calls gives you the opportunity to come and listen on the phone to the things that your child is doing great.

Participant 001 shares how the families temperament is gauged. Participant 001 stated, I engage with families in the morning. We don't allow them to come in and just fine. And leave out the classroom. I try to say good morning, and I try to gauge the parent's temperament. That way, I know what type of day I'm going to have with the child. So they had a rough one; if I see a parent, like you're frustrated with a child and rushing to drop off, I try to calm them down a little bit before they leave, and I make sure they kiss their child, and it's very important. So that child will have a good day. I try to tell them about many activities that they can do on a weekend if they don't have money because all the parents don't have money to have vacation, so I try to research free things that they could do with the children so the child will be exposed outside of the community, and gather resources if they are complaining about things, where the child crying a lot of distress, try to get the parents into.

Curriculum Specialist

The curriculum specialist supervises and supports the efforts of teachers in the classroom. Based on participants' responses their engagement with families are rooted in

their relationship with the child and their developmental and educational experience in the program. A curriculum specialist details their engagement activity for families below.

Participant 004 stated, We actually had a curriculum night. The parents loved it. And we wanted to definitely do more of that, so that parents understood what their children were learning each and every day, and not just, oh, my child is playing. Curriculum night allowed families to engage with teachers and ask questions about their child's classroom environment; the night also involved children at play for families to see what their day looks like.

Family Service

This position throughout the interviews showed to have more ways of engagement than any other position because family engagement is their focus. Many participants used meetings as their way of engaging families. The common meeting that they all mentioned was the Parent Leadership Organization for families to join and take a leadership role in the program. While other activities included meetings that were gender-based strictly for moms or fathers, health meetings, and then family meetings. Participant 003 stated, "We've done several like engagement activities where I'm asking them to do things at home and send me a picture, send me a link to a video or whatever." Participant 005 and 007 discussed the different activities that have based on genders for families and why they separate.

Participant 005 stated, different genders have different needs and stuff, so we do one with males which, whatever, grandfathers, and stuff. We do one with the

moms, I mean, with the female gender group and as dealing with moms, grandmas, or whatever. And so, we have that meeting, where we talk about life. Participant 007 stated, So we have the moms that come out, and we have some real, meaningful conversations, it's not just about the children, but it's about ourselves and how we can grow or help each other grow and then the dads have their portion which is all pro dad, which is led by my supervisor Mr. A (name confidential), and they come out they do the barbecues, they go to football games and other stuff like that.

And then we also have parent leadership organization where the parents are able to meet with us and have an open conversation about the do's, the don'ts, What the pros and the cons of the program.

...been able to supply us with some food items from their food pantry. So we're able to supply the parents with some of those items as well. Let them grab and go what they want. And we try to do that every like three times a week to help the families.

Staff created various meetings and opportunities for families to engage and voice their concerns. Although with the many opportunities that are presented and that families join, there can be barriers.

Barriers

The barriers to family engagement were determined as: COVID-19, lack of trust, pride, home environment, multiple children, and administrative paperwork. The six barriers were common with participants, usually, those who were in similar roles.

COVID-19 has been a barrier because they cannot meet with parents face-to-face as they would usually do. Participants 006 and 006 detailed their extra steps they took to engage families.

Participant 005 stated they have now created outdoor events to allow social distancing to see parents during drop off or pick up to engage. Lack of trust and pride were barriers that many families may want assistance with but were too prideful or afraid to ask and receive. Many were worried about staff passing judgment on other families.

Participant 006 stated, Not to sound melodramatic, but compared to my coworkers I have to go through a few extra steps every year to build the mutual respect and trust with families because I don't look like the families that I serve, and there's the inherent lack of trust at the beginning of the school year which I totally understand. So, through the year, I have to prove that I'm cool, and then I have the, you know, family's best interest in mind, which I've gotten used to, but it is a barrier, at first you know there's that disconnect and standoffishness from families which is totally understandable.

Families have several barrier due to transportation, pride, or lack of funding.

Participant 007 stated, I've gotten, oh we can't come face to face because of COVID or, I don't have transportation, I don't have funding. but a lot of parents I started pointing out, have a little too much pride, sometimes they say they need the help, but then they don't want to receive the help. And then you have those

who need the help. But then they don't know how to ask for the help. So the

barriers have been ranged from wanting help to not receiving the help having

pride or not saying something or not wanting to receive it.

The home environment was broken down by their education level, toxic

relationships, or instability of the physical environment (Participant 001, 004, 005, 007,

010). Families having multiple children of different ages at different schools posed a

barrier to engage because families were busy trying to juggle (Participant 004). Lastly,

administrative paperwork was a barrier for those in family service positions.

Participant 003 stated, "paperwork and documentation and house mandates and

all of that. than like the funner, relationship building. Finding that balance, you

know, I feel like it's, it's tricky for family support in particular."

Staff gave some barriers that they encounter, but they also managed to give their

steps to how they overcome those barriers. The successful factors are detailed in the next

section.

Successful Engagement

Although there are barriers to engaging families, there are successes as well, and

the participants shared those factors that make engagement successful. The factors

emerged in two sub themes, communication, and child and family relationship building.

Communication between staff and parents is essential, and participants consistently stated

that open and honest communication was vital. Participant 008 stated, "make sure the

school, you know, has clear open communication with the parent and everybody is on the

same page." Participant 009 stated, "I think communication goes a long way with parent

involvement because if we can't communicate there, we can't, we can't help one another." Participant 002 stated, "an open line of communication, where you can discuss glows and grows." Participants 003 & 004 stated, "finding out the best ways to communicate with families."

Building a relationship with the child and using that to begin a relationship or communication with families is also a success factor. Many teachers use the approach of using their relationship with the child to develop one with the families. They use their knowledge of the child to begin conversations and ultimately a relationship with families. All other roles also build a relationship with families either using their relationship with the children or through daily opportunities such as drop off and pick up or the various engagement activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the five emerging themes sought to answer the research question, What are the perspectives of Head Start staff about how to fully engage families? Staff report that the use of technology such as virtual platforms like Zoom and apps like RemindMe are how they fully engage families in their program. Teachers and the curriculum specialist reporting that their engagement differs because they are in the classroom, however they use their relationship with the children to engage families in the development of their child. Lastly, family service workers engage families fully by being consistent and providing meaningful opportunities for families to have a voice and participate in activities meaningful to them.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I shared perspectives from Head Start staff on engaging families fully, the barriers, and success factors for engagement. I described in detail the data collection and analysis process starting with describing the recruitment and coding process. Next, I discussed how the study provided evidence of trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lastly, I gave the answers to the research question using quotes from participant's transcripts. In Chapter 5, I discussed the interpretation and limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this basic qualitative study, I explored Head Start Program staff perspectives on fully engaging families. The study provides rich details on how staff define family engagement, engage families, create engagement activities, overcome barriers, and successful engagement. Staff gave personal experiences and perspectives on fully engaging families through the use of open-ended interview questions.

Data analysis indicated that COVID-19 did positively impact engagement with families; many Head Start programs' engagement increased during the pandemic, due to virtual technology platforms being used. The look and definition of engagement varied slightly based on the participant's position/role in the Head Start program. There were several different barriers such as COVID-19, lack of trust, pride, home environment, multiple children, and administrative paperwork. Success factors were also discussed on fully engaging families. In this chapter, I discuss the findings and addressed the limitations and recommendations for future research in family engagement in the early childhood field.

Interpretation of Findings

Overall, my findings suggested that several stakeholders are an important part of making family engagement successful, which is supported by Bronfenbrenner's' (1979) ecological systems theory. I conducted this study to explore how Head Start Program staff fully engage families, and the importance of partnering to engage families fully. Everyone involved in the program, including teachers, family service workers, other

administrative staff, and community partnerships, were critically important for fully

engaging families. For example, many participants define family engagement as

including or partnering with the whole family, which was not limited to the immediate

family. The microsystem portion of the ecological systems theory consists of the

immediate environment that includes the child's family and school. This is an influential

system as the child engages with those quite often part of this system. Some participants

stated that they measure their engagement success by the parents' engagement and seeing

the developmental growth in the child. Ecological system's theory suggests that

children's development can be influenced by those in the microsystem. The engagement

of the program staff and parents would be a part of the mesosystem. The

engagement/interactions of the two has proven to develop positive outcomes for the

children (Knight-McKenna et al., 2019). The barriers to engaging families fully such

employment/unemployment issues, education, neighborhood/environment are an instance

of the exosystem. Participants stated that they believe many of these factors indirectly

influence the children, due to the lack of engagement from families when facing these

adversities.

The five themes were defined as: Family engagement, process of engaging

families, engagement activities, barriers, and successful engagement.

Family Engagement

The majority of participants had similar definitions of family engagement, using

words like whole child, whole family, family unit, beyond involvement to define what

family engagement is. Their definitions aligned with the literature and its differentiation

in defining parent involvement versus family engagement. Participants defined family

engagement as the school and family working together and not just the family attending

an event. Their definition of just attending events aligned with the definition of parent

involvement which is a one-way connection between parents and their children's

education defined by Ferrara (2017, p. 146). Participants defined family engagement as

more of a partnership, gaining an understanding of the families and having the families

gain an understanding of the expectations and work the staff do. Although they want

families to participate in the engagement activities, engagement is creating that

relationship and environment for families to have input on what the engagement looks

like. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families (U.S.

Department of Health & Human Services, 2011). Their definitions of families having a

voice aligns with the Department of Health and Human Services definition of family

engagement as well.

Process of Engaging Families

The foundation for engagement is the communication between parents and

educators (Jeynes, 2018). The data showed that using technology as a form of

communication increased family engagement, specifically during the pandemic. Using

apps, like the Remind ME app, and virtual video platforms like Zoom have allowed

parents who cannot come into the center to engage due to the COVID-19 pandemic and

parents before the pandemic who were often too busy to engage, to engage. As reported

in the literature, educators and families stated that improving communication was a

barrier (Baker et al., 2016). The data also showed that many families are younger now

and that may play role in the success of using technology outside of the regular newsletters, phone calls, or in-person contact. In recent literature, school initial contact with families is important to set the foundation for engagement, it is imperative that educators take careful consideration on communication strategies (Ball & Skrzypek, 2019). Participants stated that families with multiple children in multiple age groups at different schools do not have time to meet face-to-face when juggling children at other places and times. Many program staff are looking to integrate the virtual engagement into their standard engagement practices after the pandemic.

Engagement Activities

Data indicated that engagement activities differed based on their position/role in the program. Participants gave detailed examples of engagement activities they conducted. Unlike the literature, clear examples of engagement were not provided in the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), only the title or the number of services offered is shared. Consistent with the literature, educators need to be aware of parents, citizens and immigrants, barriers they face and not focus too much on the challenges because it can become problematic and disempower them (Snell, 2018). One teacher participant indicated the importance of remaining objective and knowing that family structures, values, and beliefs will differ and keeping it in mind when engaging or creating engagement activities.

Creating positive relationships between families and educators has been shown to help students be successful in their development and academic journey (Baker et al., 2016; Ferrara, 2017; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016; Smith et al., 2019). The data

from interviews also addresses that many teachers focused on creating a better parent-child relationship. If they did not see improvement, they didn't consider having engaged families successfully. Positive relationships and strong partnerships create positive outcomes by increasing family engagement (Knight-McKenna et al., 2019). While research concludes that one of the positive outcomes from family engagement is a positive parent-child relationship, the data aligns with research, showing that marginalized families and staff disconnect because the parent-child engagement is not viewed or is misunderstood (McWayne et al., 2018). Teacher participants goals for engagement were to improve the parent-child relationship, but how do we know if there is a problem with their relationship or is staff misunderstanding the relationship.

Barriers

From this study, six barriers emerged: COVID-19, lack of trust, pride, home environment, multiple children, and administrative paperwork. A pandemic was not seen in the literature to alter or affect engaging families. Although in recent literature, researchers Daggers et al. (2021) stated "Family engagement professionals must know how to best communicate information with the remote population they serve, primarily through email, digital publications, and webinars" (2021, p. 2). This new phenomenon that sounded like it could be the worst turned out to increase family engagement.

Possible barriers to engagement are in two categories as structural/logistical barriers and psychological/attitudinal barriers (Garbacz, 2018). A family service worker recalled experiences with families who needed help but were too prideful to ask or receive the program's assistance, supporting the literature of a psychological/attitudinal

barrier. Parents in a study expressed that to be involved, the solution was to set aside time, express themselves, communicate, and get assistance (Kocyigit, 2015).

However, a family service supervisor and curriculum specialist described parental lack of education, home environment, and multiple children to be a barrier for engaging which aligns with structural/logistical barriers. Parents in another study stated their lack of engagement was due to including fatigue, irrelevance, and financial difficulties (Kocyigit, 2015). These are both in alignment with the literature and two possible categories of barrier. At least three participants stated that if they could get families to understand the importance and relevance of engagement, it would help them engage better.

Researchers stated a barrier to family engagement is the lack of communication and poor communication between the school and the families (Baker et al., 2016). An overwhelming majority of participants stated open and honest communication is a success factor not a barrier. Staff showed their mastery of understanding communication barriers by already ensuring effective communication takes place. They also showed their knowledge of this by adapting to the pandemic and implementing different communication techniques that increased their engagement.

Successful Engagement

There were two factors to successful engagement: communication and child and family relationship building. As previously stated, research cited that poor communication was a barrier between schools and families (Baker et al., 2016). This study highlighted effective communication as their success factor instead of poor

communication as a barrier. Effective communication and relationship building with both children and families work together to engage families successfully. Participants had various success stories that differed, but what remained consistent was their relationships and communication which created successful engagement. Although they may have initially encountered some barriers their consistency with the two success factors allowed then to engage families positively.

Most teacher participants stated that they used their relationship with the child to build a relationship or open communication with the families. Having a relationship with families eased tension when meeting with parents about challenging behaviors, developmental delays, or early intervention services.

Limitations of the Study

This study had three limitations to detail. Due to the study having participant exclusions based on years of experience, the sample group was developed using purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). The second limitation was that all interviews had taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic and many answers about engagement revolved around the changes in engagement due to the pandemic. Interview answers may have been skewed or limited due to the limits placed on child-care providers during the pandemic. Lastly, not having a diverse group of participants could have limited perspectives on barriers to engaging families. One participant indicated that their ethnicity was a barrier to engaging families fully.

Recommendations

My recommendations come from the limitations of the study. A study taking place when there is no pandemic and restrictions to face-to-face interactions may benefit research. Conducting a study with no interaction restrictions, researchers could gain more perspectives on engagement activities in programs. Secondly, research has stressed the importance of stakeholders to bridge the gap with schools and families of different cultures, as many conventional engagement initiatives have a disconnect with families (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Findings from this study showed the opposite of the Ishimaru research, therefore further research on how staff's culture or ethnicity creates barriers to engaging with families is recommended to strengthen the literature. This study detailed that one participant had challenges engaging families due to her ethnicity. Further research on parents' biases or trauma with other races and ethnicities and how it effects their engagement in schools should be researched.

Implications for Positive Social Change

As more educational programs move from parent involvement to family engagement, it is important to share those who have positive experiences and success fully engaging families (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Future research should have explicit examples of how educators and family service workers accomplish this positive partnership with children and families in their programs. The knowledge gained from this study will be helpful for families, educators, family service workers, administrators, and department officials.

This study may help families understand what the work program staff is trying to accomplish and their genuine desire to assist families and not only the children. Educators can also gain new perspectives. It is important to focus on their students academically and be cognizant of the whole child approach, which includes engaging their families as well. This study may contribute additional ideas to family service workers on creating relationships and engaging families outside of the classroom. Lastly, administrators and department officials, for example, the Department of Health and Human Services or Office of Head Start could gain a further understanding of how their framework and standards for engagement are impactful or could be improved.

Conclusion

I designed this study to examine and increase knowledge of fully engaging families from Head Start Program Staff perspectives. The basic qualitative approach using semi structured interviews gained perspectives from 10 participants. The following themes were identified: Family engagement, process of engaging families, engagement activities, barriers to engagement, and successful engagement. Findings suggest that family engagement is implemented and defined differently based on your position/role in the Head Start program. All positions/roles actively engage families and have found both barriers and successes when doing so. Barriers to engagement included home environment, lack of trust, pride, and family structure. Staff success factors include effective communication and developing a child and family relationship. Success factors were measured for success by the experiences and gratitude parents shared with staff and pre and post assessments.

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Appendix A: Head Start Staff Interview Questions

Pre-Question (Demographic Information)

1. What is your ethnicity?

2. What is your education level?

1. Would you please introduce yourself by stating your position/role at Head Start and

years of service?

2. What is family engagement?

a. How does your position/role support family engagement efforts?

3. How does the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) framework

define family engagement?

a. Is the PFCE framework helpful in your position/role to engage families?

b.   What are the ways you engage families?

c. Can you recall a time you felt like you successfully engaged families?

d. What factors made it successful?

4.   Are there any barriers to fully engaging families?

a.   How do you overcome those barriers?

5.   What would help you fully engage families?

6.   How do you know you have successfully engaged families throughout the school

     year?