

Parents' help with schoolwork and reading does little for children's school progress, says research

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The amount of time parents spend with their children contributes much less to their progress in school than the family's social class, new

research shows.

The study found that the time parents spent helping [children](#) with math, art and music had almost no effect on their school progress as rated by teachers. Instead, family class and income, and the parents' educational level, were much more important.

Lin Ding, of the University of Manchester, analyzed panel data from the Millennium Cohort Study survey on more than 8,000 children in the U.K. at the ages of seven and 11, recording their teachers' assessment of their progress in math and in creative subjects, and the amount of time parents spent with them on various activities.

Ms. Ding found that parents' time spent helping their children with math, reading to them and going to libraries made children only a few percentage points more likely to be classed as above average or well above average by teachers. Going to bed at a regular time also helped the children slightly.

Parents' time spent on musical or physical activities with children had no effect, she found.

However, having parents with degrees, or who were well-off or from a high socio-economic class approximately doubled the chance of their children being assessed as above average.

"The effect of various parenting activities is much less significant than parents' class, income and [educational level](#)," Ms. Ding told the British Sociological Association's [annual conference](#) in Manchester today (Wednesday, April 12).

"Family income has a greater impact on children's performance in core subjects than in creative subjects.

"The relative insignificance of parenting activities in these models may be due to the fact that high frequency of parenting activities does not necessarily equate to high quality parenting.

"The method and quality of parenting may be crucial. For example, parents from different social classes may all read to their children, but the selection of reading materials and the explanation that comes with reading may differ.

"Middle-class parents may have more advanced educational methods that may better involve their children in academic activities, mainly by helping them adapt to the school environment earlier. On the other hand, lower-class parents may be more inclined to focus on and take remedial measures only when their children encounter learning difficulties."

The data showed that for children aged seven:

- Parents' help for their children's schoolwork, reading to their children and going to libraries had a small positive effect, while musical and [physical activities](#) with children had no effect. Going to bed at a regular time was linked to better teachers' assessment.
- At age seven, children who received daily help with math from their parents had only a 1.8% increased chance of being assessed as "above average" by their teachers.
- Thirty-nine percent of the children from the highest class families were rated above average in math, compared with 21% of those whose parents were manual workers, the lowest of five classes used in the analysis. The relative difference was even greater for those in the "well above average" class: 12% for children from the highest class and 4% for those from the lowest. The three intermediate classes showed results in-between the highest and lowest classes.
- The gap was slightly less when considering creative subjects such

art and design, and music: 28% of the children from the highest class were rated above average, compared with 14% of those whose parents were manual workers.

- The figures were similar when comparing children with parents from the richest class and poorest class, and those with parents with degrees and those without qualifications. The data were also similar for children aged 11.
- When aged seven, children from the highest social class spent more time in libraries than those from the lowest class, and their parents read to them more often. But parents in the lowest class spent more time teaching their children math, reading and writing.

Ms. Ding, who conducted this research as part of her Ph.D. studies under the supervision of Professor Yaojun Li and Professor Andrew Miles, adjusted the data to compare people of the same gender, ethnicity and other factors in order to isolate the effects of parents' class, income and education. She found that the effects of parents' class, wealth and education far outweighed those of time parents spent with their children.

She also looked at whether the teachers' assessment matched the math scores students achieved in tests at age seven and 11, and found they were accurate.

The study used the five categories of NS-SEC based on SOC2000 to measure social class, which are widely recognized: higher managerial/professional; intermediate; small employers/own account (self-employed); lower supervisory/technical; and semi-routine/routine occupations.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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