A Multi Dimensional Look at Immigrant Latino/a Family Involvement in Education
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INTRODUCTION

Multicultural Context:
- The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse nation. In 2000, 20% of the US population under the age of 18 was non-Anglo whites.
- One of every five children in the United States is an immigrant, or a child of immigrant parents (Ruggles & Sobek, 2003).
- Latino/a families are the fastest growing group of immigrants (Shields & Holombeck, 2000).
- Schools increasingly serve diverse student populations; special education is required to improve the academic and social outcomes of social economic and low-income students (Rios-Gonzalez, 1999).
- Latino/a families are often characterized as the "at-risk" group for indigent bursars in their schools (Shields & Holombeck, 2000).
- Parent involvement is a potential point of intervention to combat "at-risk" immigrant Latino/a students' educational challenges (Shields & Holombeck, 2000).
- Previous research has addressed the effects of time on Latino/a family involvement in the United States or their reported language proficiency or school involvement across home and school-based activities. However, no study has determined whether these demographic factors are important for school involvement with immigrant Latino/a families.

Measures of Family Involvement:
- The Family Involvement Questionnaire-Elementary (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004) measures family involvement in education. It contains 38 items categorized for elementary students, with responses on a four-point Likert scale (i.e., Strongly Agree, 4; Strongly Disagree, 1; Don't Know, 2; and Agree, 3).
- Parent research with the FIQ-E revealed three substantial dimensions of parent-reported involvement: (1) Home-Based Involvement, (2) Home-School Communication, and (3) School-Based Involvement.
- The measure has not been validated with Spanish-speaking Latino/a immigrants.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

To examine parent involvement with immigrant, Latino/a parents utilizing a multi-dimensional family involvement measure (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004).

Specific research questions were:
1. Does the Spanish version of the Family Involvement Questionnaire-Elementary (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004) demonstrate acceptable construct validity for immigrant Latino/a families of children in Kindergarten through 5th grade?
2. What is the relationship between the length of time in the United States and their involvement in their child's education?
3. Are there significant differences in family involvement constructs across demographic characteristics of primary caregiver's socioeconomic status, education attainment, English proficiency, or marital status?

METHODS

Participants and Setting:
- 68 primary caregivers from Latino/a elementary-age children attending Kindergarten through 5th grades in rural and urban communities in Nebraska.
- The majority of the respondents were from Mexico (76%) and were primarily mothers (75%) and fathers (25%).
- Thirty-eight percent of the respondents identified their marital status as married, with thirty-five percent reporting as a single parent/household.
- Twenty-nine percent of the respondents reported having less than an eighth-grade education and thirty-three percent reported having a high school diploma or higher.
- The number of children living in the home ranged from 1 child (17%), 2 children (17%), 3 children (22%), and 4 more children (33%).
- Thirty of the present respondents reported income of less than $16,000, while thirty-one percent reported an income between $16,000 and $30,000. Nine non-reported earning over more than $30,000 and seventeen percent reported their income as "unknown".

Demographics:
- Potential correlates of family involvement behaviors and included the following: (1) English proficiency (2) length of time the respondent had spent in the United States; (3) family SES; and (5) marital status.

Procedures:
- The Spanish version of the FIQ-E (Manz, personal communication, February, 2005) was administered to all participants between May and January 2007.
- Primary caregivers were provided with the Spanish translated FIQ-E questionnaires. Spanish translated instrument items and instructions were used to over come possible difficulties.

RESULTS

Factorial Structure of the Measure:
- A confirmatory factor analysis using Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS; Arbuckle, 1994) was conducted to determine the reliability of the constructs across key family demographics. The measure had a robust construct validity.

The only effect found between time and family involvement constructs was a significant negative relationship (beta = -0.135, t = -2.330, p = 0.020) between Home-based Involvement and the continuous, independent variable of time (as defined by the number of months an immigrant family has spent in the United States or their reported language proficiency in the past 12 months).

Family demographic differences:
- To evaluate if there were significant differences with identified family involvement constructs across family demographics, an ANOVA was conducted for the level of reported English proficiency. Simple effects were conducted for reported level of education, level of income, and marital status.

DISCUSSION

The three factors found in previous research with the FIQ-E (Manz et al., 2004) were affirmed with immigrant Latino/a families. The factors are: Home-School Communication, Home-based Involvement, and School-based Involvement. The constructs found reliably by Manz et al. (2004) are robust.

A Spanish version of the FIQ-E has been validated with a new, unique, diverse sample. The availability of a psychometrically supported measure to utilize with this population will allow further empirical studies to assess levels of intervention and effects of parent involvement interventions with immigrant Latino/a families.

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There was a significant difference in Home-School Communication between the lowest self-reported English proficiency group and all other groups. Specifically, the least proficient English proficiency group significantly lowered Home-School Communication than all other groups. This finding underscores the significance of communication barriers to school involvement for immigrant, Latino/a families.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE/RESEARCH FUTURE

There were numerous missing items across all surveys. There was a follow-up as qualitative method to further explore the phenomenon for the primary caregivers; however, any particular item (e.g., did not understand what was asked or did not want to disclose that information on the survey). This reduction occurred most frequently by using the materials in the child's English. The data that the parents provided are essential for obtaining insight into the experiences of the children's learning environment.

Given the sheer importance of ongoing family involvement over time and educational contexts, schools may need to take effective steps to ensure that these families are provided with information and assistance to meet these needs as required.

These findings are significant in that it is important to make no assumptions about immigrant Latino/a families based on previous research with other groups. These families present unique characteristics, strengths and needs and school involvement interventions should be sensitive to these needs.