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School Readiness Beliefs and Practices of Immigrant Parents

Julie A. Grossman, Ph.D., NCSP¹, Susan Sonnenschein, Ph.D. ², Brook Sawyer, Ph.D. ³, Peggy Kong, Ed.D. ³, Cassandra Simons, Ph.D. ⁴, & Megan Rowan, B.A. ²

¹Prince George’s County Public Schools, Maryland; ²UMBC; ³Lehigh University, ⁴University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract

Parental beliefs about school readiness are associated with children’s achievement. Few studies addressing cultural variation in parents’ school readiness beliefs have included immigrant groups or compared and contrasted different immigrant groups. Attendees of this poster presentation will learn how school readiness beliefs and practices vary among groups of immigrant parents.

Introduction

- Parental beliefs about school readiness are associated with children’s academic achievement (e.g., Sonnenschein et al., 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).
- Given the diversity of the U.S. school population and group-based differences in academic performance, it is critical to consider parents’ beliefs from a cultural perspective. Unfortunately, most studies that have addressed cultural variation have not included immigrant groups or compared and contrasted different immigrant groups (e.g., Diamond et al. 2000).
- Such an approach is needed because the number of immigrant children in the U.S. is large and continues to grow. As of 2017, 27% of children in the U.S. were from immigrant families (Child Trends, 2018).
- Although immigrants to the U.S., regardless of country of origin, share certain commonalities (e.g., a need to learn the customs and mores of the U.S. educational system), they also may differ in how they socialize their children for school which may impact their academic success. For example, many children from Latinx backgrounds, on average, do not perform as well academically in school as children, on average, from Chinese backgrounds (Ansari & Crosnoe, 2014). Is this due, in part, to different socialization practices?
- In addition, we need to move beyond global comparisons (e.g., Asian, Latinx) to consider country-specific comparisons (Baker & DeWynngaert, 2018).

Research Questions:

- Do beliefs about school readiness vary among immigrant parents from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and China, and across domains ?
- Do home activities related to school readiness vary among immigrant parents from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and China, and across domains?

Contact Information: Julie A. Grossman, julieagrossman@gmail.com; Susan Sonnenschein, sonnensc@umbc.edu

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Methods

Sample:

- 65 parents of preschool children who identified as first or second generation immigrants from China (n = 22), Dominican Republic (n = 21), and El Salvador (n = 22).

Table 1. Descriptives

Variable	Chinese Mean, Median, or %	Dominican Mean, Median or %	Salvadoran Mean, Median or %
Average Age of Parent (Years)	37.60	33.44	35.76
Annual Income	\$90,001-100,000	\$30,001-40,000	\$30,001-40,000
Years Living In U.S.	12.11	13.86	7.77
Highest Level of Parent Education			
High School Diploma/GED or less	18.2%	27.8%	45.5%
Associate’s Degree	4.5%	44.4%	45.4%
Bachelor’s Degree	36.4%	22.2%	4.5%
Graduate Degree	40.9%	5.6%	4.5%

Measures and Procedures:

- These data come from a larger study. For this poster, parents completed a demographic questionnaire and participated in a semi-structured interview about their school readiness beliefs.

Pertinent Question From Semi-Structured Interview
In your opinion, what must [child’s name] know or be able to do by the time he/she starts kindergarten?

- Parents’ responses were categorized as falling within one of the four domains adapted from the Maryland Kindergarten Readiness Assessment: language/literacy, math, social, physical well-being.
- Interviews were conducted in Chinese, Spanish, or English, audio recorded, and if necessary, later translated into English. Parents also completed a daily checklist of their children’s activities (play, reading, and learning) for one week.

Daily Activity Checklist				
Child's name: _____		Date: _____		
Please provide information on the activities that your child did at home or in the community today. Do not count activities your child did at preschool/childcare.				
Activity	Did your child do this activity today?	Who did this activity with your child? Or you can write if child did this alone. (You can fill in multiple answers – like with mother and alone)	Briefly describe what your child did in this activity	About how long (minutes)?
Play	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Reading books or telling stories	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Learning activities (learning letters, learning numbers, educational computer games, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			

- Data for RQ 1 came from the Semi-Structured Interview.
- Data for RQ 2 came from the Daily Activity Checklist.

Results

Data Analysis:

- Following descriptive analyses (Table 1), ANOVAs and χ^2 analyses were conducted.
- Education was initially included as potential covariate but was not significantly related to anything and therefore excluded.

Findings:

Research Question 1: Do beliefs about school readiness vary among immigrant parents from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and China, and across domains ?

Did parents mention a skill within a domain?

- There were no significant differences based on country of origin.
- However, significantly more parents, regardless of country of origin, mentioned skills within the language/literacy and social domains at least once than mentioned skills within the math and physical well-being domains.

Table 2. Percent of Parents, Regardless of Country of Origin, Who Mentioned Skills Within Domain

Domain	% of Parents Who Mentioned Activities Within Domain ≥ 1 Time	% of Parents Who Did Not Mention Activities Within Domain
Social	89.2	10.8
Language/Literacy	84.6	15.4
Math	60.0	40.0
Physical Well-Being	47.7	52.3

χ^2 (df = 3, N= 65) = 36.81, p = <.001

How many different skills did parents mention within domains?

Table 3. Average Number of Times Parents from Different Countries of Origin Mentioned Skills Within Domain

Domain	Country of Origin		
	China M (SD)	Dominican Republic M (SD)	El Salvador M (SD)
Social	2.50 (1.85)	2.52 (1.94)	2.09 (1.34)
Language/Literacy	1.77 (1.27)	2.48 (1.78)	2.18 (1.40)
Math	1.09 (1.27)	.90 (.89)	.73 (.98)
Physical-Well Being	1.41 (1.59)	.67 (1.20)	.68 (.89)

- There were no significant differences based on country of origin [$F(2, 62) = .80, p = ns$].
- Regardless of country of origin, parents were significantly more likely to report more skills within the social and language/literacy domains than the math and physical well-being domains [$F(3, 62) = 21.20, p < .001$].

Results

Research Question 2: Do home activities related to school readiness vary among immigrant parents from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and China, and across domains?

Table 4. Average Number of Days Per Week Children Engaged in Home Activities by Domain

Home Activity	M (SD)
Play	5.87 (1.64)
Learn	3.98 (2.08)
Read	4.90 (2.01)

- Children reportedly played significantly more times per week than they read which was significantly more times per week than they participated in learning activities [$F(2, 116) = 24.37, p < .001$].

- No significant differences based on country of origin in the number of activities per week reported by parents [$F(2, 58) = 1.26, p = ns$].

Table 5. Average Number of Days Per Week Children Engaged in Home Activities by Country of Origin and Domain

Domain	Country of Origin		
	China M (SD)	Dominican Republic M (SD)	El Salvador M (SD)
Play	6.55 (1.37)	5.53 (1.98)	5.48 (1.40)
Learn	3.57 (2.58)	4.65 (2.08)	3.76 (1.34)
Read	5.55 (1.87)	4.80 (2.48)	4.33 (1.46)

- There was a significant interaction between type of activity and parents’ country of origin [$F(2, 58) = 6.64, p < .01$].
- Play:** Parents from China > Parents from El Salvador.
- Learn:** Parents from China < Parents from Dominican Republic.

Discussion and Implications

- Despite there being known differences in how children from different racial/ethnic groups fare in school, we did not find differences by parents’ country of origin regarding what domains parents considered important for kindergarten readiness.
- The majority of parents emphasized social skills and language and literacy skills as important for kindergarten. Significantly fewer emphasized math and physical well-being.
- Future research directions and practical implications:
 - Research the nature and type of activities children engage in at home before starting kindergarten (e.g., what specific play activities and how do they interact with their parents during play).
 - Research not only how often children do an activity but also how long they engage in activities each time.
 - Investigate how parents foster the skills they view as important for kindergarten readiness.
 - Help parents understand the importance of math skills for their children’s academic success.