

Family Engagement, Learning Materials and Home Language: A Relational Examination

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Introduction

- Family engagement in early childhood has been related to a host of positive child outcomes, such as increased early language and literacy, social-emotional development, and executive functioning, and decreased behavioral concerns (Sheridan et al., 2010; Rickards et al., 2007).
- Engagement in early childhood education is not only comprised of participation in the school setting, but of engagement in learning at home and across settings (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004).
- A positive learning environment at home is strongly associated with children's learning behaviors and classroom behaviors (Fantuzzo et al., 2004).
- More needs to be understood about how the presence of specific learning materials in the home (e.g., books, toys teaching size, shape or color) potentially contributes to family engagement across settings, particularly for low-income children identified with developmental concerns.
- Discerning this relationship is especially important among families whose primary and preferred language is Spanish because many language minority children experience lower academic achievement (Hoff, 2013) and could particularly benefit from family engagement in education.

Research Questions

- For a sample of at-risk children identified to have developmental concerns upon entry into preschool at age 3,
 - 1) What is the level of reported family engagement behaviors and the amount of learning materials available in the home?
 - 2) How does the level of reported family engagement behaviors and the amount of learning materials in the home vary by home language?
 - 3) What is the relationship between learning materials and family engagement?

Method

Participants (See Table 1)

- Part of a larger, randomized study examining the effectiveness of Getting Ready with at-risk children aged three to five years with developmental concerns.
- Approximately 196 mothers and their children, aged 3-5, living in the Midwest and attending publically-funded preschool programs.

Measures

- Primary Language Spoken in the Home**
 - 1 multiple choice item; Parents asked to report the primary language they use speaking with their child at home
- Family Involvement Questionnaire** (Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs., 2000)
 - 36 items; 4 point-Likert scale
 - Home-Based Involvement, School-Based Involvement, Home-School Conferencing
- Adapted EC-HOME Questionnaire** (Caldwell & Bradley, 2003)
 - 24 items addressing home context
 - Learning materials subscale (11 items)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Parents and Children (N=196)

	Parents	Children
Age	M = 29.78 years (SD = 6.94) Range = 20.29 – 49.06 years	M = 3.84 years (SD = .35) Range = 3.20 – 5.25 years
Gender		
Male	14.5%	55.3%
Female	85.5%	44.7%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	16.9%	22.7%
Non-Hispanic	83.1%	77.3%
Race		
White/Caucasian	79.7%	69.3%
African American	4.3%	5.2%
American Indian	3.7%	1.6%
Biracial	.5%	13.5%
Other	3.7%	10.4%
Home Language		
English	88.9%	
Spanish	11.1%	
Maternal Education		
High School Diploma or Less	40.9%	
GED	8.5%	
Some Training Beyond High School or One-Year Vocational Certificate	28.4%	
Two Year Degree or More	22.2%	

Table 2. FIQ and EC-HOME Descriptive Statistics

	M(SD)
Parent Engagement Behaviors ^{a, b, c}	
FIQ Home-Based Involvement (HBI)	41.69 (6.98)
FIQ Home-School Conferencing (HSC)	25.41 (6.78)
FIQ School-Based Involvement (SBI)	17.21 (5.47)
Learning Materials ^d	
EC-HOME Learning Materials	5.58 (1.17)

^aItems are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = always). ^bAll three subscales report strong internal consistency: HBI ($\alpha = .85$), HSC ($\alpha = .81$), and SBI ($\alpha = .85$). ^cThe maximum score for each subscale is: HBI = 52, HSC = 44, SBI = 40. ^dThe maximum score for this subscale = 11.

Results

- See Table 2 for FIQ and HOME descriptive statistics.
- English-speaking families reported a **significantly greater number of learning materials in the home** ($F(1,119) = 4.84, p = .03$) compared to families speaking Spanish at home (See Figure 1).
- Spanish-speaking families **reported significantly greater levels of home-based involvement** ($F(1,195) = 6.42, p = .01$) as compared to those who spoke English at home (See Figure 2).
- Home language was not significantly related to home-school conferencing ($F(1,155) = .24, p = .63$) or school-based involvement ($F(1,192) = .08, p = .78$).
- Families who report more learning materials in the home are **more likely to report greater home-based involvement** ($F(1,165) = 12.10, p < .001$) and **home-school conferencing** ($F(1,162) = 3.85, p = .05$), controlling for home language and maternal education.
- Learning materials did not significantly predict school-based involvement ($F(1,164) = 1.90, p = .17$, controlling for home language and maternal education).

Figure 1. Mean Home Learning Materials by Language Spoken in the Home

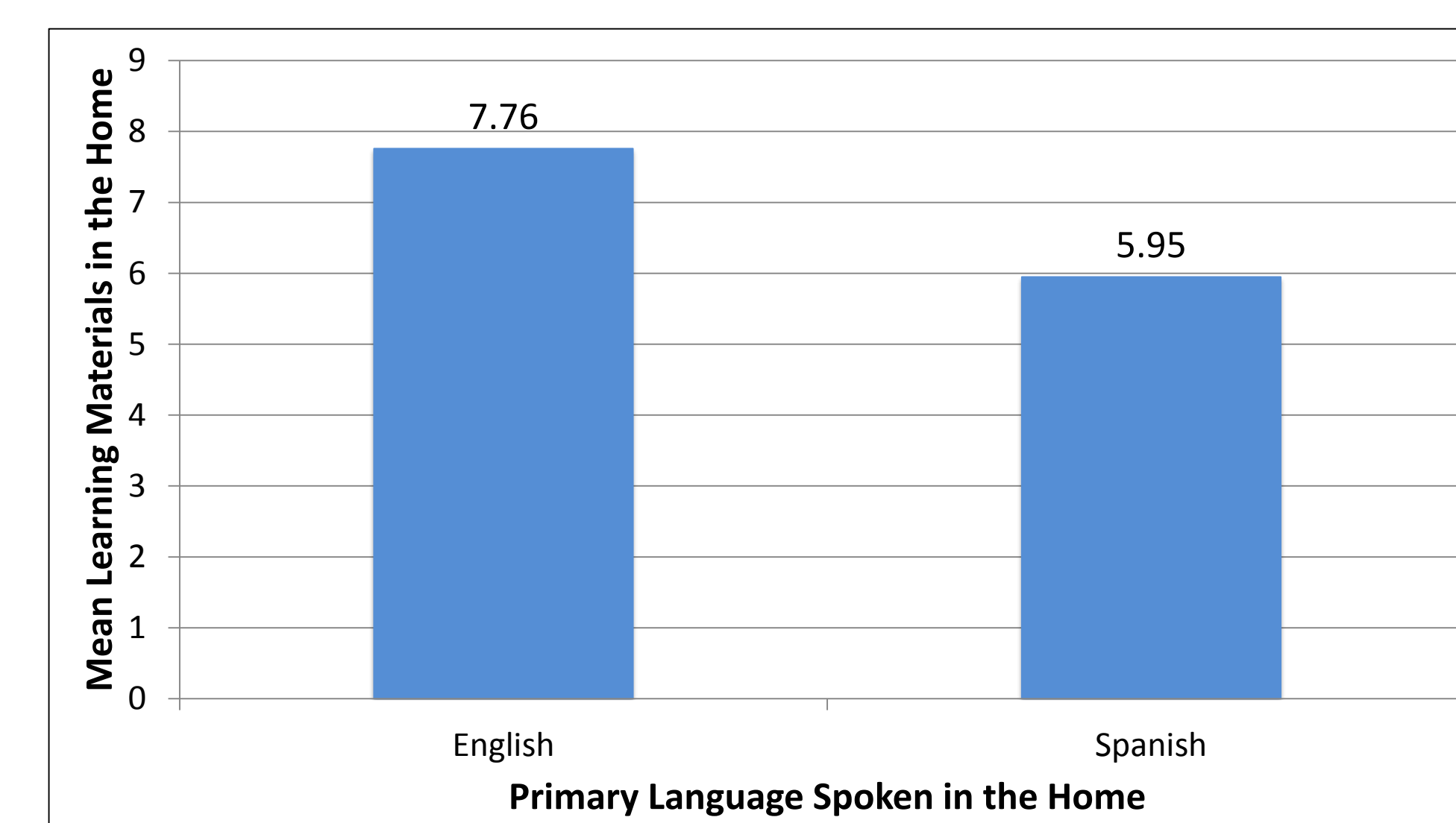
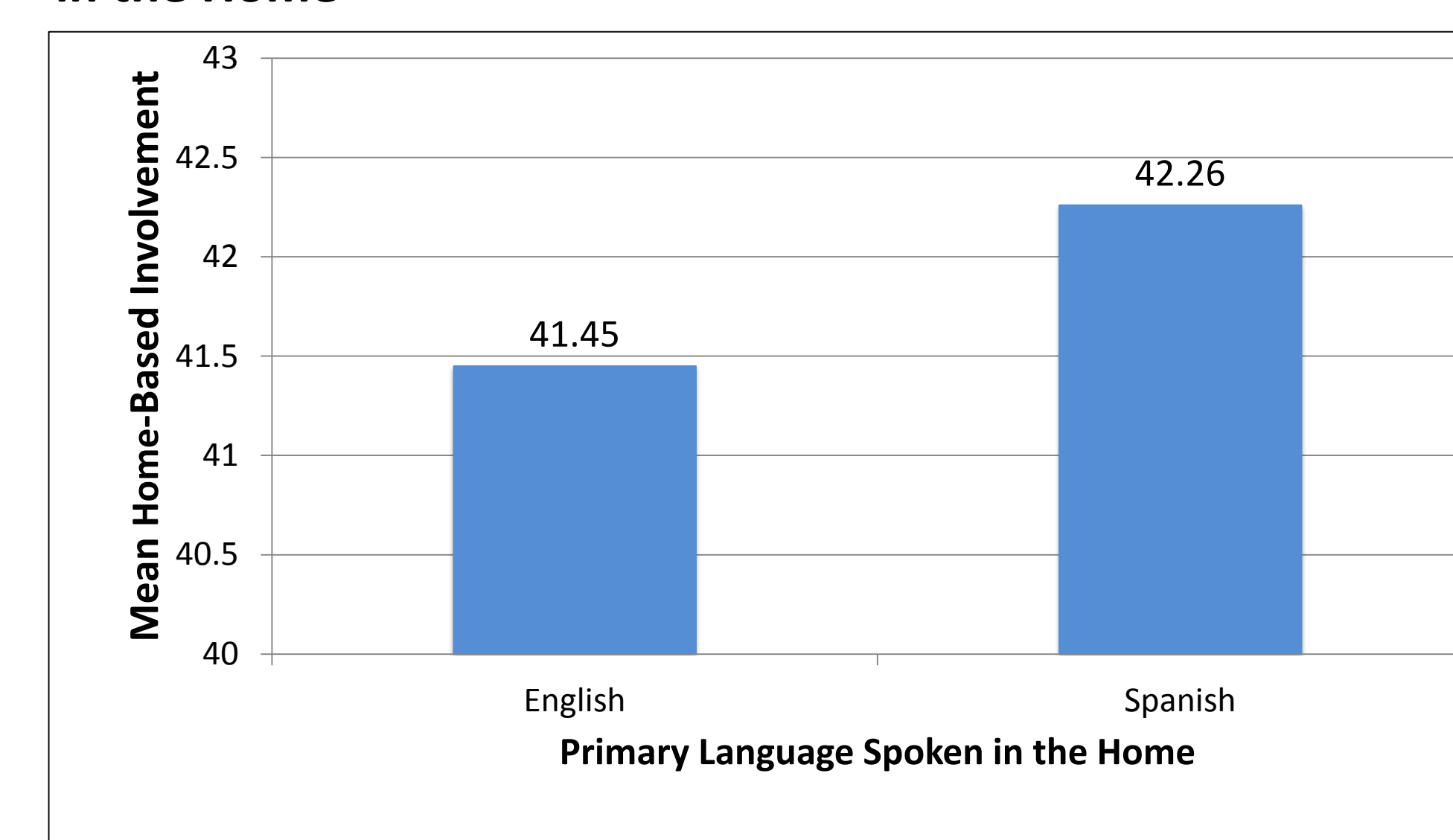


Figure 2. Mean Home-Based Involvement by Language Spoken in the Home



Discussion

- The key take away points of this poster are that there are differences in learning materials in the home and family involvement across families who speak different primary languages. Further, learning materials in the home matter for family involvement at home and across settings.
- The findings suggest multiple areas to advance early childhood practice. First, preschool educators could assist families in acquiring more learning materials in the home, especially for families that prefer to speak Spanish and with high-needs children, since they are less likely to have learning materials at home, but are *more likely to encourage learning at home*.
 - Spanish-speaking families may engage in greater levels of home-based learning activities in part due to barriers in becoming engaged at school (e.g. school staff might not speak home language of family, limiting possible exchanges).
- For similarly at-risk English-speaking families, preschool educators might encourage and model home learning behaviors using learning materials already present.
- The suggested changes could promote family access to quality care that employs family strengths to promote skill development (e.g., providing a greater number of materials to Spanish-speaking families to take advantage of higher levels of home-based engagement).
- Future research should investigate how the presence of learning materials in the home influences the development of children with identified concerns, and explore how home learning materials differentially predict child outcomes based on home language.