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Review

Using early care and education quality measures with dual language learners: A review of the research☆

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ABSTRACT

As the number of young dual language learners (DLLs) in early care and education (ECE) programs is increasing, it is critical to examine how well measures of the quality of practices in these settings reflect the needs of the diverse groups of children being served. This review of the research literature addressed these questions for ECE settings serving children birth-five: whether quality differs for settings serving high proportions of DLLs compared to typical samples, whether existing quality measures exhibit similar psychometric characteristics and associations with child outcomes in settings serving DLL and non-DLL children, and whether DLL-specific measures perform differently than general measures of quality. The search procedure produced 10 research studies that met the criteria for inclusion in the review out of approximately 3800 that were found initially and more than 300 that were reviewed. These studies included 10 out of 46 identified measures of ECE quality, including both general and DLL-specific measures. Findings suggested that widely used general ECE quality measures function similarly for DLLs compared to typical populations with regard to overall quality, psychometric characteristics, and child outcomes. Further research is needed to broaden the knowledge base for a wider variety of measures, beyond center-based settings, and beyond Spanish-speaking DLLs, as well as to enhance methodological approaches. There appear to be potential research opportunities through numerous existing studies that included DLL populations but had not analyzed their data in regard to these groups.

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1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the United States has experienced a demographic shift that has dramatically increased the linguistic diversity among young children and families participating in early care and education (ECE) programs. This changing population has resulted in a growing awareness of the unique care and education needs of young dual language learners (DLLs), children who are continuing to acquire their first or home language as they also learn English as a second language. Although as a group, young DLLs share the common characteristic of developing skills in two languages, as individuals, they differ in terms of a variety of characteristics, including home language; level of language proficiency in each language; and a host of family background factors, including culture, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, poverty level, and family composition. Given the growing numbers of young DLLs, coupled with policies in many states that promote serving these children in ECE settings, it is important to understand the current state of knowledge regarding the quality of care being received by these children and how quality is being measured with regard to this population. Therefore, the purpose of this review was to summarize the research on ECE quality for DLL children for both of these aspects.

1.1. Changing demography of ECE in the U.S

Recent data have shown that more than 30% of the children enrolled in Head Start programs speak a language other than English at home (Office of Head Start, 2009). Among DLLs, Latinos are one of the fastest-growing groups of young children in the U.S., with accordingly more research available for this population as well. As a group, Latinos represent at least 1 in 12 children in about half of the states, although there is wide variation in the proportion across states (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). Although some studies suggest that Latino families are less likely to use center-based care than European-American families (Magnuson, Meyers, & Waldfogel, 2007), other studies have found that use varies depending on children's age and family heritage (Winsler et al., 2014). According to Census 2000 data, substantial numbers attend center-based care, estimated at more than one-quarter of all 3-year-old and over half of all 4-year-old Latinos (Hernandez et al., 2007). Increased parental workforce participation as well as the availability of publicly funded programs such as Head Start and public pre-kindergarten programs have made enrollment in center-based early education settings increasingly common for children from a variety of linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further, studies suggest that DLLs often are at greater risk in terms of school readiness and that participation in such ECE programs can help better prepare these children for school (e.g., Fuligni & Howes, 2011; Gormley, 2008; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Peisner-Feinberg & Schaaf, 2009; Peisner-Feinberg, Schaaf, LaForett, Hildebrandt, & Sideris, 2014). Given this research along with the demographic shifts, it is important to examine the quality of ECE for DLLs and to determine the best ways to measure the quality of these experiences for this population.

1.2. Definition of ECE quality

Quality traditionally has been defined and measured according to two basic aspects—structural features and process quality (Peisner-Feinberg & Yazejian, 2010; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Structural features are the more basic, easily and objectively measured aspects of quality, such as teacher education and credentials, staff–child ratios, and group size, which often are represented in licensing regulations and other program guidelines, but also may be used in research. Process quality represents the direct experiences of children in early childhood settings, and therefore requires more in-depth observation and the use of standardized instruments to measure. Key aspects of process quality include the sensitivity and responsiveness of caregivers, the materials available for learning, and the instructional interactions with the teacher. The focus of the present review was on instruments related to measuring process quality in ECE settings.

1.3. Measures of ECE quality

A number of published instruments for measuring the quality of ECE practices are available, with research showing evidence of their reliability across raters and time and their validity in terms of associations with other quality measures and with child outcomes (see Halle, Whittaker, & Anderson, 2010, for a compendium of measures). These measures typically were developed for research purposes to capture a range of practices across four main categories, from measures of global quality in center-based or home-based settings to more specific aspects of practice related to teacher–child interactions, particular content areas such as language and literacy or math, and bilingual supports for DLLs. One set of widely used quality measures, the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), focus on the global ECE environment—the extent to which children have access to age-appropriate materials and the nature of caregiver interactions and supervision. ERS measures include the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) for center-based preschool classrooms, the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (ITERS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003) for center-based infant and toddler classrooms, and the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (FCCRS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) for home-based care settings. A second set of measures have focused more exclusively on the frequency and quality of teacher–child interactions. One of the most widely used measures, the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Pre-K* (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), measures the frequency and quality of interactions between teachers and children in terms of emotional and instructional support and classroom management. Other quality measures focus on

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