

# Parental support



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## Connections Between Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement

Among Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Students ArelÃ Dohner-ChÃ¡vez Abstract

This study used a correlational design to investigate how parental involvement and ethnicity (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic) is related to the academic achievement (measured by grade point average) of college students. Participants included 48 Hispanic and 40 non-Hispanic college students who were asked about parental involvement received during their primary education. A 2 x 2 ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of ethnicity on academic achievement ( $F = 6.88$ ;  $p < .05$ ), in that non-Hispanics had a higher mean GPA than Hispanic college students. However, there was not a significant main effect of parental involvement ( $F = .00$ ;  $p = .996$ ) and no significant interaction between parental involvement and ethnicity ( $F = .69$ ;  $p = .41$ ). We live in a competitive and capitalist world in which educational attainment increases the probability of obtaining wellpaying employment, ultimately leading to a higher standard of living. Students who demonstrate high academic achievement, measured by their grade point average (GPA), are more likely to graduate from college and those who graduate from college are more likely to achieve their career goal. According to Gordon-Rouse and Austin (2002), high school student participants who had a GPA greater than 2.75 were considered to be high achievers and typically demonstrated higher motivation in their education than those with lower GPAs. Rouse and Austin also suggested that those with a high GPA were more likely to prepare themselves for college and therefore have higher expectations to succeed academically. However, not all students perform well in college: the academic achievement of a student is impacted by many factors, including their ethnicity and the influence of parental

involvement during their primary education. Many studies have compared students of different ethnic backgrounds and have found that individuals of Hispanic origin continue to have the lowest educational attainment (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Mirande & Enriquez, 1979). The academic progress of Hispanic students continues to remain far behind the other 43 ethnic groups in many different aspects (Alva & Padilla). One study found one of these aspects to be that Hispanic students are far less likely to graduate from high school when compared to other ethnicities (Mirande & Enriquez). Alva and Padilla also found that there are many socio-cultural variables that impact a Hispanic student's ability to succeed academically such as the struggle for acculturation, language barriers, and lack of role models in the school system that reflect their own ethnicity. Research demonstrates that these are only a few obstacles that may increase the difficulty of obtaining academic achievement among Hispanic students. Regardless of ethnicity, parental involvement in a child's education has a definite impact on the child's level of academic success. Past research indicates that active parental involvement in education is important because it is positively related to a child's self-expectations for academic success (Ibañez, Kupermine, Jurkovic & Perilla, 2004). Across all ethnicities, studies have demonstrated that parental monitoring leads to higher academic achievement, if only because parental attention helps children remain focused on school (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). The few studies that have looked at parental involvement as a factor of academic achievement demonstrate that "parent involvement [is] positively related to expectations and importance of schooling" and that by having a positive outlook toward education, a student is more likely to succeed (Ibañez et al, 2004). Though

parental involvement is clearly important for any ethnicity to succeed academically, the dynamics facing Hispanic students suggest the need for a special emphasis on parental involvement. Such involvement is especially important if Hispanic children are to overcome cultural and language challenges to their educational attainment. However, many Hispanic parents are recent immigrants with very little formal schooling and have only low-level English skills. These parents are typically unfamiliar with the American school systems and may lack the confidence to help with schoolwork (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). In addition, as a population, Hispanics tend to have a lower socio-economic status (Mirande & Enriquez, 1979). The implication of this for Hispanic children is not insignificant, for Hispanic parents who must work long hours to make ends meet might not have enough surplus time or energy to devote to their children's education. Nevertheless, despite language barriers and long work hours, these parents often demonstrate involvement by recognizing the importance of school through actions such as making sure homework is completed. Hispanic students need the extra support of high parental involvement in their education in order to persevere and excel academically. In organizing the current study, I set out to examine this relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement amongst Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. Based on previous research, my initial hypothesis was that Hispanic students in general would demonstrate lower academic achievement in comparison to non-Hispanic students. My second hypothesis was that college students with high parental involvement in their primary education would demonstrate higher academic achievement in college than those with low parental involvement. By implication, I was able to predict

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

**Method**

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

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

44 The dependent variable of this study was academic achievement, as measured by the student's current grade point average (GPA). Measures For the purposes of this study, the researchers created a questionnaire divided

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into three sections. The first section consisted of one question asking participants to indicate their primary reason for seeking a college degree, with options such as "to please my parents", "to get a good job" and "to feel better about myself." The second section consisted of 16 parental involvement items ( $\alpha = .83$ ), such as "my parents helped me develop good study habits", "my parents checked to see if I had homework", and "I believe my parents' encouragement helped me stay focused on my education". Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strong agree). The scores from the questionnaire ranged from 21-65 with a median split of 50, so the scores ranging from 21-50 were categorized as "low parental involvement" and scores ranging from 51-65 were categorized as "high parental involvement." The final section contained demographic questions about age, ethnicity, and GPA. Procedure Researchers entered classrooms, gave a brief overview of the project, and asked if students would like to participate. Those who did not wish to participate left the classroom for a short break. Students who used the on-line subject pool were asked to come to a specific room at a designated time. Those students who wished to participate were presented with an informed consent sheet. The researchers then reviewed this sheet orally and answered any questions that were asked by participants. Once the participant chose to continue, he or she signed one copy of the form and returned it to the researcher. A second copy was also provided to the participant for their records. Researchers also stood in the campus central quad and asked students who passed by if they wanted to participate in a study. Researchers gave a brief overview of the project to those who

expressed interest in participating and if they agreed to participate in the study, they were given an informed consent form to sign and a copy for their records. Participants were encouraged to sit down and complete the questionnaire with sufficient space between each other to complete it privately. Those who did not wish to participate were not given a questionnaire. All participants were given the questionnaire and asked to choose the response that most applied to them or to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a statement. After completing the questionnaire and returning it to the researchers, all participants were given a debriefing form that summarized the goals of the study, provided information on how to learn about the results of the study, and provided references for further reading. All students were also thanked for their participation. Results Figure 1 presents academic achievement (utilizing mean GPA) for Hispanic and nonHispanic students in relation to high and low parental involvement: 3.3 3.25 3.15 3.1 3.05 3.2 2.95 2.9 2.85 2.8

	Hispanic	non-Hispanic	High Parental Involvement	Low Parental Involvement						
Mean GPA	3.3	3.25	3.15	3.1	3.05	3.2	2.95	2.9	2.85	2.8

45 Looking at the pattern of results displayed in Figure 1, it appears that Hispanic students had lower academic achievement than nonHispanic students. The degree to which academic achievement was affected by parental involvement, however, also appears to depend on the ethnicity of the participant. Specifically, for Hispanic students, low parental involvement correlated better with higher academic achievement than did high parental involvement; however, for nonHispanic students, high parental involvement correlated with a higher level of academic achievement than was attained by students indicating low levels of parental involvement. To test these apparent effects, I analyzed the data using a 2 × 2, between subjects

univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). There was a significant main effect of participant's ethnicity on their academic achievement, such that the mean GPA was significantly higher for non-Hispanic students ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .44$ ) than it was for Hispanic students ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = .42$ ), regardless of parental involvement in their primary education:  $F(1, 77) = 6.88$ ,  $MSE = 1.26$ ,  $p$