RESEARCH ARTICLE

Views of Multilingual Families' Communication with East Coast Migrant Head Start Programs

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Partnerships between schools and families directly impact children's school experiences and learning outcomes. Multilingual families experience unique barriers as they seek to partner with schools to educate their children. This research study focused on exploring families' perceptions of access to multilingual early childhood programs and communication processes between multiple stakeholders of an early childhood program in their rural multilingual community. Researchers collected data from 42 families with and without children enrolled in a Head Start program in North Carolina. Results revealed that most families believe they have access to the Head Start program and hold a positive perception of the communication processes in the Head Start program. However, barriers related to enrollment and cultural and linguistic issues were evident. This study impacts multilingual families' access to early childhood programs and their children's future academic, career, and life success.

Keywords: multilingual education, early childhood education, migrant families, Head Start multilingual programs

INTRODUCTION

Research has confirmed the importance of school-home connections and its impact on children's academic performance (Epstein et al., 2018; Justice et al., 2020; Surrain, 2021). In addition, the literature has shown that multilingual communities' beliefs and attitudes toward languages, identities, institutions, and values in their social world shape their perceptions of multilingualism (Song, 2019). Family unity, cultural heritage, home language, intergenerational legacy, and children's education are crucial for these communities (Dos Santos, 2019; Justice et al., 2020;

Sawyer et al., 2017; Smith, 2020; Song, 2019; Surrain, 2021). However, various factors impede the participation of multilingual communities in early childhood education programs such as competing stakeholder expectations, stereotyping of multilingual families, limited access to social and economic resources, and political power (Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Song, 2019; Surrain, 2021). Furthermore, the research revealed that families expressed concerns about barriers to their children's multilingual development given schools' perception of their multilingualism (Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017; Surrain, 2021).

Moreover, previous studies uncovered teachers' beliefs that reducing communication barriers between multilingual families and early childhood education program providers could alleviate structural disparities and raise children's academic achievement in these communities (Choi et al., 2021; McWayne et al., 2013; Rosenbaum et al., 2006; Smith, 2020). Nevertheless, a gap exists in the research regarding multilingual migrant families' perceptions of their partnership with early childhood education providers and the way modes of communication and miscommunication between agencies and families affect families' attitudes and participation in their children's education.

The impetus for this study arose from concerns about a Head Start program in a rural Southeast area of the United States that serves primarily migrant multilingual communities. Program leaders sought to learn how multilingual families with children already attending the program perceived communication with program teachers, leaders, and staff. Furthermore, they wished to know if potential multilingual families' perception of the Head Start program would affect their decision to enroll their children.

Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to explore perceptions of partnership and how (mis)communication in school-home relationships affect engagement between multilingual communities and early childhood education programs. The following research questions guided our study: (1) How do families perceive their access to multilingual early childhood programs? (2) How do families perceive the partnership and communication process between multiple stakeholders of early childhood programs in their rural multilingual community?

The study's theoretical framework builds on the efforts of researchers (Durán, 2011; Fernyhough, 2008), who adapted Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to investigate educators' communication practices and social engagement processes with minority families. Furthermore, this study utilizes Critical Sociocultural Theory that emphasizes the importance of identity, power, and agency in shaping discourse, communication, and social relationships (Enciso, 2004; Freire, 2000; Lewis et al., 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature confirmed that multilingual families are enthusiastic about multilingual education for their children (Dos Santos, 2019; Justice et al., 2020; Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017). Families perceived multilingualism as essential to maintaining and developing language identity and literacy in the home language and preparing their children for future professional opportunities (Dos Santos, 2019; Justice et al., 2020; Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017; Smith, 2020; Song, 2019; Surrain, 2021). In addition, the literature showed that families

envisioned schools as playing a pivotal role in fostering multilingual education through effective school-home communication; however, the research also showed that some barriers affected communication (Larios & Zetlin, 2018; Sawyer et al., 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018) along with targeted interventions that could alleviate these barriers (Guo, 2010; Wong-Villacres et al., 2019).

Language Identity Formation and Literacy in the Home Language

Multilingualism is crucial for developing and preserving literacy in children's home languages and shielding them from negative perceptions of their native languages. This is especially important for multilingual families as they strive to provide their children with a strong foundation in their home languages (García, 2003; Justice et al., 2020; Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017; Smith, 2020; Surrain, 2021). Kostoulas and Motsiou (2020) conducted exploratory qualitative research on the discourses of plurilingual children's families regarding their family's language behavior and beliefs. Two themes emerged from the study and related to linguistic ideology and language transmission and management (LTM): (a) Plurilingualism should be encouraged and (b) non-major languages (NML) should be a part of family language practices. It was evident that families lauded the benefits of preserving NMLs at home for improving their children's multicultural awareness and communication skills (García, 2003).

Similarly, Smith's (2020) ethnographic case study of three multilingual families illustrated families' views of the importance of multilingualism in their children's education. The study found that families saw multilingual education as a vehicle for fostering and sustaining their children's respective language identities. Justice et al. (2020) also found this pattern in their quantitative research study where over 500 families and almost 30 classrooms focused on a school-based literacy-focused program designed to foster home literacy. Results demonstrated that families valued the "Club de Lectura" program, a school-based program created to develop literacy with a home-language literacy development component because their children made gains in Spanish language learning and literacy. Surrain's (2021) research further explained why families value language identity formation and concluded that supporting students' home language development decreased the negative perceptions of their peers about students' Spanish identity. Without ongoing development of their home languages, children's language identity formation can be thwarted, and their family home language connections disrupted.

Studies revealed that immigrant families harbored concerns about their children's home language identity formation and maintenance when they realized that exposure to English in contexts outside their home and community could lead their children to shift to a monolingual ideology (Sawyer et al., 2017; Surrain, 2021). Moreover, Surrain (2021) concluded that immigrant families differed in their views on supporting their children's multilingual development. Specifically, some families established family language behaviors, such as a Spanish-only-at-home policy, to promote their children's active home language use. Other families employed strategies, including school-based support, to prevent children's home language loss (Surrain, 2021) and to counteract "English-only" policies. Kostoulas and Motsiou (2020) found that families were concerned that plurilingualism delayed their children's linguistic development and regarded this as the cause of their children's linguistic and developmental deficits.

Therefore, research studies on language identity formation and advancement highlighted families' deeply held values about developing and maintaining their children's home language. These values impact families' perception of the kind of access they have to multilingual early childhood programs.

Access to Future Professional Opportunities

Research studies uncovered that multilingual families, not only value language identity formation and literacy in the home language as a result of multilingual education, but they also value the future professional opportunities and career prospects that multilingualism affords (Dos Santos, 2019; Smith, 2020). According to Dos Santos (2019), families enrolled their children in bilingual English language (BELP) programs because they understood that contemporary society places a high value on English as the language of communication and career advancement. Smith's (2020) ethnographic case study also demonstrated that families emphasized multilingualism in their children's education for this same reason. Smith (2020) found that families saw multilingual education as a pathway to their children's future career opportunities and, as a result, their economic prosperity. In short, families believed that learning English while maintaining students' home language was tantamount to providing their children with options beyond working as migrant farmworkers.

School-Home Communication: Barriers and Interventions

School-home communication fosters multilingual education, particularly for multilingual families (Guo, 2010; Sawyer et al., 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Wong-Villacres et al., 2019). According to Sawyer et al. (2017), immigrant families placed importance on positive parent-teacher relationships and believed they played an active role in the collaboration between families and the school. However, the literature highlighted barriers that hindered communication (Larios & Zetlin, 2018; Sawyer et al., 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018) and presented vital interventions that could address these barriers (Guo, 2010; Wong-Villacres et al., 2019).

Barriers to Communication.   The research showed that hindrances to school-home communication resulted from families' perceptions of their role and inability to access education jargon. Sawyer et al. (2017) found that when teachers invited families to collaborate, families reported that "they were not sure what their role would be in collaborating" (p. 14). They believed this because of their perception of teachers' "authority" (p. 14). Also, a study by Larios and Zetlin (2018) found that Latinx families' engagement during an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting was affected by their inability to comprehend the jargon and technical language used by school personnel.

In addition, Schneider and Arnot's (2018) case study, which investigated the views of immigrant families and schoolteachers concerning parental knowledge of the school system and children's learning where an "English only" policy was in place, found that the literature focused mostly on students, their families, or teachers. However, there was a failure to compare perspectives on

barriers to communication within the same educational context. Thus, mismatches between different stakeholders' views (students, families, and teachers) obstruct parental engagement and mutual understanding between teachers and families.

Overall, Schneider and Arnot's (2018) study illustrated gaps and discrepancies in parental knowledge, engagement, and perceptions of challenges from teachers' and families' perspectives. Therefore, school-home communication systems need to be developed to emphasize sustainable conversations between school and home and to build an environment that fosters an iterative process of parental engagement (Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

Bilingual Personnel Interventions.   Findings from Guo (2010) and Wong-Villacres et al. (2019) respectively show that school-initiated interventions for multilingual families cultivate communication between home and school. Guo's (2010) research highlighted the employment of bilingual assistants as an intervention that could bridge the gap in communication between schools and multilingual families. The study (Guo, 2010) revealed that bilingual assistants employed at Parent Night events not only helped families understand the information conveyed by the school but also enabled families to understand the school system, including its jargon and goals. Therefore, Guo's (2010) research illustrated that events such as Parent Night, while beneficial to families, can have a more significant impact if the school makes a deliberate effort to meet families' needs for clear communication. For example, the employment of bilingual assistants acting as liaisons between multilingual families and the school helped to bridge the communication gap between schools and multilingual families. This support helps families to understand and take action in the school, which enhances their children's educational experiences and outcomes.

Similarly, Wong-Villacres et al.'s (2019) qualitative ethnographic research study on the factors that both help and hinder parent participation in a school-hosted Parent Night event demonstrated that bilingual liaisons act as a bridge of communication between the school and its multilingual families. The researchers found that bilingual liaisons interpreted information communicated by the school in the families' language and helped them to follow through on the information they received from the school. Also, bilingual liaisons expanded families' understanding of the more significant role that education played in their children's lives and gave families a sense of agency. Moreover, bilingual liaisons helped families follow through on the information they received from the school mainly because they were able to convey the information using their cultural knowledge of the families' communities and cultures. Overall, bilingual liaisons fostered a sense of belonging in the school and the broader community by motivating families to volunteer where they could, which created an extension of parent engagement beyond the school. Wong-Villacres et al.'s (2019) findings showed that the effective use of bilingual liaisons as a bridge between families and the school could create a positive perception of access to multilingual early childhood programs and increase communication between and among administrators, families, teachers, and the surrounding community.

Both Guo (2010) and Wong-Villacres et al. (2019) found that the absence of interventions for multilingual families such as bilingual liaisons (Guo, 2010) or bilingual assistants (Wong-Villacres et al., 2019) available to support families' communication between the school and multilingual families could create confusion and frustration.

The literature presented a profile of the pivotal roles multilingualism and effective school-home communication play in multilingual education. The research highlighted how the value of multilingual families' language identity formation in their children's home language impacts their perceptions of access to multilingual early childhood programs. The benefits of multilingualism were also introduced in preparation for future professional opportunities. Additionally, the literature identified the barriers to school-home communication and provided interventions for bilingual programs and personnel to overcome the barriers. Therefore, this study explored how (mis)communication in school-home relationships influences family engagement between multilingual communities and early childhood education programs with implications for educational practitioners and program stakeholders.

METHODS

After IRB approval, Head Start program leaders from the Association of Mexicans in North Carolina (AMEXCAN) recruited participants from multilingual Latinx migrant families working on farms in the Southeast United States. For data collection, a survey with questions was utilized and focused on two categories of families: (1) Those with children in the Head Start program and (2) those without children in the program. Following the survey, families were invited to focus group interviews, which were made available online in English and in Spanish.

The first group of survey questions were focused on families with children in the program. Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert-type scale on levels of agreement: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. An option to add general comments and to respond to one open-ended question were included at the end of the survey, for a total of 23 questions (Appendix A). The second group of survey questions, for families without children in the Head Start program (prospective families), were also based on a 5-point Likert-type scale on levels of agreement, from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, including an option for general comments and responses to two open-ended questions, for a total of 19 questions (Appendix B). A key feature of the online survey was its emphasis on the intersection of communication, language, motivation, and engagement. Forty-two participants completed the surveys. Seven of these participants had their children already enrolled in the Head Start program, while 37 participants were prospective families of the Head Start program. The researchers conducted a focus group interview based on the survey results to gain additional information about participants' responses to the survey.

The focus group interview consisted of eight open-ended questions (Appendix C). Head Start program leaders recruited focus group participants from the pool of survey respondents. Five participants agreed to participate in the focus group interview. Four of these participants had children already enrolled in the program, and one did not. Focus group interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The interviews focused on the benefits of the Head Start program, communication, access to the program, and the potential support the program could provide to multilingual children. Moreover, focus group interviews examined participants' experiences with (mis)communication between

school-home connections. Following focus group interviews, the researchers transcribed and translated the interviews into English and used descriptive statistics to analyze the survey data, including thematic analysis for analyzing the focus group interview data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Guest et al., 2012).

RESULTS

To examine multilingual families' perception of access to the Head Start program and their perceptions of partnership and communication process(es) between multilingual families and the Head Start program, program leaders recruited families to participate in the online survey and focus group interviews. Seven families with children enrolled in the Head Start program, and 37 prospective families responded to the survey (See Table 1 and Table 2 for descriptive item analysis). Four families with children enrolled in the Head Start program, and one parent without children enrolled agreed to participate in the focus group interview. Results from the online surveys and focus group interviews revealed multilingual families' views about the Head Start program's impact on their children's academic, social-emotional and language development, socialization, and communication skills, as well as the degree to which they believed the program fosters school-home communication, provides resources to families, affords program access. Results also highlighted respondents' views about future program enrollment.

Table 1

Survey Administered to Families With Children in the Program

Item Number	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
1. The Head Start program meets the academic needs of my child.	71	29	0	0	0
2. The Head Start program meets the social-emotional needs of my child.	86	14	0	0	0
3. The location of the Head Start program is important to me.	86	14	0	0	0
4. The Head Start program communicates regularly with me about my child's academic progress.	71	14	14	0	0
5. I can access the Head Start program easily.	71	14	14	0	0
6. The Head Start program meets the language needs of my child.	71	14	14	0	0
7. I feel welcome and accepted by the Head Start program.	71	29	0	0	0

8. The Head Start program supports my child's special needs.	57	43	0	0	0
9. The Head Start program respects and accepts my cultural values.	71	29	0	0	0
10. The Head Start program keeps the facilities in good condition.	71	29	0	0	0
11. The Head Start program contributes to my child's academic development.	71	29	0	0	0
12. The Head Start contributes to my child's social and emotional development.	71	29	0	0	0
13. In addition to my child's academic needs, the Head Start program supports other needs of my family.	71	14	14	0	0
14. The Head Start program makes my child feel welcome.	57	29	14	0	0
15. The Head Start program helps me to understand my child's social and emotional development.	57	43	0	0	0
16. The Head Start program supports multilingual families.	71	29	0	0	0
17. The staff at the Head Start program offers translation services to multilingual families.	71	29	0	0	0
18. The Head Start program staff encourages families to volunteer at the center.	57	14	14	0	0
19. The Head Start program staff is multilingual.	71	29	0	0	0
20. The Head Start program keeps me up to date with current and upcoming events.	86	14	0	0	0
21. The Head Start program encourages interactions among families.	57	14	14	0	0

Table 2

Survey Administered to Families without Children in the Program

Item Number	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
1. The Head Start program will meet the academic needs of my child.	53	40	7	0	0
2. The Head Start program will meet the social-emotional needs of my child.	43	53	3	0	0
3. The location of the Head Start program is important to me.	47	47	3	0	3
4. The Head Start program will communicate regularly with me about my child's academic progress.	47	47	7	0	0
5. I will be able to access the Head Start program easily.	37	47	17	0	0
6. The Head Start program will meet the language needs of my child.	43	37	17	3	0
7. My immigration status prevents me from enrolling my child in the Head Start program.	17	10	23	27	23
8. I might not be able to send my child to the Head Start program because of my work schedule.	57	43	0	0	0
9. The Head Start program facilities will be adequately maintained and kept in good condition.	33	57	10	0	0
10. The Head Start program will teach my child important skills to be successful in school.	53	40	7	0	0
11. I will send my child to the Head Start program because teachers and staff, who speak my native language, will be available.	43	37	20	0	0
12. The Head Start program will encourage parental engagement.	33	60	7	0	0
13. In addition to the academic needs of my child, the Head Start	33	43	20	3	0

program will support other needs of my family.					
14. The Head Start program will make my child feel welcome and accepted.	43	47	10	0	0
15. The Head Start program will help me to understand my child's social and emotional development.	57	33	7	0	0
16. The Head Start program has used a variety of methods to recruit children in my community, including flyers, town hall meetings, etc.	20	57	17	7	0

Academic Development

The survey results indicated that the Head Start program has a positive impact on multilingual students' academic development. More than 93% of prospective families believe that the Head Start Program would support their children's educational needs. Furthermore, 96% of families agreed or strongly agreed that the Head Start program would teach their children essential life skills. Focus group results reiterated this feeling as current families mentioned that the program had improved their children's academic skills. One parent stated that classes were small, "There are eight children in my son's class." Families also cited a typical day's activities in their children's classroom, such as learning to write their names, playing with classmates, reading, and vocabulary acquisition, as factors in their children's academic development.

Social and Emotional Skills

In addition to supporting their children's academic achievement, results revealed families' belief that the Head Start program supports their children's social and emotional development. Specifically, 93% of prospective families and 100% of families in the program strongly agreed or agreed that the program supports their children's social and emotional development. Additionally, during the focus group interviews, 75% of the families with children in the program expressed their satisfaction with the attention their children were receiving, especially in cases where children did not have siblings. Participants also cited the different activities their children engaged in during the day, such as play, expressing their feelings, and sharing with others, as elements that helped to develop their children's social and emotional skills. In addition, one of the families shared that a teacher contacted her and created an intervention plan to support her child who was exhibiting behavior problems. Another parent shared that her child can now express and control his emotions. One parent stated, "It is important for the development of the children. It is very good."

Language Development

According to survey responses, 83% of the families strongly agreed with the statement, "The Head Start program supports my child's language needs." Another 17% were neutral in their response. Further, more than 80% of the families agreed or strongly agreed that the Head Start program makes their children feel welcome and accepted. Focus group results showed that 75% of the families with children in the program believe that the program supports their children's language needs. Families stated that bilingual teachers were employed by the Head Start program because some teachers are native Spanish speakers, while others learned Spanish as a second language. One parent stated, "They use both languages: English and Spanish. There are two teachers in the classroom; one who speaks Spanish." In addition, the families stated that, although the director doesn't speak Spanish, she always finds ways to communicate with families through a translator. Because of the program's efforts in fostering language development, 100% of the families either strongly agreed or agreed that the staff makes them feel welcome.

Table 3

Focus Group Interview Themes

Theme	Quote
The program supports children's social and emotional development.	"I have seen how the program has helped my child's social and emotional development." "The program is helping my child learn how to express himself. This is very beautiful for me."
Communication between the school and families is appropriate.	"The school sends newsletters to families and makes phone calls." "Teachers speak with families during arrival and dismissal times if necessary."
The program advances students' academic skills.	"Every two months we complete a questionnaire. They tell us how the child is developing based on their age." "It is important for the development of children. It is very good. I have seen a difference in my child, especially since my child is an only child. The program has helped him with his socialization skills."
Families feel that their children's home language is valued.	"They use both languages: English and Spanish." "There are two teachers in the classroom; one who speaks Spanish."
The program is accessible to families.	"The center is close to me; just a few minutes [away]." "For families who do not live close by, the county provides transportation."

Social and Communication Skills

Results revealed that families are also satisfied with the Head Start program's efforts in developing their children's social skills. Social skills are the behaviors children acquire based on environmental cues that dictate how they engage with others (Takahashi et al., 2015). When children develop positive social skills, they enjoy positive relationships with others throughout their lives (Aksoy & Baran, 2010). In the focus group, one parent mentioned that the program helped her child improve her social skills. This was particularly important to the parent because the child had no siblings to play with at home. The parent stated, "I have seen a difference in my child, especially since my child is an only child." Another parent seemed very satisfied with how the program has helped her child improve his communication skills. Communication skills are those that facilitate children's ability to interact with others by conveying what they want to communicate in the ways in which they decide to communicate (Allen, 2017). She stated, "I don't work, but I was interested in the program because my child was having speech difficulties. The program helped him and now he can express himself more clearly. The program is also helping him express his emotions. He is able to say, 'Mami te amo.'" Overall, the results indicated that 75% of the families with children in the program strongly agree that the Head Start Program supports their children's socialization and communication skills.

School-Home Communication

Families believe that the Head Start staff seems interested in communicating with them. School-home communication is the ability of families to interact in two-way communication with school personnel about their children's educational development (Laho, 2019). The results show that 75% of the families with children in the program strongly agree that the Head Start program keeps them informed about their children's academic progress and school events. In addition, 47% of prospective families strongly agreed that they have easy access to the Head Start Program. The remainder of the participants agreed, while two maintained a neutral stance. The survey results also indicated that 77% of the prospective families agreed or strongly agreed that they could communicate with the Head Start Program. Of prospective families, 60% agreed that the Head Start program would encourage family communication.

Focus group participants seemed satisfied with the methods the Head Start program uses to communicate with their families about their children's progress. Specifically, 65% of the families with children in the program held a positive view of communication between school and home. For example, they mentioned that teachers conduct outreach a few times during the year by organizing conferences with families to discuss their children's academic progress.

During the interview, one parent stated, "The staff is always available to answer questions. They always answer the phone when we try to talk to them." Another parent mentioned that the program, periodically, distributes a newsletter with updates.

Program-Provided Resources

While the Head Start program provides different resources to families, focus group participants felt that the program should provide resources to households beyond academic, social, and emotional support. They expressed that they would like additional support to be provided by the program, such as a mental health worker or psychologist. They would like family training programs that would teach English or computer literacy.

Head Start Program Access

When asked about geographic accessibility to the program, focus group participants shared that the program was easily accessible. Of this group, 80% of the prospective families and 86% of the families with children in the program found the location of the program to be convenient. Additionally, four out of the five families in focus group interviews agreed that the program was geographically accessible. They mentioned that the program is not far from where they live, and that the town provides transportation to families who do not live there. Some remarked that, even if transportation were not provided, they would make every effort to send their children to the program. Another parent stated that even if the program was far from her house, she would enroll her child in the program because of its positive impact. The parent said, "The distance will not be important because of all the benefits [of the program]. I will drive, even if it is one hour away." Another parent added, "The center is close to me, just a few minutes [away]." The county provides transportation for families who do not live close by." When considering immigrant access to the program, 90% of the participants from both categories (with/without children in the program) agreed or strongly agreed that their immigration status did not hinder their children's participation in the program. Overall, 43% of the families strongly agreed that the Head Start program would support the needs of their families. The rest of the respondents agreed with that statement.

Future Enrollment and Recruitment

Prospective families responding to the survey selected "strongly agree" (43%) about their plan to enroll their children in the Head Start program. 75% strongly agree that they would send their children to the program. However, only four of the families in the focus group knew about the program. They stated that information was disseminated by word-of-mouth and by Comite de Padres (the Parent Committee). However, one parent shared that she had no knowledge of the Head Start program, but, if she did, she would have enrolled her child in the program.

Most families strongly agreed or agreed that the Head Start program recruited families. For example, 20% strongly agreed, and 57% agreed that the program uses various resources to promote enrollment. During the interview, all the families, except for one, knew about the program. Two families mentioned that they knew about the program through the parent association in town. They agreed that the program could improve its recruitment efforts by sending flyers to all the households and making announcements to the entire town, similar to the emergency alerts used during a natural disaster.

DISCUSSION

This study explored families' perceptions of multilingual early childhood programs and the partnership and communication process between multiple stakeholders. Results revealed that families felt a sense of partnership with the program and positively perceived communication between families and the Head Start program. Furthermore, families believed that the Head Start program supported their children's academic, social and emotional development, as well as their children's language identity. Also, they viewed the school and home partnerships as a vehicle for communication.

One key finding was families' belief that the Head Start program supported their children's academic, social, and emotional development. This finding aligns with empirical data indicating that high-quality preschool programs benefit children's academic, social and emotional development (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Pungello et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2011; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). In addition, Stanley et al. (2016) found that students who were more physically active in the earliest years of their lives experienced positive impacts on their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Notably, in Head Start programs, multilingual learners achieved higher skills in various developmental domains than students who were not multilingual and participated in other early childhood programs.

Another main finding of the study revealed families' beliefs that the Head Start program benefits their children's social and emotional development. This finding also parallels Stanley et al.'s (2016) research on the benefits of early childhood programs on children's social and emotional development. Children who were more physically active in the earliest years of their lives experienced positive impacts on their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. In addition, enrolling in a pre-kindergarten program can enhance the cognitive development of young children. For example, Stork and Sanders (2008) found that a child's success impacts their attitude, which affects their cognition and social skills. In short, early exposure to literacy and mathematics provides young students with foundational knowledge.

In addition, results demonstrated that families believed that the program enhances their children's language acquisition and their language/identity needs. This finding is consistent with Puma et al.'s (2010) observation that Head Start programs have particularly benefited multilingual learners. According to research findings, multilingual learners are often considered at risk academically, especially as they develop English proficiency (Choi et al., 2021; Whiteside et al., 2016). This finding supports previous research about the high value multilingual families place on their children's language development. Research from Justice et al. (2020), Sawyer et al. (2017), and Smith (2020) that multilingual families valued programs that allowed their children to learn their native language and English concurrently; they see bilingual education as a way to maintain their children's cultural identity and prepare them for a brighter future. Families also view multilingualism as essential to preserving family unity, home language, and academic success (Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017; Surrain, 2021).

Another significant finding from the results was that families held positive perceptions about their partnership with the Head Start program and saw this school-home partnership as a vehicle for communication. Previous studies have shown that miscommunication could be one barrier that

negatively impacts multilingual early childhood programs in their communication with families (Sawyer et al., 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). However, the results of this study revealed a high level of agreement that there was positive school-home communication between multilingual families and the Head Start program. Researchers have identified long-term benefits to young children when families are engaged in their children's education (Guo, 2010; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Some of these benefits include improvement in academic achievement, lower dropout rates, increased parental involvement, maintaining young children's self-identities, and fostering cultural awareness in young children (Epstein et al., 2018; Fehrer & Tognozzi, 2018; Gichuru et al., 2015; Kossek & Burke, 2014; LiBetti, 2019). Jasis and Marriott (2010) also discussed the effectiveness of community-focused interventions that emphasized building relationships and rapport with families.

Overall, this study found that families positively perceive the Head Start program. Families who are not yet enrolled in the program want to have their children enrolled, while families who are already enrolled will continue to partner with the program. Families enrolled in the Head Start program felt that the program supported their children's academic, social, and emotional development, language acquisition and development, and that there is a strong school-home partnership.

However, one of this study's limitations is that families who participated in the study were of two categories: Families with children in the Head Start program and prospective families who may enroll their children in the program. Focusing on two different family groupings led to split results. If families with children enrolled in the program or families without children in the program were invited to participate in two separate groups, program managers and leaders could strategically target programmatic efforts.

The results of this study also highlighted barriers to enrollment in the Head Start program. Although some families perceive that the Head Start program makes an effort to recruit families, more families expect the program to provide additional resources for future recruitment instead of conveying information by word-of-mouth. Therefore, it will be important that future research investigates the Head Start program's recruitment efforts, including how it communicates with families of children not yet enrolled, to strengthen access to resources and services supplied by the program to multilingual families.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

A significant contribution of the study is its insight into how multilingual Spanish- speaking families in rural areas in the Southeast United States perceive Head Start programs. The study identifies the main themes relevant to migrant multilingual communities. Future research could provide additional information about the program's stakeholders, including the perceptions of administrators and teachers on the impact and effectiveness of Head Start programs that serve multilingual families. In addition, future studies should examine the difference in perception between the program's view of its (mis)communication with families and how families view the degree to which they communicate with the program. Another future study might explore the program's recruitment practices and enrollment efforts towards multilingual families in the

community to better inform multilingual families about enrollment in early childhood education programs. Additionally, future research could investigate the role of the program's location and its connection to enrollment and multilingual family engagement. Future research could also probe connections between enrollment and engagement in the Head Start program with students' success in kindergarten and first grade. Moreover, future studies could contribute to reducing disparities in academic achievement among children from multilingual families by increasing access to education at a young age.

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