

Preschool Parents' Ratings of Parent-teacher Relationships. A look at the Impact of Family Demographics

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Abstract

Relationships between families and teachers are important quality indicators of an effective early childhood program and a child's development indicators. Assessment of these relationships provides program administrators and policy makers insights into the effectiveness of their programs in impacting children's and family outcomes. In this study, using the newly developed FPTRQ Measure, parents' perceptions of parent-teacher relationships in preschool programs were assessed. The effects of parents' demographic factors income, education, age of the child, years provider had cared for the child, and number of providers parent had worked with were also investigated. The study focused on the parent-teacher relationship components of knowledge of the family, collaboration practices, and teacher attitudes of families. Fifty one parents participated from both Head Start and center based programs. Results show that teachers generally scored higher on family knowledge and attitudes with some items in the practices element scoring fairly lower. Significant core-relationships were found in parents' income, education and age of the child and parent-teacher relationship skills on collaboration, communication and commitment. Parents in low income category and of younger children reported stronger parent teacher relationships. The study suggests a need to focus on strengthening the practice component of the parent-teacher relationship, specifically communicating with parents.

Keywords : parent-teacher relationships, home connections, parental engagement, preschool

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Introduction and Review of Literature

It is an established fact that the connection between home and school is extremely beneficial for children's development and learning, yet, optimally harnessing these benefits for all children continues to be elusive (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). While this connection is important from infancy through upper grades, it is more critical in the early childhood years (Lang et al., 2013). Family involvement in early education is complex and multidimensional. The astronomical growth and development that occurs during early childhood, and the young children's limited ability to adequately communicate their thoughts create the necessity for communication between educators and families to ensure optimal care of the children (Castro et al., 2004). Unfortunately, a number of studies report that much of the research on family engagement has focused on older children (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The recognition of the significance of home-school connections in early childhood education is demonstrated through the existence of standards and objectives on family engagement at national, state and local early childhood education accountability overseers. Head Start, which has spearheaded efforts to engage families, has created a set of objectives child care facilities are required to abide by in order to obtain federal funding. Specifically, evidence of "regular and direct participation" of the early childhood centers with Head Start parents, and assessment data documenting the compliance, is required (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; NCPFCE, 2018). Similarly, NAEYC, the national organization that accredits early childhood program includes "community and families" category as one of its 6 standards. Like Head Start, programs seeking NAEYC accreditation must specifically provide proof of existing mechanisms for family participation, communication, and assessment of these participation (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; NAEYC 2020).

Head Start defines family engagement as " an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with" not doing to or for—families Ferlazzo, 2011; NCPFCE, 2018).

Family engagement, encompasses a wide array of factors ranging from service provision

to actual relationships between teachers and parents. While it is true for all age groups, in early childhood programs much more emphasis is given to parent-teacher relationships. A good parent-teacher relationship is likely to encourage family engagement. The current study focuses more on the parent-teacher relationships.

Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides a great conceptual framework for explaining the significance of the school and home connection and parent- teacher relationships. The home and the school connection represent a dynamic transaction between two most proximal microsystems. These two systems combine to create an exosystem that has the potential to either support or adversely affect a child's development (Kostelnik et al., 2015). When, for instance, there are unnegotiated differences in child-rearing beliefs and practices between home and school, inconsistent messages may be given to children by the teacher and parent, potentially contributing to negative child outcomes such as low social competence and poor academic skills (Epstein, 2018; Crosnoe et al., 2010). Therefore, respectfully orchestrated negotiations between the school and the home help support a children's academic and development outcomes. This occurs while honoring families' respective unique cultures, experiences, and genetic endowment. Further, if the home and school microsystems do not interact equitably, parents' effectiveness in supporting their children could be adversely affected, creating low parenting efficacy, as implied by the description of the "mesosystem". As Lang, et. al. (2013) point out, when parents feel disregarded, they are less likely to share information or participate in school events. Early childhood personnel must therefore seek to understand the families of the children in their care and nurture a healthy partnership and effect positive child outcomes. Recent perspectives emphasize the importance of goal-oriented partnerships as well and an application of culturally responsive and sustaining orientations (Epstein, 2018).

At the macro levels (state and national levels), policies and resources that support school-home connections very directly impact parent-teacher relationships and child outcomes. Enforced systems of accountability and continued improvement help support these partnerships. Limited funding to support family and school partnerships tend to be rampant,

especially in schools that would increase student outcomes through my family empowerment and partnership (Grace & Trudgett, 2012).

Benefits of Parent-teacher Partnerships

The benefits of strong parent-teacher relationships are enormous. Interactions between parents and teachers are the foundation for building positive relationships (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Further, the strong relationship builds mutual trust, which in turn supports the children's feelings of safety and development of social competency. Strong parent-teacher connection leads to higher social competence, higher language and literacy development and school readiness (Sheridan et al., 2011), and overall academic achievement (Dearing et al., 2004). Further, social functioning and emotional adjustments in children, is also enhanced through these connections (Pomerantz et al., 2007). The benefits of early home-family connections are reaped over a long time in a child's education trajectory and have been associated with high school completion rates (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), achievement and performance (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012), increased student engagement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), decrease in absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), lower drop-out and retention rates, and decrease in disruptive behaviors, (Sheridan et al., 2012).

Teacher's role in building Parent-Teacher Relationships

The responsibility of creating a partnership between teachers and parents primarily lies with the teachers and the schools (Lang et al., 2013; Sanders et al., 2005). Teachers have enormous power to build relationships, however they are often not aware of the power they have (McGrath, 2007). Their outreach and invitations to participate has been found to be a major reason for more parent involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). McGrath (2007) also found that parents were generally eager to develop relationships than teachers, a finding that throws the ball to the teachers' court to take further steps to nurture these relationships. More active involvement of parents in school leads to stronger teacher and parent relationships. To further strengthen these relationships, teachers must be empowered with skills and capacity to connect home and school (Epstein & Dauber,

1991). An effective way teachers can build strong relationships with parents requires making information about their children's learning and development accessible. Such information influences families' self-efficacy, confidence, and skills (NCPFCE, 2018). Additionally, when teachers genuinely invite teachers in decision making and goal setting, as well as engage them in ways that are truly reciprocal, the teacher gets to know the child and the family in a deeper way (NAEYC, 2020). Such partnership further influences families' motivation to trust, collaborate, and remain positively involved with and learning from the providers and programs (NAEYC, 2020; Powell et al., 2010).

Porter et al. (2015) identify three components for a successful family teacher relationship as knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Each of these components consists of several elements; the exception is knowledge, which includes only one element-family-specific knowledge. There are four elements in the attitudes component: respect, commitment, openness to change, and understanding context. The five practices elements include communication, collaboration, responsiveness, connecting to services, and family-focused concern. Environmental features have five elements welcoming, communication systems, culturally diverse materials, information about resources, and peer to peer parent activities (Porter et al., 2015). Peer to peer activities are often facilitated by teachers by bringing parents together to learn from and support each other. The goal is to create a community and link parents with others for several reasons, including common interests or of similar cultural backgrounds and lived experiences (NAEYC, 2020; NCPFCE, 2018)

Likewise, Iruka, Jones Harden, Bingham, Esteraich, & Green, S. (2018) assert that high levels of trust, communication, and agreement between parents and teachers often indicate a strong home-school connection. When teachers respect parents as a child's first teacher, they are more likely to invite them to participate in their child's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). It is therefore clear that there is a need to foster teachers' skills and capacity to build relationships with parents. Several studies have found that some teachers perceive ethnic minority and low-income parents as not being involved in their children's learning (Lopez, 2001). Further, ethnic minority children and children from low-income households are more likely to be rated by their teachers as less socially competent and more aggressive compared to Caucasian children and children from higher-income households (Patterson et al., 1990; Pigott, & Cowen, 2000). Cultural differences between teachers and parents in beliefs on child

rearing and expectations can affect the relationships. Strengths-based approaches that employ culturally responsive and sustaining strategies in engaging all parents is critical in increasing enthusiastic engagement, especially from socially oppressed groups (Epstein, 2018; NAEYC, 2020). In its Developmentally Appropriate Practices position statement, NAEYC (2020) asserts that more communication strategies, including technology-mediated strategies (Fan & Yost, 2019), must be employed to reduce the communication barrier.

It is clear that the parent-teacher relationship is very important, and that the primary responsibility of building an environment and opportunities to build these relationships primarily lies with the teacher (NAEYC, 2020). Unfortunately, measuring the range and depth of parent-teacher relationships in early childhood classrooms is still a challenge. This challenge has been expressed by program directors, practitioners, and policymakers who would want to assess their efforts so as to strengthen their relationships with families (Porter et al., 2015). The Family and Provider Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) measures rigorously created by Porter et al. (2015) is one comprehensive tool that attempts to address this issue. A component of The FPTRQ measures that targets parent-teacher relationships was used in this study. Many relevant elements that support effective facilitation of relationships with families are included in this measure. This study specifically uses a subcomponent of the FPTRQ measure to investigate preschool parents' perceptions of the nature of relationships with their children's teachers. The richness of the measure provides useful insights into these relationships and provides results that can be used to support stronger relationships and consequently, more family engagement.

Family factors do play a role on the level of engagement from different families and the support needed for the family to be more engaged and influence their children's development and learning. Chang et. al. (2009) and Crosnoe et. al. (2010) found that more family engagement of low-income children through child stimulation at home showed gains in children's reading cognitive achievement. Such engagement can be facilitated through resource support by teachers and programs support for parents. Children from vulnerable homes like those from poverty and with parents having less education need more mechanisms in place to support their engagement (Hornby & Rafael, 2011). Studies that look at the influence of parental engagement on learning outcomes the effect on younger children to be lower because of their "immaturity" (Ma et al., 2016). In essence that is the very reason why

family engagement is more critical at a younger age, because for young children, overall development is considered as foundational for later success. Co-creating goals for the young children and honoring their uniqueness is urgently important in early childhood years (NAEYC, 2020).

Research Questions

To understand parents' perceptions of the nature of parent-teacher relationships in early childhood programs, the following research questions were asked: 1). How do preschool parents perceive parent-teacher relationship practices in their programs? 2). How do parent's demographics income, education, age of child income, education, age of the child, years provider had cared for the child, and number of providers parent had worked with number of providers worked with, relate to parent-teacher relationships?

Methodology

Participants

Data was collected from Head Start and center based early childhood programs from one Mid-western state in the United States. Purposive sampling was implemented to ensure that participating programs were knowledgeable of the expectations of parent-teacher partnerships. The Head Start programs are federal programs funded by the US government and follow the Head Start Performance standards. One of the standards is parent and family engagement in education and child development services. This standard requires a) programs to structure education and child development services that recognize parents' roles as children's lifelong educators, and that encourage parents to engage in their child's education and also (b) programs must engage parents and family members by offering them opportunities to be involved in the program's education services and implement policies to ensure that (U.S. Department of Education (2015). The Head Start program provides services children 0-5 years. The center based programs comprises of private child care centers that

also serve 0-5 year old's. These programs have a choice to be accredited by other quality rating systems. Only programs that had this rating were included to in the study. The center based programs in the study had received the Bright and Early rating which is a quality rating system within the state that shows the program has meet specific guidelines and home connections is one of them.

Names of center based programs with this rating were obtained from the Bright and Early quality rating system website and contacted to participate through their program directors. Two center based programs agreed to participate with two classrooms each. Names of Head Start programs were obtained from the state's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website and their directors contacted.. Two Head Start programs with two classrooms each agreed to participate. Eight classrooms participated in total. The FPTRQ measurement tool requires that the primary custodian of the child completes the survey. This can be the mother, father or guardian. One parent or guardian from each household per child completed the survey.

Measures

The Family and Provider Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) Measure (Porter et al., 2015) was used for data collection. While the measure assesses the quality of relationships between families and various providers (teachers, directors, family services workers) of early childhood programs serving children ages 0-5, the specific sub-tool used for the study focused on parent-teacher relationships. The parent/provider measure asks questions about how parents work with their child care provider or teacher. It consists of three broad components: knowledge, practices, and attitudes. These components are broken into eight subscales. The measure contains several types of response categories that respondents can chose from on a Likert scale of 1-4 (never to very often; strongly disagree to strongly agree; very uncomfortable to very comfortable, not at all like my provider to exactly like my provider): The family specific subscale is composed of 15 items scored on a Likert scale of 1-4 (very uncomfortable-very comfortable). The collaboration subscale is comprised of 11 items scored on a Likert scale of 1-4 of never to very often. An example of an item in this category is how often did you meet or talk with your child care provider on your child's experiences in the education and care setting. The responsiveness subscale is comprised of

11 items scored on a scale of 1-4 of not at all like my provider to exactly like my provider. An example of item is my child care provider or teacher is flexible in response to my work or schedule. The communication subscale has 8 items scored on a 1-4 scale from never to very often. An example of question is how often does your child provider or teacher share information with you about your child's day. The family focused subscale has 3 items scored in the range of 1-4 of never-rarely. An example of an item is how often does your child care provider/teacher offer ideas or suggestions about parenting. The subscales in the attitude, commitment has 9 items scored in 1-4 ranges from not at all like my provider to exactly like provider. An example of the item in this is my child care provider/teacher is caring, understanding context is composed of 4 items scored in 1-4- ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An example of item is my child care provider/teacher judges my family because of our culture and values, respect is comprised of 5 items an example of item was how often does your child care provider/teacher contradicts you in front of your child?

A confirmatory factor analysis model that correlated factors in the tool produced a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.0676 suggesting an acceptable model fit. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), SRMR of .08 or less is indicative of an acceptable fit.

The parent measure includes eight subscales under the three broader constructs of Knowledge, Practice, and Attitude. During the development of the tool all of the subscales showed at least acceptable, and mostly good or excellent reliabilities of above 0.75 (Kim et al., 2015). Cronbach's alpha of above 0.7 are in the acceptable/good category (George & Mallery, 2003; Kline, 2000). Family specific subscale had .94, collaboration .92, communication .91, family focused .75, commitment .88, understanding contacts .87, respect .83. Family knowledge construct .94, practices .96, attitudes, .88.

All these items combined were used to measure the parent's teacher relationship rating. Nine background questions are included at the end that asked parents about their child, their experiences with childcare and their background. These questions captured information on the age of child, sex of child, years provider had cared for the child, number of providers parent had worked with, language used at home, if they were Hispanic or Latino origin, race, education level and household income.

Table I. *FPTRQ's Measure: Components & Subscales of the Family Provider Teacher Relationship Quality Measure*

Component	Description of the Component	Subscale and its definition as relate to teacher characteristics
Knowledge	understanding of families' culture, contexts, situations, abilities & goals	1. Learning families cultures, their contexts, situations affecting them, helpful community resources and their abilities, needs and goals
Practice	Collaboration and engagement with families in the program	1. Working together with families in setting goals, decision making and following up to develop action plans 2. Responsiveness: Involved in careful/thoughtful, flexible, and responsive support to families' needs and goals 3. Communication: promoting for two way communication as per parents preferences and teachers' personal boundaries 4. family focused concern: communication with families in ways that matter.
Attitudes	Beliefs, values, feelings perceptions, about families and children	1. Commitment: sensitivity to needs of children, parents, and families. 2. Understanding context: appreciation of broader contexts of situations of families and how that contributes to their development. 3. Respect: appreciating child and family by being welcoming, accepting, non-discriminatory, and non- judgmental.

Procedure for Data Collection

After IRB approval to conduct the study center directors were contacted, via email, to seek their permission to allow parents of children in their programs to participate in the study. Upon their acceptance, surveys were dropped at each classroom and teachers were requested to pass to the parents. The surveys, along with the consent forms, were sent to parents at the end of the day along with other regular mail. Parents were implored to return the completed surveys the next day to maximize the return rate in a sealed envelope. Follow-up mail was sent by the researcher to remind parents to complete and submit their surveys. Those who completed the survey were entered into a drawing to win a \$25 target gift card. Fifty-one parents returned the surveys making it a 42.5% survey return rate, which was considered a satisfactory response rate from parents.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlations and independent t tests were run to identify relationships between parent scores and demographic factors and differences across programs.

Results

Demographics

Table 2 on demographics highlights 3 variables that were found significant - age of child,

Table 2. *Parent's Demographic Information*

N=51

Variable			Variables		
Race	N	%	Age of Child	N	%
White	37	72.5	1-2 years old	7	13.7
Black or African American	4	7.4	3-4 years old	30	58.8
Asian Indian	6	11.8	5 Years old or older	14	27.5
Guamanian or Chamorro	2	3.9			
Teaching experience of teachers			Sex of child		
Less than 6 months	25	49.0	Boys	19	37.3
6 months less than a year	10	19.6	Girls	30	58.8
1 year less than 2 years	10	19.6	No answer	1	2.0
No. of providers parents worked with			Language spoken at home		
1	6	11.8	English	46	90.2
2-3	20	39.2	English & Spanish equally	1	2.0
4-5	9	17.6	English & another lang	1	2.0
More than 5	16	31.4	Other language	3	5.9
Hispanic or Latino			Level of Education		
Yes	4	7.8	Less high school/GED	11	21.6
No	47	92.2	Assoc. or some college	13	25.5
			Bachelor's degree	9	17.6
			Graduate degree	18	35.3
House Hold Income			Program Type		
Less than \$25,000	12	23.5	Center Based	34	66.7
25,000 – 34,999	8	15.7	Head Start	17	33.3
35,000 – 44,999	3	5.9			
45,000 – 54,999	3	5.9			
55,000-74,999	8	15.7			
75,000 or more	17	33.3			

income and education. About three quarters (44) of the children were 3-5-year-old. Over half (27) of the parents who participated had a bachelor's degree or higher. Half of the parents (25) had an income of \$55,000 or more whereas 12 had an income of below \$25,000. The high-income group of parents were those with children enrolled in the center-based care. While the number of providers the parents had worked with was not significant in this study but the data shows that about half of the parents (25) reported having worked with at least 4 different providers. Out of this 16 had worked with more than 5 providers.

Parent-teacher Relationships Ratings

Descriptive statistics (Table 3) were used to find means and frequencies for parent ratings on parent-teacher relationships on each of the eight elements (family specific knowledge, collaboration, responsiveness, communication, family focused concern, commitment, understanding context, and respect). These elements were grouped into the three components to find the total means for each; knowledge had family specific knowledge; practices had collaboration, responsiveness, communication, family focused concern; and attitudes component had commitments, understanding contexts and respect.

Table 3. *Parent Ratings on Parent-teacher Relationships*

N=51

Component/element	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Knowledge				
Family Specific knowledge	2.7	4.0	3.7	.36
Practices				
Collaboration	1.9	4.0	3.2	.59
Responsiveness	2.0	4.0	3.6	.45
Communication	1.0	4.0	2.8	.89
Family focused	1.6	4.0	3.5	.54
Attitudes				
Commitment	2.7	4.0	3.8	.28
Understanding context	1.1	4.0	3.7	.69
Respect	1.0	1.8	3.8	.25

All mean scores of each element for each component were calculated and one score was obtained for each. This score was used to examine the areas associated with strong or weak parent-teacher relationships (Table III). Communication M=2.8 and collaboration M=3.2 were the elements with the lower mean scores. The attitudes elements (commitments, understanding context and respect) and family specific knowledge received higher mean scores of above 3.5.

Each component was further analyzed to identify how parents rated each item in the elements of each component. The family specific component was measured by asking parents how comfortable they felt in sharing specific information with their child care provider or teacher (Table 4). The component measured the specific information providers/teachers had about families they served.

Table 4. *Parent Ratings on Family Specific Knowledge Component*

	Very Uncomfortable	Un. Comfortable	Comf. table.	Very Comfortable	M	SD
Child has siblings			3	48	3.9	.19
Adult relatives in household			5	46	3.9	.24
Household schedule			8	43	3.8	.35
Marital status			6	45	3.8	.30
Personal relationships	2	12	13	24	3.2	.92
Employment status			12	39	3.7	.42
Financial situation	3	10	16	22	3.1	.94
Family life		1	13	37	3.7	.49
Faith & religion	2	8	13	28	3.3	.87
Family culture & values		5	15	31	3.5	.68
Ways to encourage child's					3.7	
learning outside school			8	43	3.8	.35
How to discipline child			12	39	3.7	.40
Problem child has at home			10	40	3.8	.39
Changes happening at home			13	38	3.7	.42
Health issues child has			6	45	3.9	.27

On family specific knowledge forty-three out of the 51 parents that completed the survey indicated being very comfortable to being asked by teachers what they did outside of the education and care setting to encourage their child's learning. Suggesting that parents are open to being involved with their children at home and are happy to share this information with teachers. Also, parents were very comfortable being asked information about their child's siblings, adults living in their household, household schedule, marital status, health and problems child have at home. These seven items on family specific knowledge received the highest number of parents indicating being very comfortable (between 40-48 out of the 51 parents) being asked about those questions. Questions on personal family issues like this create a pathway for connection between parents and teachers. They are likely to signal to parents that teachers care about their families and can lead to other deeper connections in the areas of children/s learning. For teachers to know what really matters for parents will help them to know where to begin and what they should focus on when working with parents. Questions on personal relationships with spouse/partner, financial situation, and the role of faith and religion play in parent's household, had at least 10 parents in each that were uncomfortable with being asked this question. It is necessary for teachers to think about what the purpose for asking these questions is. The focus should be on providing resources that lead parents to places that they may use if faced with common family challenges. Overall the family specific knowledge subscale was one of the highest positively rated by parents when looking at the mean averages in Table 3 other than commitment and respect both with means of 3.8 each.

The practices component measured providers/teachers' interactions and engagements with families on four elements: collaboration, responsiveness, communication, and family focused concern (Table 5).

It would be better if the authors present Table 5 as a graph, instead of a table, along with percentage information together with the frequencies.

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Table 5. *Parent Ratings on Teacher Collaboration, Responsiveness, Commitment & Family Focused Concern Practices* N=51

	Never/ rarely	%	Some/ Very often	%
My teacher has met/talked about...				
Collaboration practices				
Child experiences	3	5.9	48	94.1
Child's abilities	7	13.7	44	86.3
Child's behavior	3	5.9	48	94.1
Child's learning	7	13.7	44	86.3
Goals you have for child	11	21.6	40	78.4
What to expect in stages of development	17	33.3	34	66.7
Your vision for your child's future	19	37.3	32	62.7
Your providers expectations for your child	15	29.4	36	70.6
Rules your provider has for children	15	29.4	36	70.6
How you feel about the care/education	15	29.4	36	70.6
Share information about child's day	0	0.0	51	100.0
Communication				
Offer books/materials on parenting	21	41.2	22	43.1
Suggest activities to do with child	16	31.4	27	52.9
Asks values/beliefs	43	84.3	20	39.2
Strategies to use at home	16	31.4	27	52.9
Ways to improve child's education	9	17.6	33	64.7
Ideas & suggestions on parenting	37	72.6	16	31.4
Opportunities to make decisions	12	23.5	31	60.8
Opportunities to give feedback	12	23.5	31	60.8
Family focused concern				
Asks about my family	6	11.8	43	84.3
Remembers personal details	2	4.1	47	95.9
	A little like My provider	%	A lot like/ exactly like my provider	
Asked questions to show he/she cares	5	10.2	44	89.8
Responsiveness				
Respects me as a parent	1	2.1	48	97.9
Is flexible in response to my work/schedule	5	10.4	43	89.5
Treats me like an expert on my child	3	6.1	46	93.8
how child is progressing towards goals	5	10.2	44	89.8
Uses my feedback to adjust learning	3	6.1	46	93.9
Encourage my involvement	3	6.1	46	89.8
Reflects cultural diversity of students	4	8.2	45	91.8
Shows respect for diff. ethnic heritages	2	4.1	47	95.9
Is respectful of religious beliefs	4	8.3	44	91.2
Encourages feedback on teaching	8	16.3	41	83.6
Communicates my cultural values	8	16.3	41	83.6

Collaboration

All parents agreed that teachers were sharing information about their child's day. This was also followed with the information talking to them about their child's experiences in the education and care setting, their child's abilities, their child's general behavior, their child's general learning, goals they had for their child where most parents agreed that teachers were doing well in those items. However, the items talking to them on what to expect at each stage of their child's development and the vision they have for their children's future had the highest number of parents indicating never or rarely had the teachers talked to them about that compared to the other 7 items in the collaboration practices element. Talking about the rules they had for children in their care, and talking about how they feel about the care and education their child receives were also rated second in highest number of parents rating never or rarely were teachers doing this.

Responsiveness

While many parents agreed that teachers were doing most items on the responsiveness subscale three items, how child is progressing towards goals, teachers asking parents to provide feedback on the way they cared for and taught their children and communicating the cultural values and beliefs they wanted their children to have, received the highest number of parents with ratings of never or rarely in that order. Many of the parents agreed that teachers respected them as parents, treated them as experts on their child, and that teachers showed respect for their ethnic heritages. Teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being worst and 5 being best) how they would describe their relationship with their child care teacher. A mean of 4.5, SD .58 on a scale of 5 indicated that parents were rating their relationship with their teachers positively.

Communication

For the communication subscale, there were many parents who indicated that they never or rarely received communication on different aspects of this subscale (Table V). Asking

parents the values and beliefs they wanted to see in their children had the highest number of parents (43 out of 51) disagreeing that teachers were doing this. This was followed by offering ideas & suggestions on parenting and offering books/materials on parenting with 37 and 21 parents disagreeing respectfully. This whole subscale was rated weak compared to the other subscales of collaboration, responsiveness, and commitment.

Family Focused Concern

The family focused concern subscale also received favorable responses. Most of the parents agreed (47) that teachers were asking about their families, they remembered personal details about their families and that they asked questions to show they cared about them.

Table 6 shows the attitudes component which measured the providers'/teachers' beliefs and values about the families and children they were taking care of as rated by parents on commitment, understanding context and respects practices. The attitude component was generally the most positively rated by parents. All of the items had a mean of 3.8 and higher. Parents indicated that their teachers were caring, understanding, flexible, dependable, trustworthy, and available. On commitment subscale, parents agreed strongly that teachers were committed to their work. Parents felt that their child's teachers could maintain a safe environment for their child ($M=3.9$ and had their child's interest at heart ($M=3.8$). Teachers were also rated positively in understanding parent's context and not to using it to judge them. Parents felt teachers didn't judge them based on their faith and religion, their culture and values, race/ethnicity or based on their financial situation. Over 48 out of the 51 teachers strongly disagreed that their teachers used their family backgrounds information to judge them.

Correlations on demographic variables: Family Income, Education & Age of child with parent-teacher relationship Correlations were run on parent-teacher relationship score and parent backgrounds i.e. their level of education, income, number of providers worked with, age of child, and teaching experience of how long teachers had worked with the child. Correlation coefficients of education and income were run and it was found to be correlated ($r=.72$). Partial correlation was run to explore the relationships between education and parent teacher relationship scores on the eight sub dimensions, while controlling for income. There

Table 6. *Parent-teacher Relationship Ratings on Component Teacher Attitudes* *N=51*

Commitment	Min.	Max.		M	SD
Caring	3	4		3.9	.30
Understanding	3	4		3.9	.33
Flexible	2	4		3.5	.61
Dependable	3	4		3.9	.33
Trustworthy	3	4		3.9	.35
Respectful	3	4		3.8	.33
Available	2	4		3.8	.48
Can maintain a safe environment	2	4		3.9	.45
Has child interest at heart	2	4		3.8	.51
Respect					
Contradicts me in front of my child				3.6	.98
Rude	1	4		3.8	.51
Impatient	3	4		3.9	.44
Unfriendly	3	4		3.9	.14
Judgmental	3	4		3.9	.14
Understanding context					
My teacher.		Disagree	Agree	M	SD
Judges my family b/c of our faith/religion.		48	3	3.8	.46
Judges my family b/c of our culture/values		48	3	3.8	.46
Judges my family b/c of our race/ethnicity		49	2	3.8	.46
Judges my family b/c of our financial situatio		48	3	3.8	.46

was a strong, correlation between education and family specific knowledge scores, $r=.53$, $n=48$, $p<.0005$, family focused concerns, $r=.60$, commitment, $r=.44$, and communication $r=.74$.

A multivariate analysis (MANOVA) was run on the FPTRQ score and parent backgrounds and the 7 subscales. There was a significant multivariate analysis on education and the 7 subscales (Table 7. How parents rated parent teacher relationships was significantly dependent on the education level they had $F(21,118) = 2.06$, $p<.005/.0008$, Wilks' $A=.408$, partial $\eta^2=.26$. It was seen that education had a significant effect on collaboration ($F(3, 47) =$

5.11: $p < .005/.004$, partial $n = .25$ and family specific knowledge ($F(3, 47) = 3.6$; $p < .005/.021$, partial $n = .19$). The mean scores differences (using Tukey) for collaboration were seen between less than high school diploma/GED and bachelor's degree parents ($p < .0005$) and less than high school diploma/GED and graduate degree parents ($p < .0005$), and associate/ some degree and bachelor's degree ($p = .0005$), but not between less than high school diploma/GED and associate or some college degree parents ($p = .960$). Parents with higher education had lower means score ratings than those with lower education. In family specific knowledge mean score differences were seen between parents with an associate or some college degree and those with a graduate degree ($p < .0005$). The parents with graduate education had lower mean scores from the Tukey test.

The MANOVA on income and the 7 subscales was also found to be statistically significant. How parents rated parent teacher relationships was significantly dependent on the income level they had $F(35, 166) = 1.348$, $p < .0005/.0008$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .351$, partial $n = .18$. The income had a significant effect on collaboration ($F(5, 45) = 5.91$; $p < .0005/.004$, partial $n = .39$). The mean scores differences (using Tukey) for collaboration were seen between those earning less than \$25,000 and \$75,000 ($.0005/.021$), and those earning between \$25,000 – 34,999 and 75,000 or more ($.0005/.009$). Also between those earning between 35,000 – 54,999 and those earning 75,000 or more ($p = .0005/.014/.031$). Parents with higher income education had lower means score ratings than those with lower education in collaboration subscale. The mean score differences in the other subscales were not significant.

Table 7. *Correlations on Parent-teacher Relationships Means and Parent Demographics/Backgrounds*

Variable	PTRQ	FS.	Coll.	Respo.	Commn.	FFC	Commt.	UC	Respect
Education-	.46**	-.36**	-.43**	-.33	-.55**	.09	-.34*	-.06	.09
	.00	.01	.00	.02	.00	.51	.01	.67	.55
Teac.Exp	.11	.01	.12	.13	.05	.21	.12	.07	.00
	.42	.95	.45	.38	.72	.14	.38	.54	.54
Age	-.41**	.17	-.36*	.17	-.45**	.17	-.36	.06	.05
	.00	.23	.011	.22	.00	.23	.01	.64	.71
#. Teac.-.	.10	-.05	-.15	-.03	-.00	.16	.02	-.29	-.30
	.40	.72	.27	.81	.96	.23	.84	.03	.03
Income	-.49	-.26	-.50**	-.36	-.63**	-.23	-.34*	-.22	-.32*
	.00	.05	.00	.00	.00	.09	.01	.12	.02

* $p < .05$ level ** $p < .01$

Parents with older children were more critical in rating teacher relationships lower. Teaching experience of teachers and number of providers the parent had worked with were not significant. Also, the practices of responsiveness, family focused concern, understanding context, and respect did not correlate with the parents' income, education or age of child.

Discussions and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine preschool parents' perspectives on the nature of parent-teacher relationships in preschool programs and determine if there were specific demographic factors that related to how parents rated these relationships. Parent-teacher relationships were measured by looking at three components; teacher's family knowledge, practices, and attitudes. Overall results showed that teachers were scored high on family knowledge and attitudes components with some items in the practices component scoring fairly lower.

Two specific elements were rated low on the practices component: collaboration and communication. Collaboration and communication are key practices that relate directly to the learning outcomes of the children (Iruka et al, 2018; Porter et al., 2015). These practices are directly related to children's academic success (Sheridan et al., 2011) and other aspects of development (Pomerantz et. al., 2007). The practice of informing parents what to expect at each stage of development received the lowest mean score ($M=2.8$). Additionally, most parents reported not being offered books on parenting. Such information helps parents to understand where their child is developmentally and to make decisions for supporting their children to achieve the expectations of each stage of development (NCPFCE, 2018; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Intentional programs to train parents on parenting can help parents develop better relationships with their teachers and children. Many of the collaboration items scored by parents were very specific on what the teachers are expected to do. The assumption that teachers understand what parent-teacher relationship means for different groups of parents may need reexamination. Often lack of parental involvement is blamed on parents, but understanding how parent-teacher relationships shapes parent involvement would help to boost parent involvement in schools.

Secondly the study investigated if parents' backgrounds had a relationship to parent-teacher ratings. Parents with older children and higher income scored parent-teacher relationships lower. One possible explanation could be that parents with older children have interacted more with child care teachers and are likely to be much more knowledgeable of what they need or assess in a relationship because they have past experiences to draw from. It is also possible that because younger children can have difficulty communicating their needs, their parents felt a need to be in touch with their caregivers to ensure their children's needs were being met. More research on how parent backgrounds such as cultural contexts, income, and education affect parent-teacher relationships is necessary. Surprisingly, contrary to most research (Ansari & Gershoff, 2015; Smith, 2006), the current study found that parents with low income rated parent-teacher relationships higher than their higher income counterparts. Most of the low-income parents were participants from the Head Start program. Head Start engages in a lot of family engagement activities as part of the Head Start Performance standards requirement (NCPFCE, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2015) that could be contributing to this finding. However, the low ratings of parent-teacher relationships among high income parents could also be explained by examining program characteristics. The parents of the high-income group came from a university child care center. Understanding how different programs build parent-teacher relationships is thus important. Research (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2010) continues to highlight the associations between parent education and income, to parental involvement. Parents with higher education and high-income tend to be engaged in actions that ensure higher education experiences for their children. It may be possible that they become very critical of their teachers and hold them accountable for quality education for their children. A further look at the relationship between parent-teacher relationships with parent involvement, and its impact on children's learning outcomes could be another research area to focus on. Also understanding what quality means to parents when doing such ratings is important.

Overall, there is need to research on the way parent-teacher relationships are conceptualized across different groups of parents. Low income and low educated parent's high ratings do not translate to high academic achievement in their children as most research reports (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Chang et al., 2009; Welsh et al., 2010). There seems to

be a discrepancy on how low income and educated parents positively rate parent-teacher relationships and what is making an impact for them. Qualitative research that focusses on different groups of parents e.g. through interviews, focus groups to ascertain what works to impact child and family outcomes is necessary and what positive relationships means to different groups of parents is needed. Other studies looking at if parent-teacher relationships translate to how parents are involved with their children will also help to understand this study further.

When looking at the overall parental involvement and what is likely to make parents participate, parent's beliefs on parenting roles, opportunities to have an impact on their children's education, perceptions of whether a program is interested in their involvement are key factors (Powell, 1998). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) also note that how parents construct their role determines their perception of educational activities that are important for their children. Parents are likely to be involved in their children's education if they see themselves as competent and able to positively impact their children's learning (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In this study parents identified some areas they felt inadequate in, for instance, lack of understanding stages of child development, and activities to do with their children. This could contribute to their feelings of inadequacy.

Limitations

Some limitations for this study are one, a small sample size. Two kinds of programs participated and since program characteristics have a great role to play in how they work with parents it would be important to have studies that look at larger sample sizes with different program characteristics such as home care centers, and licensed vs. non-licensed programs. Second, the study only focused on programs that were required to implement the home connection standard as part of getting the quality rating mark approval. It is possible that results of the study could be biased in that way.

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