

Families' Support and Influence on College Students' Educational Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore families' support and influence on the educational performance of students on a faith-based campus in northern Indiana, USA. The study answered the following research question: How does families' support influence college students' educational performance? This research question was developed after reviewing the literature and coming to the realization that there is little research on families' influence role in college students' academic performance. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with 12 students who resided at the college campus. Themes recognized within the study were used to discuss families' role in students' academic performance. Considering the families' role in students' everyday life and the background support is vital to their educational performance. Themes included: (1) Frequency of contact with family, especially mother; (2) Levels of parental financial involvement; (3) Independence from family; (4) Siblings' influence on academics; (5) Parents' spiritual involvement; and (6) Parents' educational background.

Keywords: educational performance, families' role, families' support and influence

1. Introduction

In a college environment, students often receive financial, emotional, spiritual, and other support from family members. The aspects of college life have many demands, and families' support may be necessary for a student to have successful academic performance. The purpose of this study was to explore families' support and influence on the educational performance of students. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with students.

2. Background

Every person's and families' needs vary. When parents disapprove an act, their child is less likely to do this act. This behavior shows there is a positive relationship between communication and what children choose. Parents have an enormous influence on their children and can change their children's college experiences ("Family Engagement" 2015). Tang, Kim, and Haviland (2013) found students who get encouragement from their families and parents are motivated toward academic success. Family support is important for academic success. Family and parent involvement is needed while a student is in school, but consideration must be taken that every student and families' needs are different. Some families can provide support while others cannot, but this does not mean the student has to fail. That is when other factors, such as social networking, come into play.

3. Research Question

The focus of this study was to answer a question regarding families' support and its effect on students' performance. The research question was: How does families' support influence college students' educational performance?

4. Review of the Literature

4.1 Databases

Nine scholarly peer-reviewed articles were reviewed for this study. The articles were located by using

Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature, EBSCOhost, and Academic Search Premiere. Key phrases included *family influence on college students*, *family influence on education*, *college students and success*, and *family support and academic achievement*. The studies were published from 2013-2016. The following paragraphs summarize the studies.

4.2 Effects of Parental Involvement

Edelman (2013) asserted that parental involvement could come in different forms, which can either be helpful or a hindrance to academic success. By this, Edelman asserted that positive results might be seen academically while socially the students are adversely affected as parents hover in the child's college life. This is what Edelman described as helicopter parents. A child should be allowed some autonomy to be able to survive life after college. Academic success did not warrant success in life after college, because of what might seem as total dependence on the parents (Edelman, 2013).

Tang et al. (2013) asserted that a family motivated and encouraged students to pursue higher education. They also contend that some parents provided consistent non-academic support. Some ethnic families provided both academic and non-academic support. This study confirmed that family and personal aspirations for a better life were intertwined and served as important motivators for doing well in school. Not all families from ethnic backgrounds were familiar with the American school system and were faced with language barriers that limited their ability to provide instrumental support to their children in navigating and succeeding in the educational system. During this study, Tang et al. asserted that several parents disapproved of the student's campus involvement, felt that students were wasting their time, and failed to see the value of student participation in extracurricular activities as a way to develop social investments while in college.

4.3 Depression in Students

Covarrubias, Romero, and Trivelli (2014) hypothesized that even when first-generation students were successful in school, the students did not feel good about their own achievements. Students often felt guilty about their achievements in school and often led to depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem. The first-generation college students in this study had more depressive symptoms than the non-first-generation students and they also experienced lower self-esteem (Covarrubias et al., 2014). This, in turn, would affect the well-being of the students as well as their success.

4.4 Indicators of Success in College

Fauria and Zellner (2014) researched the variables that led to academic success. Cognitive variables that were relevant to academic success included grade point average (GPA), American College Test (ACT) scores, advanced placement scores, and dual-credit coursework. Although these may be a good indicator of success in college, this did not necessarily correlate with getting good grades. One of the variables that students credit to success was their family members (Fauria & Zellner, 2014).

4.5 Students Aptitude in Academic Success

In their study conducted with 124 participants, Beauvais, Stewart, DeNisco, and Beauvais (2014) researched factors that played a role in students' success. The factors included emotional aptitude, psychological enablement, hardiness, spiritual welfare, and academic success. The findings included a strong correlation between the variables in the research and students' aptitude in their academic success (Beauvais et al., 2014).

4.6 Student Anxiety

In a study on transitions, and how to promote better student success, Hart and Swenty (2016) made special note of the normal anxiety that accompanies transitions. The authors noted that it would be abnormal for a student to be without some level of nervousness, such as a nursing student on day one at a new clinical facility. No matter what level of support a student had, there was typically a natural level of anxiety that went alongside transitions in academic and social life (Hart & Swenty, 2016).

4.7 The Effect of Social Setting

In a study of students' feelings of safety and support and their academic performance, Hopson, Schiller, and Lawson (2014) discovered that students had a much higher academic performance when they felt as though they had a support system. The study focused on how social norms, parental expectations, and safe neighborhoods affected students, and a positive correlation was found between these factors and good grades, as well as good behavior. The study concluded that social settings had a very large impact on a student's academic performance (Hopson et al., 2014).

4.8 Summary of Literature Review

These studies were conducted to identify and analyze the numerous factors that affect academic performance in various aspects of family support. Their findings identified student's effort, parent's education, environment, family income, self-motivation, parental involvement, and class attendance as factors that had a significant effect on the student's academic performance in various settings. A gap existed regarding the Christian college students' experience regarding families' support and influence, which prompted this study.

5. Theoretical Framework

The social learning theory, by Bandura (1977), revolves around human behavior. This theory highlights how thoughts, environment, and behavior interact to make up a personality. Bandura discussed direct learning and observational learning. An individual can learn about an experience by being directly involved. Whereas, observational learning is something that occurs every day without the person even realizing it might be happening.

Ultimately, the two types of learning are a part of everyday living. Each individual learns differently, but the two types can sum up the basics of learning. Each individual is born with a unique personality, which is made up of attentiveness, memory, reproduction of memories, and motivation, that dictate how a person processes information, what they will do with the information, and how that affects their learning.

Bandura's learning theory applies to the research question: How does families' support influence college students' educational performance? A family is often a part of a person's environment. An individual is constantly learning, whether directly or through observation. This learning relates to behaviors, attitudes, financial stability, emotional stability, spiritual stability, and interest. All of these factors have the possibility of playing a role in a students' educational performance as the environment they grew up in and carry into their college education.

6. Definition of Terms

6.1 Conceptual Definitions

Behavior is the way in which one acts in response to a particular situation or stimulus. *Factors* are circumstances, facts, or influences that contribute to a result or outcome. *Environmental* is the aggregate of surrounding things, conditions, influences or social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community. *Personal* refers to any particular traits or characteristics that distinguish an individual from other people.

6.2 Operational Definitions

For this study, *families' support* is defined as perceived emotional, physical, financial, and spiritual help and assistance that is given to a family member attending college. *Families' influence* is defined as the perceived general effect that a family has on the college student throughout their lifetime. For this study, the focus is on the period that students are in college. A *families' role* is the part that a family plays in a member's life. *Educational performance* is defined as students' academic outcome.

7. Methodology

7.1 Design Appropriateness

This study was conducted through a qualitative, phenomenological method. Personal interviews were performed. A qualitative study was appropriate to learn more about students' personal opinions and perceived support and influence from their own families.

7.2 Sample Population

The population for this study was 12 college students currently enrolled at the college in northern Indiana, who were 18 years or older. The sample contained full-time students who were in any year of their 4-year schooling. They were of any race and included both males and females. The students were all single. The interviewers located some students in the dorms. The participants were full-time non-resident students who had previously agreed to participate in the research. From these students, snowball sampling was used to make up the rest of the population.

7.3 Setting

The collection of data for this study took place on the college campus. Interviews were performed in a quiet area in the dorms as well as in the coffee shop on campus. In the coffee shop, the interviews were performed away from others to provide confidentiality for the interviewees.

7.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through demographic questionnaires and in-person interviews. The demographic questionnaires included gender, age, race, year in school, marital status of the interviewee, and marital status of the interviewee's parents. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Interviews lasted 30 minutes or more and were digitally recorded on a voice recorder. The recordings were kept confidential and were deleted from the recorder after the interviews had been transcribed to prevent wrongful handling of information.

Because of the personal nature of the interviews and the possibility of causing distress or negative feelings from family support or lack of support, referrals for counseling services were provided to each participant during the time of the interview. This intervention occurred at the direction of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The phone number for the College Wellness Center was given to participants. They were assured that appointments could be made between Monday through Friday from 8am-5pm at no cost for full-time students and walk-ins are welcome. Outside of those hours, Campus Crisis Services could be contacted 24 hours a day for any counseling needs.

7.5 Development and Use of Interview Questions

To gather information, in-depth interviews took place and consisted of six demographic questions and one primary question. The survey question was: How does your families' support influence your college educational performance? Questions were developed after reviewing the literature and detecting a gap. Participants were not given an instrument to be written on; rather, the interviews were conducted by asking open-ended questions and recording the answers.

While recording the interviews, the interviewer took notes on verbal and nonverbal communication to ensure gathering the most accurate information. Notes were taken with pen and paper while the interview was being conducted and was typed after the interview. Each participant was assigned a number, and the notes and the interviews from each person were assigned with the same number. All printed interviews were stored in one secure area to ensure confidentiality. To avoid corruption of data, close-ended and leading questions were withheld.

The interview questions were peer-reviewed. Conversation prompts were chosen based on each individual interview, depending on how the conversation flowed. The researchers worked together during interviews, allowing one researcher to ask questions while the other took notes. By the time participants, 10-12 were interviewed, data saturation occurred. The information that was being shared with the researchers became repetitive and contained no new ideas.

7.6 Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Before participation in the study, participants were required to sign informed consent. This consent form permitted to record, analyze, and use the data collected for research purposes. The participants read about the purpose of the study, where the study was taking place, benefits or risks of participating in the study, the length of participation in the study, and confidentiality of information. The consent forms and surveys collected were safely stored and kept confidential in the college nursing office. These documents would be kept for up to three years and then destroyed.

8. Results

The data collected were analyzed after the completion of all 12 interviews to identify themes. Data reduction was used while reviewing data. Schmidt and Brown (2015) stated that data reduction takes place when a researcher simplifies transcribed interviews by identifying terms, ideas, or quotations to focus on common themes and patterns.

Of the 12 participants, seven were females, and five were males. Four participants were sophomores, three juniors, and five seniors. All participants were single, Caucasian, and in the age range of 18-23. Eleven of the participants had parents whose marital status was "married". One participant had parents that were divorced and remarried. See Table 1 for demographic variables, frequency, and percentage.

There were 6 primary themes found within the data. These themes included (1) frequency of contact with family, (2) levels of parental financial involvement, (3) independence, (4) siblings' influence on academics, (5) parent's spiritual involvement and (6) parent's educational status. Participants were labeled P1 through P12.

The words of the participants such as "like" are not edited. They are written as spoken by the participants who are older teens and young adults.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for participant demographics and background

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	5	58
Female	7	42
<i>Year in College</i>		
Sophomore	4	33
Junior	3	25
Senior	5	42
<i>Age Range</i>		
18-19	1	8
20-21	9	75
22-23	2	17
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Caucasian	12	100
<i>Participant's Marital Status</i>		
Single	12	100
<i>Parent's Marital Status</i>		
Married	12	100

Description: *N* = 12.

Theme One: Frequency of contact with family, especially mother

Throughout the interviews, all 12 participants said that contact with their family affected their educational performance. One commonality that was noted by participants was that they were more likely to have contact with their mothers than other members of their family. P5 stated, "I try to talk to my mom every other day because I enjoy it" after having stated that she tries to communicate with her sisters at least once a week through texts or phone calls, although that does not always happen. P10 claimed that when talking to his mother, he has to make sure he has time because "she'll just talk and talk and talk without me saying anything ... and my dad doesn't talk on the phone or text. So unless I see him in person, I don't really talk to him."

It was also a commonality for the participants to have conversations with their parents that were more mature and were adult-to-adult conversations rather than parent-to-child conversations. P2 said that his dad "really treats me like I'm an adult. 'You get to do what you want to do, like if you want to go out with your friends, you don't have to tell me you're leaving.'" P3 stated that her conversations with her parents have started to consist more of her parents saying "you're an adult, and we're gonna tell you our adult opinion on it and tell you if we think you're making dumb decisions." This type of communication with parents and siblings was noted in other interviews, as well.

For many participants, there were aspects of contact with their family that they wished would change while they were at school. One of these changes was that they wished their family would contact them first, instead of the participant contacting their family first. P5 stated, "I think that my family is afraid to bother me when I'm in college, like, I'm always the one who has to call them because they don't want to interrupt my schedule." Participants also mentioned that they wished their parents and family would visit them more often. P3 stated, "I always go home to see them, so, like, if they came down here for, like, the weekend or something. Come, like, see what's going on here instead of me driving to, like, see them." Another participant, P5, wants her family to be involved. She says, "I interpret for chapels, and I would love for my family to come but that is just not realistic 'cause it's at 10 am'." Participant 11 stated, "I would love to see them more, but that's not ... they just moved to Chicago. They did live in Texas, though."

Theme Two: Levels of parental financial involvement

For all participants, their parents were somehow involved in the financial aspects of college. Many participants stated that their parents had taken out parent loans or had co-signed for the loans that the students were taking out. P1 stated that the loans being taken out for her to attend college were in her parents' names, although she will have to eventually pay her parents back. She also stated, "I mean, like, the dream would probably be, like, 'Hey, I wish you would've put away money, like, here and there for, like, college expenses later on.'" P1 also said that she had recommended this to her parents to provide for her younger siblings. For P4, the loans are taken out in her name, but says of her parents, "They help me with my tuition ... They pay part of the bill with a personal check from them."

It was also common that parents helped assist in the day-to-day financials. P6 said that her parents would ask, "Do you need anything? We'll go get it before you go back." P7 said that his parents help similarly. "They assist me in paying for school, with car, and with gas." Overall, finances were a topic that each participant talked about and knew affected their educational performance, no matter what level the parents were involved with the financial aspect of college.

Theme Three: Independence from family

Many participants noted that independence from their family was something that has affected them throughout their time in college. When talking about how her relationship has changed with her parents since being in college, P1 noted, "I feel like I have, like, adapted, like, better to, like, to things myself and so, not necessarily needing somebody all the time." Another participant, P2, said that his family is "hands off" and that it "... has kind of hurt me in a sense. It also has really helped me grow as an adult, and it's really benefited ... uh ... me to learn my own independence and how to handle my own situations." This independence has allowed these participants to learn how to take care of themselves without the assistance of someone else.

For P11, he appreciated that his parents avoided contacting him his first year away at school, and "they very much, like they wanted me to feel like I was actually able to get away and be independent here at school." This initial independence allowed P11 to take the initiative to contact his parents first and has continued throughout his time in school. P12 has had independence her entire life, and this independence in school is not new, having stated, "I've just always been a very independent person because my mom and dad worked a lot, so I babysat when I was, like, in 3rd grade." Once leaving home to live at school, this independence from her parents has continued. P12 said, "To me, they're awesome, and I love them, but, like, I don't mourn their loss every day that I don't have them here." For some of the participants, the independence has been forced on them once living at college, and for others, this independence is a continuation from before living at college.

Theme Four: Siblings' influence on academics

Overall, many of the participants noted that their educational performance was influenced in some way by their siblings. P3, whose brother also attends this college, stated: "my brother and I are really competitive about our grades." Even though they're not in the same major, they will compare their grades on the tests that they take. P3 took a test that she didn't do well on, and instead of being competitive in this situation, her brother's response was, "Oh, don't worry. I got a 14% on that one." She also said, "It's nice when, like, I have rough days and having him here, and you know, like, getting that little taste of home without being at home." Another participant, P4, also has an older sibling that attends this college. P4 said that her sister helps to make her better. Since being at college, her sister has been intentional to say, "This is your first year. Don't slack off. How's your homework going? Are you getting your stuff turned in?" The participants that had siblings on campus at some point within their college experience have said that this has been beneficial for them in some way.

Participant 9 has younger siblings that are twins. Although P9 is closer to her brother than her sister is, she says, "I'll still talk to them and call them once or twice a week and just check up on them." For another participant, P11, he was able to live with his older brother over the summer, and his brother will buy him food. His older sister is his best friend, and he states, "She's the person that if anything goes on, I'll call her, and we just talk about it."

P12 had a different experience with her younger brother. Her brother was diagnosed with both ADHD and autism. As a result, P12 stated, "I was always the one that my parents pushed to have straight A's and good grades." This has placed pressure on her throughout her education. She admitted, "I just think that, like, because my brother doesn't get the grades that I do, and, like, he doesn't have the opportunity to, there's a lot more pressure there, unsung pressure." Each person had individual influences on their educational performance depending on their family situation, and they were positive and negative influences.

Theme Five: Parents' spiritual involvement

Participants stated that their parents' spiritual involvement affected their educational performance. Parents praying for the participants were a commonality. P2 stated, "I mean, my parents will tell me that they are praying for me or something, but they don't really ask me how I am doing with that." Another participant, P12 said, "They pray for me and stuff ... mom tells her friends, and my mom's small group is, like, my sponsor ... so she knows a lot more from, like, the letters I send and stuff like that ... what I need prayer for." It was common for participants to note that their parents were praying for them, even when they did not have in-depth discussions about spirituality.

For some participants, it was more common to talk about spiritual topics. P5 said, "We'd talk about God and our faith every once in a while, but it wasn't something we talk about every single time I call." Although admitting that she does not have these conversations often, P5 then said, I know that if I ever did have questions, I could ask them about my faith and about what's going on in my life, and they'd just listen. My mom sometimes thinks that she sometimes needs to have all the answers, and I am just like "No, you don't need to have all the answers. I'd just like to talk to you." Other participants also noted having spiritual conversations with parents. P11 stated, "My dad and I will, like, just about every time I see him for an extended period of time, will like, break off to just talking about theology and stuff because he's a pastor." Overall, it was very common for parents to have some involvement in spirituality, whether praying for their child or talking about spirituality topics.

Theme Six: Parents' educational background

Throughout the interviews, the parents' educational status became a theme. Depending on the parents' educational status, this had both positive and negative influences on the participants. P1 stated, "That has not been a thing in my family. Like my parents did not go to college. Like, my mom did online school when I started my freshman year here. They didn't know college was a thing." When talking about her parents, P12 said, "Because I, like, live my life here, and they never went to college, so they don't really know what it's like to be here and stuff like that." Participants commented that their parents did not understand what it was like to be at school because they had never attended college themselves.

In other cases, it has been beneficial for participants that their parents have attended college. Those who had parents that went to college were very vocal about the effect that it had. P7 stated, I would say that the fact that both of my parents went to college and both sets of their parents went to college has drastically impacted the way that my college experience looks because they can understand what it looks like to be in college and what it looks like to have a parent support them in college. So this kind cycle is more or less hard to break, whether it's in a good sense or bad sense. So, to me, it wasn't a question whether or not I was going to college. It was more of a question "Where I was going to go and what I am going to study?"

Another participant, P10 said, "My mom has helped me academically because she graduated from college with a teacher's degree. So, like, sometimes ... I would send her, like, my essays before I, like, turned them in." This showed that a student might have better support from their family when their parents' went to college themselves. Overall, the parents' educational status has an effect on the participant both socially and emotionally, and it can be either positive or negative.

9. Discussion

Analysis of this study took place through the questionnaires and listening to the digital interviews. The demographic questionnaires helped to find the frequency and percentage. The interviews were fully transcribed. Once the hard copies were available, researchers read through each interview. Common connections and major themes were noted. These themes were the information of interest for the data analysis (see Figure 1).

Upon comparing the literature and the data from this study, some commonalities were found, some new information was presented, and some disagreements within the research came to be noticed. When comparing the first theme, contact with family, Edelman (2013) discusses helicopter parents and the college student's need for autonomy. One of the primary themes that emerged in this study was that many college students wanted their parents to contact them more frequently whether that is via technology or face-to-face. Fauria and Zellner (2014) had identified that one of the variables that students' credit to their success is the support of their families.

In relation to the financial aspects of college, this study indicated that both parents and students take an active role. Tang et al., (2013) stated that some parents provided consistent non-academic support. Edelman (2013) argued that parental involvement can come in a variety of methods, each of which have the opportunity to hinder or help the college student. Some students see financial support as a motivator while others see it as a free pass.

Many students had to become more independent upon entering college. Edelman (2013) reasons that children should be allowed autonomy so that they will be more successful and independent after college. In comparison

to this, Covarrubias et al. (2014) theorized that first-generation students who were successful in school did not feel good about their own achievements. They often felt guilty, which frequently led to lower self-esteem and an increase in signs of depression.

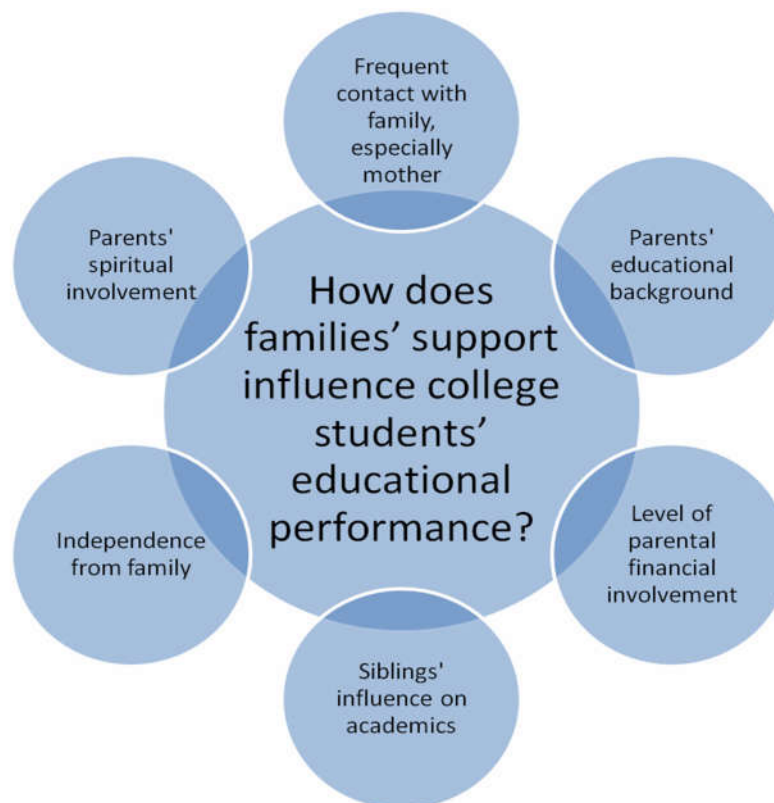


Figure 1. Themes that emerged from the data regarding the influence of families' support

In the current study, many college students believe their siblings have a positive influence on their academic performance. Hopson et al. (2014) determined students who feel as though they have a support system, have a much higher academic performance. Hart and Swenty (2016) noted that no matter what level of support the student has going through the college transition, there will likely be some level of anxiety that accompanies the student.

In relation to parents' spiritual involvement, students stated that their parents' praying for them was an important aspect of their day-to-day life. Beauvais et al. (2014) studied five factors that had a strong correlation to a students' aptitude for academic success, two of which were hardiness and spiritual welfare. Being surrounded by familial prayer can have a large impact on both aspects.

Finally, including parents' educational background also impacted the student's academic performance. Covarrubias et al. (2014) had discovered that first-generation college students had more signs of depression and lower self-esteem than non-first-generation students. Tang et al. (2013) found that several parents disapproved of the student's campus involvement, and the parents felt the student was wasting their time and failed to see the value of student participation in extracurricular activities as a way to learn social norms while in college. Perhaps if the parents had experienced college for themselves, they might have seen the benefit in participating in extracurricular activities.

10. Implications

Educational organizations can use this information to provide support for enrolled students during the time that they are in school. Understanding the effects of family involvement may lead to an increased successful academic performance in the future while limiting any negative effects from decreased family involvement.

11. Limitations

All 12 participants were Caucasian. Lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the sample is a limitation. All parents

being married could also be a factor in the results of the study. Uniformity in the participant's demographic characteristics could have resulted in early data saturation.

12. Recommendations

It is realized that educational success is possible when all aspects of life are in order. Family involvement allows the students to commit most of their time toward studies and extracurricular activities that benefit the student in their academic success. Future research could be aimed at including a variety of ethnicity to understand how students from different ethnic groups are affected by family involvement. Married college students should also be taken into consideration for similar studies.

13. Conclusion

The research study focused on identifying educational outcomes for students whose families are involved in their spiritual, social, financial and emotional needs. In comparing the information from the literature review with the outcome of this study, it is evident that overall family support is necessary for better educational outcomes for students. Although some students indicated that their parents backed off to give them room to mature and be independent, the parents did not neglect the support. They were still involved but kept a distance. Themes deduced from the research fell into six categories. Participants indicated that family involvement is a necessity for educational success.

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