

Examining the Effects of Parent Engagement on Early Childhood Development in Migrant-Seasonal Head Start

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INTRODUCTION

Migrant and Seasonal agriculture workers in the US experience similar working conditions, but vastly different lifestyles. Migrant families move regionally multiple times throughout the year to follow growing seasons, while seasonal workers remain in one place to work in agriculture for part of the year, typically working in other fields for the off-seasons of local agriculture. In both types of families, the importance of their children's development and educational achievement cannot be overstated. Migrant-Seasonal Head Start programs are available to children based primarily on poverty level and family income in agriculture-based employment. Each center provides comprehensive childcare including nutrition, educational programming, socio-emotional interaction, and health resources, all supporting positive developmental outcomes. As children grow and prepare for school, their parents are encouraged to actively participate in their education and strengthen family bonds. This study examined the relationship between a composite parent engagement score (independent variable) and the children's composite developmental benchmark achievement scores (dependent variable) as measured in the Migrant population and the Seasonal population. I hypothesized that the Seasonal family type would show a stronger positive relationship between the two variables.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that there is a stronger positive relationship between Seasonal parent engagement and their children's benchmark achievement than in the Migrant population. These preliminary findings set the precedent for asking further questions.

Potential limitations of the study include low reliability in parent engagement scores; this could create inaccurate results. Additionally, the study has omitted variables – other variables that could be related to benchmark achievement (such as age, gender, environment, family stress). One consideration when interpreting these results is the single independent variable. Measuring other influences as independent variables would likely help clarify future research in this area.

In this study, all five measures of parent engagement were analyzed as one composite score between 0 and 5, as were the five areas of benchmark achievement. Revisiting the initial data as it was originally collected in individual categories could show potential relationships between specific types of engagement and benchmark achievement.

Assuming that the low reliability score in parent engagement has not skewed the findings, questions remain about which aspects of the Migrant and Seasonal lifestyles impact childhood development besides parent engagement. Further studies on the relative levels of stability, SES, family history, and several other areas that create significant differences between the Migrant and Seasonal lifestyles and the subsequent capabilities, priorities, and resources of families in the two distinct populations.

Accurately assessing demographic and personal information for Migrant and Seasonal farmworkers is a challenge due to working hours and conditions, fear and distrust over documentation-status, limited English proficiency, and other barriers, but is necessary to assure quality service provision and positive outcomes for children and families within these populations.

METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS

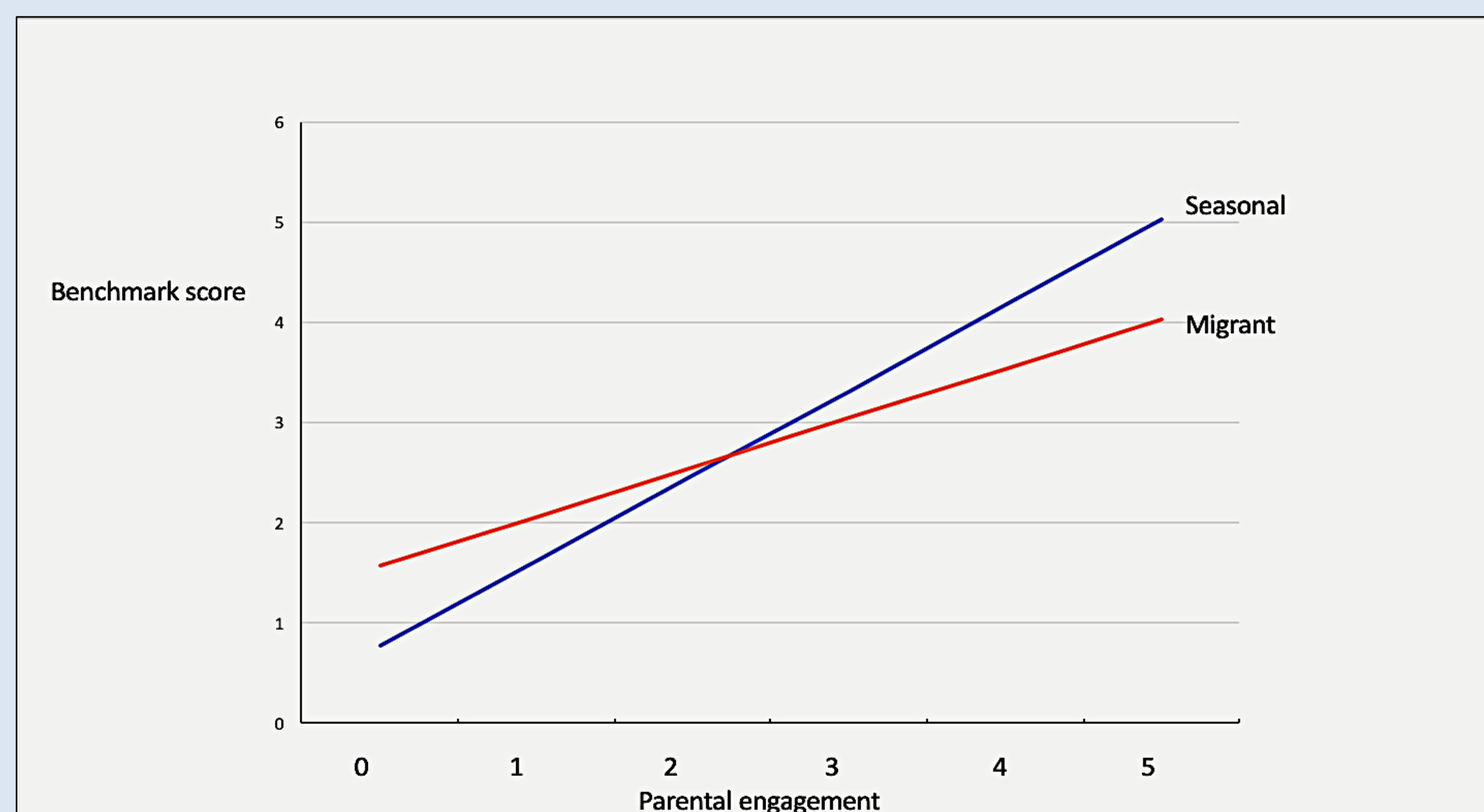


Figure 1

This study was a secondary data analysis. The data was collected from Migrant-Seasonal Head Start programs in a southeastern state. The total sample size was 150 participants. A linear regression analysis was used. The independent variable was the total of five types of parent engagement, and the dependent variable was the total score of five types of developmental benchmark achievements. The reliability of the parent engagement scores was 0.47, and the reliability of the benchmark achievement scores was 0.77.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, and the individual results can be seen in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the statistical interaction between family type and the effects of measured parent engagement on developmental benchmarks. The blue line with the steeper slope shows the stronger relationship between parent engagement and developmental benchmark scores for Seasonal Workers than that represented by the red line for Migrant Workers.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.771	.322		2.392	.018
	PE	.851	.093	.794	9.203	.000
	Type	.801	.482	.244	1.662	.099
	Inter	-.308	.133	-.379	-2.318	.022

a. Dependent Variable: B

Table 1