

The Antecedents and Outcomes of Early Care and Education Programs for Latino Children in America: A Mixed Methods Study

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Project Description

Latino families represent the fastest-growing minority population in the U.S., but they are also the least likely group to enroll their children in some form of non-parental care the year before kindergarten. Why Latino families utilize less formal arrangements remains unclear. With the national push to expand preschool education, there has been growing interest in theoretically grounded research that can uncover the factors supporting or inhibiting Latino families' participation in preschool education as well as their underlying motivations and perceptions of their agency in navigating the child care system. Additionally, although preschool programs can facilitate children's short-term academic success, their long-term effects are often ambiguous, with little evidence for Latino children across the country.

Research Questions

Aim 1: To quantitatively characterize the early care and education utilization behaviors of Latino families in the first five years of life.

1. What are the processes by which Latino families select into formal preschool education?
2. How do these selection factors differ for Latino families versus non-Latino families

Aim 2: To qualitatively identify Latina mothers' motivation and their perceptions of their agency involved in preschool decision-making.

3. What are Latino mothers' perceptions of preschool education and what obstacles, if any, do respondents perceive regarding their search for preschool or childcare?
4. To what extent are these decisions based on passive versus active agency?

Aim 3: To quantitatively determine whether and why parents' decisions about early care and education have implications for children's short- and long-term school success.

5. Are there short- or long-term associations between different types of preschool programs and children's school success and, if so, are these moderated by racial/ethnic group membership?
6. Are the associations between early care and education programs and long-term development mediated by child- and adult-focused mechanisms?
7. Are the associations between early care and education programs and children's short and long-term functioning moderated by children's propensity for child care enrollment?

Sample

This study will use a mixed-method strategy that integrates quantitative data from two nationally representative datasets, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth (ECLS-B) and Kindergarten Cohorts (ECLS-K), with in-depth interviews with Latina mothers in the Austin, Texas, community.

Methods

To address the three aims, this study will use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Quantitative data procedures

- Two publicly available data sets will be used for this project. The ECLS-K is a nationally representative longitudinal study of kindergarteners of 1998. Assessments, interviews, and questionnaires were conducted in the fall and spring of kindergarten and 1st grade and the spring of 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade. In contrast, the ECLS-B is a nationally

representative birth cohort of 10,700 children who were born in the U.S. in 2001. These children were followed up at 9, 24, and 48 months of age, and again during the kindergarten year. In both cases, over half of the sample maintained their participation throughout each data collection wave. Additionally, in both datasets, data were collected in multiple ways, including interviews with parents, caregivers, and teachers and direct assessments of children.

Qualitative data procedures

- The qualitative data will be derived from four focus groups with Latina mothers (both native and foreign-born) in Austin, Texas. I will use a two-pronged strategy to recruit Latina mothers. First, I will work with the local school district to recruit 15-20 Latina mothers from a child care center that serves largely Latino (86%) and low-income families (94%)—a population of families who lag behind in preschool enrollment. Second, I will use United Way for Greater Austin and their community contacts to recruit 15-20 additional Latina mothers who have not enrolled their children in a formal child care program. In using this two-pronged strategy, I can identify the similarities and differences in the experiences of Latina mothers who have and have not enrolled their children in preschool education at age four.

Progress Update

This project has received IRB approval from the University of Texas at Austin. With regard to the qualitative portion of this project, the local school district has agreed to allow me to recruit from and hold focus groups at a city-run preschool program, and a local community agency has agreed to help recruit families not using formal child care. The qualitative data collection will begin in February 2016. With regard to the quantitative portion of this project, I have begun the data analyses with the ECLS-B to address Aim 1 of this investigation. At the CCPRC Annual Meeting, I can discuss the preliminary findings regarding the processes by which immigrant and native-born Latino families select preschool programs for their children, and how these processes vary across groups (vs. White and Black families). I will begin the quantitative

analyses with the ECLS-K immediately after the CCPRC meeting.

Implications for policy/practice

This research has important implications for policy and practice as this study has the potential to highlight the reasons why Latino children are under-enrolled in preschool education. These results can also help us better understand the similarities and differences in the preschool selection behaviors of families from different cultural backgrounds as well as the long-run associations between program participation and child development.

Implications for research

This study also has implications for future research as it applies a theoretically grounded approach in the study of child care selection.

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