

Early care and education services utilization among mexican immigrants in central Illinois

Maria Galarza-Heras¹
Universidad Panamericana

Abstract

Access to a good education is vital for the success of the children of immigrants and a good Early Care Education (ECE) experience can form the foundation for later educational achievement (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2002). Having a child in an ECE setting offers many rewards for parents, including the social integration and economic mobility (Brandon, 2004). This research analyze the utilization of Early Care and Education Services (ECEs) among Mexican immigrant parents, looking at the patterns of utilization and how beliefs about ECEs influence it use. The findings reveal that, although parents express the salience of structural barriers, parental beliefs relevant to ECEs utilization are the most important factors that lead this particular group of parents to utilize or not utilize formal ECEs. Particularly, beliefs related to providers characteristics such as cultural sensitivity, and being warmth and responsively to the child. Understanding the constraints and beliefs influencing Mexican immigrant parents' utilization of ECEs is a necessary first step toward creating better methods of informing them about early care and education services (e.g., addressing issues of school readiness and language acquisition) and the different options available (e.g., child care centers and child care homes).

Keywords: *Child care, early care and education, ECES, latino immigrants, rural.*

¹ School of Business and Economics. Universidad Panamericana. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer No 101, Aguascalientes, Ags., México 20290. Correo electrónico: mgalarza@up.edu.mx

Resumen

El acceso a una buena educación temprana es vital para el éxito de los hijos de inmigrantes. Una buena experiencia de educación temprana puede ser la base para logros educativos posteriores (Suárez-Orozco y Suárez-Orozco, 2002). Tener un hijo en una institución de educación temprana ofrece muchas recompensas para los padres, incluida la integración social y la movilidad económica (Brandon, 2004). Esta investigación analiza la utilización de los Servicios de Atención y Educación Temprana entre los padres inmigrantes mexicanos, observando los patrones de utilización y cómo las creencias sobre dichos servicios influyen en su uso. Los hallazgos revelan que aunque los padres expresan la importancia de las barreras estructurales, sus creencias son relevantes para la utilización de los servicios de educación temprana. Particularmente, las creencias relacionadas con las características de los proveedores, como la sensibilidad cultural, la calidez y la capacidad de respuesta hacia el niño. Comprender las limitaciones y creencias que influyen en la utilización de servicios de atención y educación temprana por parte de los padres inmigrantes mexicanos es un primer paso para crear mejores métodos para informarlos sobre servicios de atención y educación temprana (i. e., abordar problemas de preparación para la escuela y la adquisición del lenguaje) y las diferentes opciones disponibles (i. e., centros de cuidado infantil y hogares de cuidado infantil).

Palabras clave: *Atención y educación temprana, inmigrantes, rural.*

Introduction

Social and economic factors encourage Latinos, including Mexicans, to migrate to the United States. These include seeking better opportunities, such as the hope of having a job and obtaining a better education for their children. Throughout their journey, Latino immigrants face unique challenges that vary depending on their ability to speak English, their education level, family composition, and socioeconomic and immigration status. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011a), Latinos are the largest racial/ethnic minority in the United States. Within this growing population, the number of Latino children has also increased faster than children from other racial/ethnic groups, such that today nearly one quarter (23%) of children under the age of eighteen are Latinos (NCLR, 2011). Overall, this population grew 6% over the past decade, and according to the most recent data, 17% of the children in the U.S. are Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). In fact, by 2035 many expect that one in three children will be Latino (NCLR, 2011).

The rapidly growing Latino youth population has increased the need for ECEs. As studies have emphasized, access to a good education is vital for the success of the children of immigrants (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2002). The utilization of high quality ECEs among immigrant children between three to five years old can greatly promote their cognitive, physical, and social development, and facilitate school readiness. In addition, ECEs can also play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of immigrant children into American society (Brandon, 2004).

Early Care and Education Services

For this study, the term Early Care and Education Services (ECEs) includes formal and informal (excluding maternal care) early care and education of children. Informal

ECES include those childcare services provided by relatives, friends, babysitters, or neighbors. Formal ECEs include childcare centers and childcare homes. Formal care has been associated with better cognitive outcomes for children, especially those from low-income families (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan and Carrol, 2004). Formal ECEs in particular can enable children of immigrants to enter elementary school with more advanced English skills than they might otherwise possess, making them more prepared to succeed, and can also connect their families to other social services and facilities available in the community (Matthews and Ewen, 2006).

This research will analyze the utilization of ECEs among Mexican immigrant parents. A thorough description of the patterns of ECEs utilization will be provided, then an examination of how parental beliefs about ECEs may influence the utilization of those services.

Literature Review: The Use of Early Care and Education Services (ECES) among Mexican Immigrant Families in Central Illinois

Selecting ECEs is a complex process that can be influenced by many external factors including social, economic, and cultural concerns (Fulmer, 1997; Wood and Bassou, 2008). Parents thus analyze the ECEs choices available to them using the knowledge and perceptions they have regarding the benefits and inconveniences of each option (Fulmer, 1997). Existing research emphasizes that parental utilization of ECEs is based on what parents believe is best for the child and on practical concerns such as cost and convenience (Kim and Fram, 2009; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien and Roy, 2001). Literature demonstrated that mothers with high educational levels are more likely to have their

children in formal ECEs (Early and Burchinal, 2001; Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola, 1996). The reason for selecting more a formal setting might be related to the weight these mothers give to the development promoted by formal ECEs. In contrast, low-income, minority, and immigrant parents tend to rely on their relatives as childcare providers, which is often attributed to cultural practices (Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola, 1996). In such cases, however, parents may also select relatives as childcare providers due to the cost or unavailability of other ECEs options (Fuller et al., 1996; Meyers and Jordan, 2006). For reasons yet to be discovered, children from immigrant families are less likely than children of parents born in the United States to be enrolled in formal ECEs (Jacobson, 2006).

Utilization of early care and education services. According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, forty nine percent of Latino children under five are in non-parental care (NACCRRRA, 2008). In general, Latino immigrant families rely on informal care (i.e., spousal or relative care) more often than childcare centers or family childcare homes (Becerra and Chi, 1992; Crosnoe, 2007). Children of immigrant families have lower enrollment rates than children in U.S.-born citizen families (i.e., both parents were born in the U.S.). Researchers have suggested that if formal ECEs were available, affordable, and culturally relevant, more foreign-born Latino mothers would likely use them (Buriel and Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000). Others have argued that Latinos are not averse to utilizing ECEs, but simply have limited access to affordable locations (Delgado, 2009). ECEs utilization provides benefits for child development, but it can also confer advantages to a child's parents. One important benefit for immigrant parents is that ECEs can be used as an "acculturation bridge," connecting the parents to the new culture. Utilization of ECEs among Mexican immigrant parents can also promote their social integration and economic mobility as a result of having the time to work and receive a salary (Brandon, 2004).

Barriers to early care and education services utilization. Low enrollment of Latino children in formal ECEs (child care centers and child care homes) may be due to barriers such as accessibility, income, and linguistic difficulties experienced by Latino immigrant parents in accessing and utilizing them (Capizzano, Adams and Ost, 2006; Delgado, 2009; Matthews and Ewen, 2006; NACCRRRA, 2008). Immigrant parents also deal with other challenges arising from particular constraints they face, such as the limited availability of ECEs in some areas, the quality of the available care, transportation, and inflexible schedules due to non-traditional work hours (e.g., nights and weekends). There is also concern, particularly amongst Latino immigrant parents, about leaving their child in an ECEs setting that is not appropriate, due to language and cultural differences (Child Care Bureau, 2004; Delgado, 2009).

The ECEs available to families living in rural communities may be practically nonexistent (Leach, 2009). Rural areas thus pose an even greater challenges when it comes to accessing ECEs, as smaller populations in these areas may result in fewer ECEs due to supply and demand issues, longer distances between home, ECEs locations, employment locations, and fewer skilled service providers (Colker and Dewees, 2000). Many Latino families live in rural communities and small towns, and thus face structural constraints like the lack of formal and regulated ECEs (Crowley, Lichter and Qian, 2006; Durand, Massey and Capoferro, 2005). These barriers may encourage them to rely more on informal childcare options such as friends and relatives (Atkinson, 1994, 1996; Katras, Zuiker and Bauer, 2004).

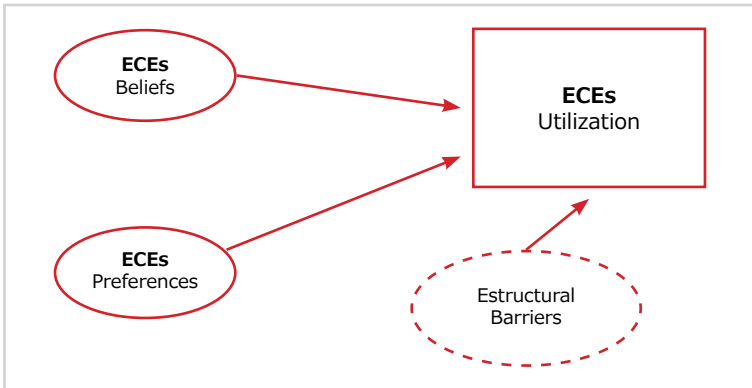
Early care and education services' preferences. The type of ECEs parents prefer for their children may influence the type of ECEs they utilize. Preferences vary according to the access to information parents have about the different types of ECEs (Han, 2004; Leibowitz and Waite, 1996). Latino families in particular might be more likely to want children to stay home at earlier ages (Zucker, Howes and Garza-Mourino, 2007). Working mothers, in

Latino families, use more informal ECEs for their children, including care provided by their partner, relatives, friends, and neighbors (Capizzano, Adams and Ost, 2006; Chyu, Pebley and Lara-Cinisomo, 2005; Crosnoe, 2007; Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola, 1996).

Parental Beliefs Relevant to ECEs Utilization. Research suggests that parents might hold particular beliefs, perceptions, and values about the different ECEs options for their children, which can influence their selection. Examples include the importance of having a relationship of trust with the caregiver, and the importance of finding an arrangement that is culturally sensitive (Holloway and Fuller, 1999; Wood and Bassou, 2008; Zinsser, 2001). However, previous studies have only begun to analyze these beliefs in relationship to other potential influences.

Beliefs about child development and childrearing. Beliefs about child development and childrearing are often transmitted from one generation to the next or constructed within a cultural milieu, shaping childrearing practices. Patterns of utilization of ECEs among Latino immigrants may therefore be influenced by parental beliefs (also called parental ethno-theories) about childrearing and

FIGURE 1. ECEs UTILIZATION MODEL



Source: self made.

family practices among Latino immigrants (Harkness and Super, 1992, 2006). While values, beliefs, and personal experiences may be an important influence on the utilization of ECEs among Latino immigrants, prior studies have only just begun to explore these in relationship to other potential influences (Buriel and Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000; Delgado, 2009).

Consequently, this research analyze the utilization of Early Care and Education Services (ECEs) among Mexican immigrant parents, looking at the patterns of utilization. It also examine potential influences on these patterns, such as preferences, beliefs and structural barriers (Figure 1).

Data Collection

A questionnaire was administered concerning Mexican immigrant parents' demographics, utilization of ECEs, beliefs relevant to ECEs, and availability of ECEs. Research was conducted in Central Illinois, in two counties served by the Child Care Resource Service at the University of Illinois. These two counties were selected because of the percentage of Latinos living there. Volunteers were recruited in a variety of settings, and data was collected from 100 Mexican immigrant mothers who had at least one child between the ages of three to five, through a questionnaire administered in interview format. The recruitment materials and the questionnaire were available in both English and Spanish for the convenience of the participants. Participants were recruited through a variety of approaches, including participant referrals and announcements at community and service events. Participants were individually interviewed at their homes. Voluntary participation was ensured. A unique ID number was assigned to each participant to identify their interview form; names were not associated with the completed interviews, and thus participants remained anonymous.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 100 Mexican immigrant mothers with children between three and five years old. The average age of the mothers were 31.6 years, with a range from 21 to 43 years of age. A third of the participants (29%) are from the north of Mexico, with two-thirds (71%) from the south. The Mexican immigrant mothers in the sample all arrived to the United States within 10 years prior the study, with 76% of them arriving between 2000 and 2008. On average, the participants had completed nine years of formal education (table 1).

Results: Description of Actual and Preferred Patterns Utilization of Early Care and Education Services (ECEs), both Formal and Informal

Actual utilization of formal ECEs. More than half of the participants (69%) were utilizing formal ECEs. Sixty-five percent have their children enrolled in a childcare center. The average time using childcare centers per week in the full sample is nearly 20 hours per week. The average amount of care among the participants who use childcare centers is 30.27 hours per week. Only few of the participants utilize childcare homes. The average time using childcare homes per week in the full sample is 2.5 hours per week, but among the participants who have their children enrolled in a childcare home, the average is nearly 28 hour per week.

Actual utilization of informal ECEs. A fifth of the participants (20%) stay at home taking care of their children. They cared for their own children all of the time. Relatives and friends, neighbors or babysitters care for One-tenth of the children (11%). The average time per week children are cared for relatives among the full sample is nearly 4 hours. Within only those using relatives as pro-

viders, the average amount of care by week is 36 hours. The average time using friends, neighbors or baby sitters per week among the full sample is 1 hour per week, but among the participants who have their children care by a friends, neighbors or baby sitters, the average is about 16 hour per week. The data shows that participants with five-year-old children were utilizing more childcare centers than those with younger children. Informal ECEs are less utilized, and in some cases not utilized even with children at age five (table 2).

Preferred ECEs utilization. Participants were asked to indicate on a likert scale for each type of ECEs whether they would prefer to use that type: 1 not at all, 2 less, 3 the same or 4 more. A yes/no question asked about satisfaction with current arrangements. A follow-up open-ended question asked mothers' to explain their satisfaction answer. Most of the mothers (80%) described being satisfied with their childcare arrangements. In general, participants preferred to have their younger children in more family-like arrangements (informal ECEs) and their older children in the more formal ECEs. Almost half (45%) of the participants that are not utilizing formal ECES, however most of them expressed that they would like to do so.

Child Care Center (CCC). Most of the participants, utilizing childcare centers, are satisfied with the amount of time their children spend there. Mothers shared why they like to have their child in a CCC: "My child learns many things, including English, and also do a lot of activities"; "My child is learning new things and do exercises"; "I like that my child is learning and the teacher communicates very well with him, they treat him well." Nearly a third (31%) of the mothers would like their children spend more time at the CCC. These are the mothers who have their children in programs where the child goes for 3 hours per day; most of these children are 3 to 4 years old. Among all mothers that do not have their child at a CCC, 88% of them responded that they would like to have their children at a CCC.

Child Care Home (CCH). More than half of the participants utilizing child care homes were satisfied with the amount of time their children spend there. However, 27% of them would prefer that their child spend less time at the CCH, and 9% of them do not like to have their child at the CCH. Some of the mothers shared how they feel about utilizing CCHs: "I am happy now, but the CCH I used before was bad, they treated my child bad"; "I would like to find a CCH just for Latinos, because I want my child to learn Spanish first and then English." In general, participants do not perceive CCHs to be formal ECEs; they compare this type of care with that provided by a friend or a neighbor. Regarding this issue, one of the participants who has the child in a CCH expressed: "I would like to take my child to a place where he can learn."

Informal ECEs. Mexican immigrant mothers feel that children are more secure at home, and they also feel that they are sharing their culture with their children. One of the participants said: "I take care of my child very well, and she is secure with me." Seven children received care from the participant's partner. Among these, four of the mothers were happy with the amount of time their partner provided care for the child, two of them would like the partner to spend more time providing care for the child, and one reported wishing the partner would provide less care for the child. Only three mothers have an adult relative caring for their child, and one of these mothers is not happy with that type of care.

Five of the mothers have their childcare provided by a friend/neighbor/baby sitter. Three of the mothers like the amount of time their child is cared for by a friend/neighbor/baby sitter, while two of them did not. Three of the mothers have a son/daughter less than eighteen years of age taking care of their younger child. Two of the mothers are happy with the time their child is cared for by his or her older brother or sister, but one of them does not like this situation.

Barriers to early care and education services utilization. Even if parents prefer some types of ECEs over oth-

ers, there are multiple barriers that might impact their utilization, including structural barriers like ECEs availability, cost, language, and transportation. All participants responded to these set of questions about the barriers they face to access ECEs.

ECEs availability. The availability and location of various ECEs may also provide structural barriers to utilizing them. Data in table 3 illustrates the availability of sites and slots per zip code. A ratio was calculated to analyze the availability of ECEs in the different areas in which participants lived. This ratio was calculated, dividing the number of slots available by children population (on age to use those slots). Participants in the study were from seven different counties. One of the counties had a 1.89 ratio, while another one only have a 0.16 ratio.

Cost. When asked about the barriers to utilizing formal ECEs, 74% selected cost as a primary barrier to using a childcare center with 71% reporting cost as an obstacle to using a childcare home. It is clear that cost is a barrier to using formal ECEs, since only 7% of the participants reported financial security. Furthermore, more than half of the participants (55%) reported being in a difficult financial situation, not having enough for basics or only meeting basic needs. Table 4 illustrates how cost is one of the highest barriers to utilizing formal ECEs.

Language. A third of the participants selected language as a barrier to using a childcare center (28%) or a childcare home (31%). Most (83%) reported "not at all" or "just a little" ability to carry on a conversation in English, both understanding and speaking. In national surveys that use the same questions to report English proficiency among foreign-born Mexicans, only 71% answer "not at all - Just a little" (Hakimzadeh and Cohn, 2007).

Transportation. Only 23% of the participants selected transportation as a barrier to using a childcare center or a child care home. 82% have a car or access to one: only 18% of the mothers do not.

Parental Beliefs Relevant to ECEs Utilization

Beliefs about child development and childrearing. Participants reported the importance they give to some child development and childrearing beliefs. These beliefs were grouped into three main categories: social skills, teamwork skills and cognitive development (table 5).

Social skills. Participants agreed that it is important for the child to learn English, and to communicate in public. Social skills related to discipline, such as, teaching the child to follow rules, to respect adults, to be organized and clean, and to have good manners were important for all mothers in the sample. One of the mothers shared that it is important for her child to learn good behavior: "they should teach the child to behave." The vast majority of them (99%) agree that discipline should be learned at school.

Some participants expressed that it is not important for the young children to speak English. They want their children to speak Spanish first, just in case they go back to Mexico. One of the mothers had a four-year-old girl who is at home, because she does not have a place in a Spanish "pre-k" class, although she had a place in an English-speaking class. The mother preferred to wait for one more year to have her child in the Spanish group, and meanwhile, is taking care of her child at home.

Teamwork skills. Participants agreed about the importance of encouraging the child to share toys, and to work and play with other children. Helping the child to make friends was important for most of the participants. Mexican immigrant mothers talked about the importance of encourage their children to work and share with other children.

Cognitive development. In the area of cognitive development, participants gave more importance to preparing the child for school, and instructing the child in basics like shapes and colors. It was important for them that their children be prepared before entering elementary school; this finding agrees with past literature (NACCRRRA, 2008).

One of the participants shared: "I like the place my child goes. They prepare him in advance for school." Another mother recognized that "The child is learning many things. He learns English and he also does many activities."

Asking the participants what else they thought the child should learn at ECEs, they said: "children should learn to be independent, to be outgoing, to talk properly, and to control his or her temper." The issue of teaching the child about personal security arose in several of the later interviews, during which time a child molester was detected around one of the study locations. Therefore, participants were more concerned than usual about their child's security.

Desirable provider characteristics. This section describes the most important provider characteristics that this group of Mexican immigrant mothers looks for when selecting a childcare setting. These characteristics were grouped into four main categories: culture sensitivity, warmth and respect, parent supportive, and professionalism (table 6).

Cultural sensitivity. For 38% of the participants having a Latino provider for their children was important. Half of them (53%) responded that it was important to have a provider who speaks Spanish. Two thirds of the participants (73%) agreed that it was important that the provider encourage their child to speak Spanish. Most of the participants (87%) expressed that it is important to have a provider who understand their culture and a provider who is aware of their traditions.

Warmth and respect. It was important for all the participants to have a provider who is responsive and sensitive to the child's needs, and also a provider that makes the child feel comfortable. For this particular group, it is also important to have a provider that shows affection to the child. Most of the participants also agreed that they look for a provider who makes them feel comfortable.

Parent supportive. Participants look for providers that are friendly to them (95%), and give them advice about how to care for their children (92%). These are important

characteristics that immigrant take into account when balancing cost and rewards of the different ECESs options.

Professionalism. Professionalism is a broad concept that in this case includes safety, trustworthiness, and training. All the participants looked for a provider who is trustworthy, and who was going to keep their child safe. They recognized that an ECE provider should have special training to care for the child. Some of the participants also added that it is very important that their children do not experience psychological abuse.

Preliminary descriptive analyses for beliefs about child development and childrearing as well as desirable provider characteristics indicated little variation. This may be attributed to the homogeneity of the participants, all from Mexico with similar background and demographic characteristics. Given this high agreement, data will be presented to show the percentage of endorsement.

Relationships between utilization of formal ECEs and respondent characteristics and structural barriers. The results of correlations among demographic variables and the study outcome variable—conducted to determine which should be included in the model—are shown in table 7. A dichotomous variable was created for the use of formal ECEs (1 = Using formal ECEs, and 0 = Not using formal ECEs). Demographic variables such as family's average monthly income, and number of children were significantly correlated to the outcome variable. There were also some significant inter-correlations among the demographic variables.

Relationships between utilization of formal ECEs and beliefs about child development and childrearing. Correlations among the belief predictor variables and the utilization of formal ECEs are shown in table 8. Even though predictor variables were salient for most of the participants, those were not significantly correlated to the use of formal ECEs.

Relationships between utilization of formal ECEs and desirable provider's characteristics. Correlations among provider characteristics variables and the study outcome

variables are shown in table 9. Cultural sensitivity variables (e.g., a provider that speaks Spanish, a provider who encourages my child to speak Spanish, and a provider who understands my culture) were significantly negatively correlated with the use of formal ECEs. Parent supportive predictor variables (e.g., having a provider that is friendly to me and gives parents advice) were significantly negatively correlated to the use of formal ECEs. Provider characteristics such as “warmth and respect” and “professionalism” were not significantly correlated with the use of formal ECEs.

Relationships between utilization of formal ECEs, and the composite scores of the beliefs about child development and childrearing and composed scores of the desirable provider’s characteristics. Correlations among the utilization of formal ECEs, and the composed scores of beliefs about child development and childrearing and desirable provider characteristics are shown in table 10. Culture sensitivity and parent supportive scores were negative significantly correlated to the use of formal ECEs. Correlations among composite scores and demographic variables were also analyzed. Two negatively significant correlations emerged. Family average monthly income was negatively associated with the provider characteristic of cultural sensitivity and the number of ECEs-knowledgeable people was correlated with the parent-supportive provider characteristic.

Discussion

The current study explores the ECEs utilization patterns among Mexican immigrants living in Central Illinois. It used the proposed model to examine both the perceived costs and benefits of ECEs choices, as these are embedded in cultural contexts and constrained by structural elements of the surrounding environment. It lays the foundation for further examination of the social relationships

and messaging strategies that may facilitate Mexican immigrant parents' utilization of formal ECEs. The discussion will address descriptive findings related to Mexican immigrant parents' patterns of actual and preferred utilization of ECEs, and the beliefs relevant to ECEs utilization.

Description of Actual and Preferred Utilization Patterns of Early Care and Education Services (ECEs), both Formal and Informal.

Past research on childcare utilization among low-income, minority and immigrant parents showed that immigrant parents (Mexican immigrant parents included) rely on their relatives as childcare providers (Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola, 1996; Jacobson, 2006; Matthews and Ewen, 2006; Meyers and Jordan, 2006). Contrary to past research, this study found that 69% of the participants are utilizing formal ECEs, with only 11% utilizing informal ECEs. However, this general pattern does not tell the whole story. While most of the participants recognize the benefits of formal ECEs, some still utilize informal ECEs, or take care of their young children (4 years old or younger) by themselves. Ultimately, participants would like to have their younger children in the more family-like arrangements (informal ECEs) and their older in formal ECEs, mostly CCCs. This finding agrees with past literature, supporting the notion that, across ethnicity, many women prefer to leave their children with their parents or kin members until the age of three to four years (Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola, 1996; Kuhlthau and Mason, 1996). However, this is simply not feasible for many of these women.

Barriers to ECEs utilization. There are a number of practical concerns are likely to be salient influences upon ECEs utilization (Meyers and Jordan, 2006; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien and Roy, 2001). In this case, the cost of formal ECEs cannot be overlooked, since it is the most

salient finding. More than seventy percent of the participants selected cost as a barrier to using formal ECEs. This is a consequence of their poor financial state; only 7% characterized their family as having good financial conditions. A third of the participants selected language as a barrier to utilizing formal ECEs. This percentage is lower than expected considering the low English proficiency levels reported by this particular group of Mexican immigrant mothers.

Less than one fifth of the participants reported speaking English pretty well or very well. This is lower than the levels of other groups of foreign-born Mexicans in the U.S. (Hakimzadeh and Cohn, 2007; Raffaelli and Wiley, 2012). Perhaps they did not expect to find Spanish speakers providers; they do expect to have to cope with the challenges of language barriers, since they are coming to a place with lower Latino population. Thus, they might expect to cope with these challenges in everyday life, including while using ECEs. Immigrants (including Mexican immigrants), living in rural communities, have fewer opportunities to take ESL classes due to their work schedules and availability (Raffaelli and Wiley, 2012). There are additional barriers that stop them from utilizing formal ECEs, such as a lack of public transportation and the unavailability of formal ECEs slots. Participants that selected transportation as a barrier lived in rural communities where there public transportation is limited. Transportation and other services are not as accessible as in urban areas; therefore, participants living in rural communities have to own a car or rely on their relatives and friends to be able to commute to their places of work and to have access to other services such as ECEs. In addition, the availability of formal ECEs slots varies remarkably according to the zip code where the participants lived. The availability ratio, shows that four of the seven areas where participants lived have a ratio close to 0.5, one of the areas have a ratio close to 2.00, and one has a ratio of 0.16. Indeed, it is less availability in areas where the population density is lower. A reason for the lack of formal ECEs slots could be that generally there are fewer

resources in rural areas, making these communities less attractive for childcare providers. In recent years, Mexican immigrants have migrated to new destination communities, mainly rural destinations. Unfortunately, many of these receiving communities have lacked sufficient information, infrastructure, and resources to facilitate their adaptation (Durand, Massey and Capoferro, 2005; Marrow, 2005).

Parental Beliefs Relevant to ECEs Utilization

One innovative aspect of this study is the consideration of parental beliefs relevant to ECEs utilization. Parental beliefs involve beliefs about child development and childrearing, as well as desirable provider characteristics. In past characterizations, Mexican immigrant mothers have expressed that ECEs promote cognitive, physical, and social development for their children (Clarke-Stewart and Allhusen, 2005; NACCRRRA, 2008). This study extends such extant research by documenting that cultural beliefs and values about child development and childrearing appear to influence parents' perceptions about different ECE options as demonstrated among Mexican immigrants living in Central Illinois.

Beliefs about child development and childrearing. Beliefs about child development and childrearing were divided in three main areas: social skills, teamwork skills, and cognitive development. Most of the participants recognize as important that the care a child receives prepare the child for school, and teach the child basics such as shapes and colors. In general, participants recognize that social skills are important for their children; they have to speak English, learn how to communicate in public, learn good manners and to respect others. Participants see these skills as important for the children need to learn while in a ECEs. Learning teamwork skills such as play with others and learn to share were important for these participants. This demonstrates that Mexican immigrant parents would

like that their children learn to behave and to respect adults. Mexican immigrant parents rated most belief-rooted statements about what their children need from care as important. However, participants express that they would like to know the methods used to teach their children, as well as the methods used to apply discipline.

Notably, in this sample, all mothers, regardless of the childcare arrangements they are utilizing, including caring for child themselves, expressed the benefits of formal ECEs most often cited in the literature (e.g., helping the child to learn English and preparing the child for formal school). This suggests that they are getting some messages about childcare from the context around them. These particular touted benefits are probably salient since they want their children to be successful at school and as they become adults.

Desirable provider characteristics. In the questionnaire, desirable provider characteristics were grouped as follows: cultural sensitivity, warmth and respect, parent supportive, and professionalism. For a large majority of participants (87%) it is important that the provider recognize their culture and traditions. This finding is very important since it implies a need among parents for connection with the providers. Parents need information about what to expect from providers, just as providers are likely to need information about what Mexican immigrant parents expect from them. In other words, they should understand each other, creating a better understanding of particular beliefs and childrearing practices. While only 38% of the participants said having a Latino provider is important or very important, 50% think it is important to have a Spanish speaker who can communicate with parents and children alike. In fact, parents were primarily worried about the communication between the provider and the child. Parents know they will not always be able to communicate with the providers, as it happens in other settings; it is something they cope with every day (Wiley, Raffaelli, Galarza, Tran, Rodriguez and Lazarevic, 2010).

In addition, having the child cared for someone who is warm and shows respect is important. Participants look for a provider who makes them feel comfortable. Most of all, they look for a provider who is responsive to the child's needs, who makes the child feel comfortable, and who shows affection to the child. This is a very important finding since it is culturally rooted. Emotion expression and socialization have a strong cultural basis (Eisenberg, 1999). Mexican immigrant parents expect the provider to be affectionate to the child. They look for the signs of affection with which they are familiar, such as a provider who is hugging or kissing their child. Therefore, Mexican immigrant parents should be informed about ECE practices in the U.S. They should know that best practice dictates that providers care for their children by nurturing them and attending to their safety, but without a lot of physical contact. If the provider does not hug or kiss the child, it is not necessarily a lack of warmth or attributable to discrimination (e.g. because the child is Mexican). Mexican immigrant parents need to understand that there are policies and practices regarding providers' behavior, particularly about "physical contact" that ECEs typically have in order to avoid child abuse or relaxed misunderstandings. This type of information would help to prevent cultural misunderstandings.

In addition, participants also value a provider who is friendly to them and those who are sources of advice about how to care for their children. This is important; parents recognize they need advice about childrearing practices, since parents are learning to navigate in the new culture, particularly learning how to navigate the U.S. educational system. While they may be familiar with childrearing conventions from their home culture, these may or may not translate. Providers can be a wonderful resource. Participants also value professional and trustworthy providers.

Overall, participants seemed to value all the provider characteristics. Little variation was encountered on questions related to warmth, respect, and professionalism. The greater variation was in those characteristics related to

culture sensitivity. It is important for Mexican immigrant parents to have a provider who recognizes their culture and speaks Spanish. At the same time, they are conscious that it is difficult to find Latinos providers in communities since they are new destinations.

Conclusion

When Mexican immigrants reach their new destination, they bring a wealth of experiences, practices, and values; they are already experienced in their culture of origin. Even with a wealth of resources and strengths, they face structural and cultural barriers while becoming immersed in new communities. In this study, findings demonstrated that Mexican immigrant parents with children between the ages of three to five years of age are willing to utilize formal ECEs under the right conditions.

When these findings are considered in the context of past literature, we must conclude that increasing formal ECEs utilization among Mexican immigrants requires first a serious and systematic exploration of their needs, strengths, and preferences, and then a concerted effort to tailor services and messaging in ways that meet their needs (Wiley and Ebata, 2004). We believe that more Mexican immigrants would choose formal ECEs if practitioners and policy makers developed better methods to inform them about the different ECEs, as well as making those ECEs more affordable and accessible for them. We conclude that there is a need for trustworthy cultural intermediaries to guide Mexican immigrant parents while they are selecting a childcare provider. Intermediaries should work following the lay worker- or promotora-model that has been shown to have effectiveness in health promotion (Eng and Parker, 2002; Rhodes, Foley, Zometa and Bloom, 2007). Accordingly, this group of parents, social workers, friends, teachers, and other Mexican immigrants with experience in using ECEs in the U.S. should work as intermediaries.

One implication of this is that professionals must create appropriate information and materials to pass on to a wide variety of key community members who may act as cultural intermediaries. These may include Mexican or Latino immigrants who are already taking or have taken part in formal ECEs.

We expect generally that the more Mexican immigrant parents interact with cultural-intermediaries, the more they will recognize the benefits of formal ECEs, and the more they will consider formal ECEs as a choice. These cultural- intermediaries do not necessarily have to share a cultural background, but they must be able to communicate effectively, preferably in Spanish, and build rapport. To have credibility, they must exhibit cultural sensitivity, particularly with regard to concerns related to childrearing and family values. Therefore, encouraging immigrant mothers, in this case Mexican immigrant mothers, to consider formal ECEs must begin with an understanding of their culturally rooted concerns (Child Care Bureau, 2004).

Formal ECEs in the U.S. must become more culturally welcoming, particularly in rural communities where ethnic enclaves do not exist. Extant research with older children in formal schooling has demonstrated that a cultural mismatch between home and school is a barrier to parent involvement in children's education (Arias and Morillo-Campbell, 2008). The findings of this study suggest that cultural mismatch might be a barrier to utilization of ECEs. Immigrant parents note that ECEs staff would not need to be bilingual but should be able to communicate effectively about basic issues related to the child's wellbeing. This might seem a difficult task for many rural communities, but Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR and R) staff should consider routine professional development opportunities to increase cultural competency and basic communication skills for ECEs providers, especially those in non-metropolitan communities with growing immigrant populations. CCR and R staff should also consider making available concrete tools such as basic dual-language daily or weekly report sheets to facilitate communication and mutual respect between parents and ECEs professionals.

Given the financial struggles of Mexican immigrant families, it should not come as a surprise that cost and availability are their most salient barriers to utilizing formal ECEs. Early care and education services should be more affordable and available even in rural communities; thus, information focused on Mexican immigrants should emphasize that subsidies exist to make high quality formal ECEs available. This population needs information regarding subsidies; for example, Spanish versions of forms to be filled out (and Spanish-language assistance for filling these out). They also need a clear understanding of what documentation for which they do and do not need to be eligible. The next challenge is to have enough available formal ECEs slots of the right age range and for the hours needed. When these basic structural needs are met, it is then likely that parents will attend to the more subtle cultural issues that also matter to them.

Mexican immigrant families encounter numerous difficulties in accessing formal ECEs, including language barriers, distances, and costs. However, this study shows us that they are on track; at least by age five, most children are in formal ECEs. Increased attention by researchers, policymakers and childcare professionals can only continue this important trajectory, benefitting the children of immigrants (who will most likely grow up to be U.S. citizens) and promoting the social integration and economic stability and mobility of their families.

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Annexes

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERISTICS

	%	M (SD)
Age of the mother	31.66	(5.59)
Years living in the U.S.	10.36	(3.69)
Number of children per family	2.23	(0.94)
Children's age	5.75	(2.81)
Children's gender		
Male	50.5	
Female	49.5	
Marital Status		
Single	6	
Committed Relationship	37	
Married	54	
Separated	3	
Education		
Elementary school	29	
Middle School	43	
High School	23.7	
Associate's/Bachelor's Degree	4.4	
Employment situation		
Work full time	40.8	
Work part time	12.3	
Not working (outside the home)	46.9	
Family's financial situation		
Not enough for basics, struggling each month	19	
Meeting only basic needs	36	
Financially adequate, but little savings	38	
In good financial condition	7	
Family's average monthly income		

Less than \$1250	40
\$1,250 - \$2,500	41
\$2,500 - \$3,750	15
More than \$3,750	4
Latino residents in the neighborhood	
Few or some Latino residents	59
Mostly/ All Latino residents	41

Source: self made.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR TOTAL HOURS PER WEEK (168) OF CHILD CARE BY:

	Full sample	Children age 3	Children age 4	Children age 5
	N=100	N=27	N=31	N=42
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Mother	140.23 (18.75)	142.15 (24.87)	141.39 (19.51)	138.14 (13.06)
Formal ECEs				
Child Care Center	19.98 (16.27)	16.07 (18.07)	12.19 (13.54)	28.24 (13.13)
Child Care Home	2.51 (8.90)	.00 (0.00)	6.87 (14.73)	0.90 (3.35)
Informal ECEs				
Relatives	3.97 (13.74)	8.29 (20.22)	5.84 (15.09)	0.00 (0.00)
Friend / Neighbor / Baby Sitter	1.14 (4.97)	0.89 (3.39)	1.77 (6.40)	0.83 (4.67)

Source: self made.

TABLE 3. 2010 ECES AVAILABILITY

Zip Code	Partici- pants %	Number of sites	S l o t s Available	# chil- dren 3-5	R a t i o s l o t s / children
A	19	42	317	691	0.46
B	19	46	1016	538	1.89
C	21	107	651	1130	0.58
D	8	22	116	741	0.16
E	4	35	316	555	0.57
F	4	31	407	582	0.70
G	25	10	109	192	0.57

Source: self made.

TABLE 4. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR BARRIERS* TO
FORMAL ECES UTILIZATION

	Child care center M (SD)	Child care home M (SD)
Cost	3.13 (1.19)	3.01 (1.25)
Transportation	1.67 (1.08)	1.69 (1.11)
Language	1.79 (.967)	1.83 (1.01)

* Answer choices from 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "A lot"

Source: self made.

TABLE 5. PERCENT ENDORSEMENT TO BELIEFS ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREARING

How important is that the care my child receives from others:	%				
	Very Important	Important	Neither	S o - mewhat Insignifi- cant	Insigni- ficant
Social skills					
Teach the child English	85	13	1	0	1
Teach the child how to communicate in public	84	15	0	1	0
Teach the child good manners	90	9	0	0	1
Teach the child to respect adults	91	8	0	0	1
Teach the child to be organize and clean	86	13	0	0	1
Teamwork skills					
Help the child to make friends	60	35	2	2	1
Encourage the child to work and play with other children	78	22	0	0	0
Encourage the child to share toys with others	77	23	0	0	0
Cognitive Development					
Prepare the child for school	89	11	0	0	0
Teach the child basics like shapes and colors	84	16	0	0	0

Source: self made.

TABLE 6. PERCENT ENDORSEMENT TO DESIRABLE PROVIDER'S CHARACTERISTICS

How important is to have my child care by a provider who	%				
	Very Important	Important	Neither	S o - mewhat Insignifi- cant	Insigni- ficant
Culture Sensitivity					
Is Latino	18	20	34	4	24
Speak Spanish	30	23	26	6	15
Encourage my child to speak Spanish	36	37	15	4	8
Understands my culture	53	34	5	6	2
Is aware of my traditions	49	38	6	3	4
Warm and Respect					
Is responsive and sensitive to my child's needs	91	9	0	0	0
Shows affection to my child	89	9	2	0	0
Makes my child feel comfortable	92	8	0	0	0
Make me feel comfortable	83	16	1	0	0
Parent Supportive					
Is friendly to me	72	23	4	0	1
Give parents advice	66	26	3	2	3
Professionalism					
Keeps my child safe	98	2	0	0	0
Is a trustworthy person	97	2	1	0	0
Is trained to take care of my child	95	4	1	0	0

Source: self made.

TABLE 7. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UTILIZATION OF FORMAL ECES, RESPONDENT'S CHARACTERISTICS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Use Formal ECES	.074	.361**	-.059	.158	.129	.247*	.152	-.034	-.002
1. Number of children	--	.219*	.113	-.175	-.075	.070	.054	-.060	.019
2. Children's age		--	.000	.051	-.011	.158	-.035	-.013	-.077
3. Language proficiency			--	.213*	.208*	.212*	.310**	.138	.168
4. Years of school completed				--	.111	.350**	.081	-.123	-.087
5. Employment situation					--	.347**	-.004	-.062	-.142
6. Family average monthly income						--	.188	-.269**	-.255*
7. Number of adult relatives living nearby							--	.051	.191
8. Number of sites by zip code								--	.543**
9. Capacity by zip code									--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 8. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UTILIZATION OF FORMAL ECES, AND BELIEFS ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREARING (HOW IMPORTANT IS THAT THE CARE MY CHILD RECEIVE FROM OTHERS:)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Use Formal ECES	-0.075	0.162	-0.001	0.013	-0.054	-0.035	-0.095	-0.161	-0.167	-0.057
Social skills										
1. Teach the child English	--	.509**	.708**	.688**	.605**	0.068	0.081	0.028	.466**	0.149
2. Teach the child how to communicate in public		--	.621**	.593**	.599**	.367**	.373**	.306**	.212*	0.127
3. Teach the child good manners			--	.935**	.883**	0.189	0.157	.247*	0.17	0.165
4. Teach the child to respect adults				--	.864**	.264**	0.171	.212*	0.113	0.119
5. Teach the child to be organized and clean					--	.341**	.599**	.201*	0.133	0.122
Teamwork skills										
6. Help the child to make friends						--	.372**	.448**	0.071	0.156
7. Encourage the child to work and play with other children							--	.800**	.199*	0.163
8. Encourage the child to share toys with others								--	0.112	0.15
Cognitive Development										
9. Prepare the child for school									--	.457**
10. Teach the child basics like shapes and colors										--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 9. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UTILIZATION OF FORMAL ECES, AND DESIRABLE PROVIDER'S CHARACTERISTICS (IMPORTANCE OF HAVING MY CHILD CARE BY A PROVIDER WHO:)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Use Formal ECES	-0.183	-.291**	-.376**	-.197*	-0.181	-0.059	-0.002	-0.038	-.227*	-.231*	-0.096	-0.111	-0.067
Culture Sensitivity													
1. Is Latino	--	.603**	.409**	.392**	.367**	0.186	0.083	0.035	0.181	0.187	0.004	0.005	-0.02
2. Speak Spanish		--	.605**	.406**	.344**	0.159	.208*	0.182	.262**	.226*	0.101	0.117	.207*
3. Encourage my child to speak Spanish			--	.601**	.561**	.268**	.274**	.286**	.210*	.273**	0.108	-0.086	.226*
4. Understand my culture				--	.858**	.319**	.265**	.247*	0.088	.248*	0.12	-0.035	0.182
5. Is aware of my traditions					--	.364**	.240*	.262**	0.105	.223*	0.036	-0.084	0.018
Warm and Respect													
6. Is responsive and sensitive to my child's needs						--	.610**	.680**	.206*	.256*	.205*	-0.052	0.058
7. Shows affection to my child							--	.750**	.291**	0.158	0.135	-0.055	.205*
8. Makes my child feel comfortable								--	.293**	0.124	.221*	-0.049	.203*
Parent Supportive													
9. Is friendly to me									--	.336**	0.033	-0.089	0.05
10. Give parents advice										--	.000	-0.047	0.163
Professionalism													
11. Keeps my child safe											--	.272**	.486**
12. Is a trustworthy person												--	.263**
13. Is trained to take care of my child													--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 10. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG UTILIZATION OF FORMAL ECES, COMPOSED SCORES FOR BELIEFS ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREARING, AND COMPOSED SCORES FOR DESIRABLE PROVIDER'S CHARACTERISTICS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Use Formal ECES	.005	-.103	-.126	-.320**	-.078	-.279**	-.119
1. Social skills	--	.306**	.238*	.142	.172	.223*	.117
2. Teamwork skills		--	.196	.118	.279**	.276**	.058
3. Cognitive development			--	.010	.478**	.150	.304**
4. Culture sensitivity				--	.303**	.324**	.108
5. Warmth and respect					--	.352**	.135
6. Parent Supportive						--	.045
7. Professionalism							--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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