



Educational Aspirations & Participation of EL Students

Elizabeth Vera, Andrea Carr, Daniel Camacho, Marla Israel, Amy Heineke, & Nancy Goldberger



Introduction

Background

Parental involvement in education has been widely studied as one of the most important predictors of school success for all students (Smit & Driessen, 2007). Additionally, children of all ages with involved parents tend to have higher attendance, achievement levels, and more positive attitudes toward school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) than those whose parents are less involved.

Recent U.S. Department of Education statistics reveal that over five million school aged children are categorized as English Language Learners (ELL) (NCLCA, 2006). The parents of ELL students often face unique barriers to being more actively involved in their children's academic lives. They face school-based barriers, which may include a negative climate toward immigrant parents, individual barriers such as a lack of dominant language proficiency (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003), and logistical barriers such as childcare and work responsibilities which often make it difficult for parents to attend school functions (Valdes, 1996).

Previous studies of the involvement of parents of ELLs have found that these parents are most involved in activities like monitoring homework and asking children about their school day. Parents of ELLs have also reported language barriers, a lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system, and a desire not to interfere with teachers' work as barriers they have commonly faced in becoming involved in their children's education (Vera et al., 2012). Vera and colleagues began exploring predictors into six different types of involvement (reading with children, developing routines, monitoring child activity, communicating with child about school, communicating with teachers, and using community resources). Interestingly, there seems to be no common way to predict different types of parental involvement.

Overall, exploring ELLs' parental involvement in schools as well as the barriers to such involvement remains significant to an understanding of the educational outcomes of ELL students. Also, amidst an emerging body of empirical evidence that schools of choice (e.g. private schools, charter schools) do have higher levels of parental involvement, differences in levels of ELL parental involvement between public and private schools merit further exploration.

Purpose

The current study sought to replicate and expand the understanding of the involvement parents of ELLs engage in and barriers they face. This was accomplished by replicating the analyses completed in Vera et al.'s (2012) study with a new sample of parents. Additionally, the new data was collected in both private and public schools. This allowed for the authors to expand understanding of parents of ELLs with respect to the type of school their children attend.

Selected References

Barkley, Jack. (2007). Choosing schools, building communities? The effects of schools of choice on parental involvement. New York, NY: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education.
Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Austin TX: Southwest Educational Development Lab.
National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2006). The growing numbers of limited English proficient students: 1990/94-2003/04. Washington, DC: Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education.
Quezada, R. L., Diaz, D. M., & Sanchez, M. (2003). Involving Latino Parents. *Leadership* (Vol. 33), pp. 122.
Smit, F., & Driessen, G. (2007). Parents and schools as partners in a multicultural, multilingual society. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 20, 1-20.
Valdes, G. (1996). *Can we expect: Bridging the distance between culturally diverse families and schools*. NY: Teachers College Press.
Vera, E. M., Israel, M., Coyle, L., Muil, M., Knight-Lynn, L., & Goldberger, N. (2012). Exploring school involvement in parents of ELL children. *School and Community, IR*, 183-202.

Methods

Procedure

Instruments were translated into fifteen different languages to represent the largest language groups in each school district. The surveys were copied so that the native language version was on one side of the page and English on the other, allowing the parent the choice of language in which to respond. Surveys were sent home in students' backpacks with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Measure

The same survey developed for Vera and colleagues' (2012) was used for this study. It consisted of 31 items with a five-point response scale where "1-strongly disagree" and "5-strongly agree." The first scale, Educational Aspirations, assessed the parents' goals for their children's education. School Climate, the second scale tapped into how participants currently perceived the climate at their children's school. Next, the measure assessed six different types of barriers the parents may face. The barriers included: language, a reluctance to interfere with teachers' work, negative experiences with the educational system, being overwhelmed by other aspects of life, logistical barriers (such as lack of time to attend events), and a lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system. Finally, the survey assessed the parents of ELLs' current level of involvement in their children's education. Six different types of involvement were measured: reading with children, using community resources, communicating with teachers, communicating with children about education, establishing routines, and monitoring children's activity.

Participants

Participants for this study (N=459) were selected for inclusion because they were identified as the parents of ELL from two K-8 school districts in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. The two districts volunteered for participation in the research based on their involvement in a large research project designed to improve the academic outcomes of ELL students. One of the districts was a public school district (N=129; response rate of 21.1%) and the other was a network of Catholic schools (N=330; response rate of 18.0%). The majority of the participants were female (84.7%) and married (75.6%). Parents from all fifteen language groups were included in the study. The five largest languages groups include: Spanish (75.8%), Urdu (4.4%), Russian (2.8%), Tagalog (2.4%), and Assyrian (2.4%). The majority of parents responded to the survey in English (61.4%), however, 34.9% responded in their native language and the remainder (3.7%) responded in some combination of languages. The average number of children living with the parents was 2.29. Participants reported living in the United States for an average of 22.88 years. Most parents were employed full time (52.5%). Parents reported a wide range of levels of formal education. The largest group reported having completed high school or the equivalent (26.1%), 18.5% attended college, and 17.2% received a college degree.

Results

Current Levels of Involvement

In order to assess if the type of school (public or private) impacts parental involvement a series t-test were used to determine if any differences are present in the activities that parents of ELLs engage in. The data indicate that three of the six types of involvement are different depending on the type of school. In all three, community involvement, routines, and monitoring, parents whose children attend public schools reported higher levels of involvement.

	df	t	p	d
Reading	451	-.759	.448	-.08
Community	445	3.67	< .001	.41
Teacher Communication	448	.009	.993	.00
Child Communication	446	.057	.956	.01
Routines	289	2.71	.007	.26
Monitoring	443	2.08	.038	.22

Perceived Barriers

A similar analysis was completed regarding the barriers that the parents of ELLs perceived in public versus private schools. In these analyses only one type of barrier, logistics of attending events (such as transportation or child care), was significantly different between the groups of parents. Parents in private schools reported a greater difficulty with logistics than parents in public schools.

	df	t	p	d
Language	449	1.56	.120	.11
Interference with teacher's work	210	1.90	.059	.21
Negative experiences	321	-1.60	.111	-.15
Overwhelmed	438	1.03	.303	.11
Logistics	434	-2.37	.018	-.25
Familiarity with U.S. schools	416	1.83	.068	.20

Multiple Regressions

In addition to exploring the impact the type of school has on the barriers parents of ELLs face and their levels of involvement, a series of multiple regressions were completed to determine the significant predictors of the different types of parent involvement. Demographic variables were included as control variables if they were shown to be related to mean differences in each specific type of involvement. Then educational aspirations, perceived school climate, and each of the types of barriers were regressed onto each of the six types of involvement.

Selected Results

The regression model for routines accounted for 12.5% of the variance of routines and was significant ($F(11,350) = 5.69, p < .001$). Significant predictors for establishing routines were: language of survey completion, highest level of education, type of school, and the overwhelmed barrier. Highest level of education, school climate, and feeling overwhelmed were all significant predictors for reading with your child. This model was significant ($F(10,350) = 4.78, p < .001$) and accounted for 9.5% of the variance in parents reading with their children. Finally, the regression model for using community resources was also statistically significant ($F(11, 346) = 6.06, p < .001$) and accounted for 13.5% of variance. The significant predictors were: highest level of education, type of school, negative experiences with school, and logistics barrier.

Discussion

It was interesting to see that the parents from the public schools seemed to find fewer logistical barriers to involvement and were more involved in routines, monitoring, and the community. There are two possible explanations for this. The public school district included in this study is located in a suburban area and parents are likely to be more affluent than the parents in the private school district who are from typically lower SES areas in a city. This would perhaps indicate that the families with more financial resources experience fewer barriers and are more able to be involved. Another possible explanation for these results, is that the parents in private school system trust that the teachers and school will provide the necessary structure for their children and do not find it necessary to be as involved in these aspects of their children's lives.

The first predictor of reading with children, a parent's highest level of education, aligns with the findings of Vera et al. (2012). Additionally, in both studies a language barrier did not significantly predict reading involvement signifies that parental reading is not a "language issue." Rather, it seems that parents with lower levels of education may not see it as important to read regularly with their children or may not feel confident in doing so. Furthermore, parents who are overwhelmed by their other responsibilities, with less energy to expend on reading to their children, are less likely to engage in such involvement. Lastly, the current study concluded that parents who perceive a more positive school climate towards parental involvement were more likely to read to their children. In perceiving that their school encourages parents to be involved with the education of their children, these parents likely see the importance of doing so through reading with their children.

The predictors for community involvement appear to be quite logical and are similar to the results obtained previously (see Vera et al., 2012). They suggest possible avenues for ways to increase levels of parental use of community resources. As the private school parents are less likely to take advantage of community resources, the schools may inform parents about local resources. Additionally, this intervention may also help with parents who are less educated. Parents who feel overwhelmed are understandably less likely to become involved in using community resources. It is unclear how negative experiences at school may impact parents' use of community resources, except that perhaps these parents may also have gone through similar situations in the community.

Parents who are overwhelmed may not have the time or energy to develop routines with their children. As mentioned previously, the type of school may either be a result of social class or expectations for the school. Parents who are more educated may have a greater understanding of the importance of routines. It was interesting that the response language predicted the use of routines. This may indicate that perhaps there are acculturation or cultural differences that make parents who did not respond in English less likely to use routines.