

Early Teacher-Child Relationships of Multilingual Children

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Teacher-Child Relationships and Children's Behavior

Teacher-child relationships serves as a base for children as they engage in opportunities to learn in the classroom

Early teacher-child relationships have an enduring impact on children's school adjustment.

Teacher-child relationships in the early years of schooling are associated with future internalizing and externalizing behaviors, social competence, and achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; White, 2013).

Multilingual Students

In 2012, more than 12 million (22%) children in the United States spoke a language other than English at home (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

In the past decade, the number of children who speak more than one language has continued to grow; with the rate of children speaking languages other than English increasing by 2%.

As the population of children in the United States who speak more than one language continues to increase it becomes particularly important to understand their school experiences.

Challenges for Multilingual Students

Learning an additional language can make adjusting to school particularly challenging for children (Fumoto, Hargreaves, & Maxell, 2007).

Children learning English reported a lower sense of school belonging and lower levels of academic self-efficacy (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Morrison, Cosden, O' Farrell and Campos; 2003).

Children must learn the culture of the school and classroom while also interacting within the classroom using a language with which they have less expertise or are still learning.

Previous Research

Teachers reported more positive relationships in the fall with children who were learning English and Spanish than children who were English only speakers in Head Start classrooms(Luchtel et al., 2010).

Fumoto et al. (2007) found that children with the least experience and ability speaking English were perceived to have less closeness in teacher-child relationships at the beginning of the school year. These differences were not significant by the end of the year.

Culture and Language

The parenting practices and socialization goals of parents of multilingual children are distinct from the practices of monolingual English households (Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010) and are likely to influence how children interact with teachers.

Alternatively, language difficulties might interfere with communication and relationship formation between children and their teachers.

Current Study

1. Do multilingual students experience a different quality of teacher-child relationships than their monolingual peers?
2. After accounting for differences in language skills, do we still see differences in the relationship quality of multilingual and monolingual students?

Data

Early Learning Ohio Project

- Classroom ecology
- Cross-sectional sample of children in grades Prek-3rd grade

Participants (N = 840)

Enrolled in one urban school district in Ohio

Included children in preschool through grade 3 with information on language background and data on teacher-reported relationship quality in the fall or spring.

The majority of the children enrolled in the study were male (52%).

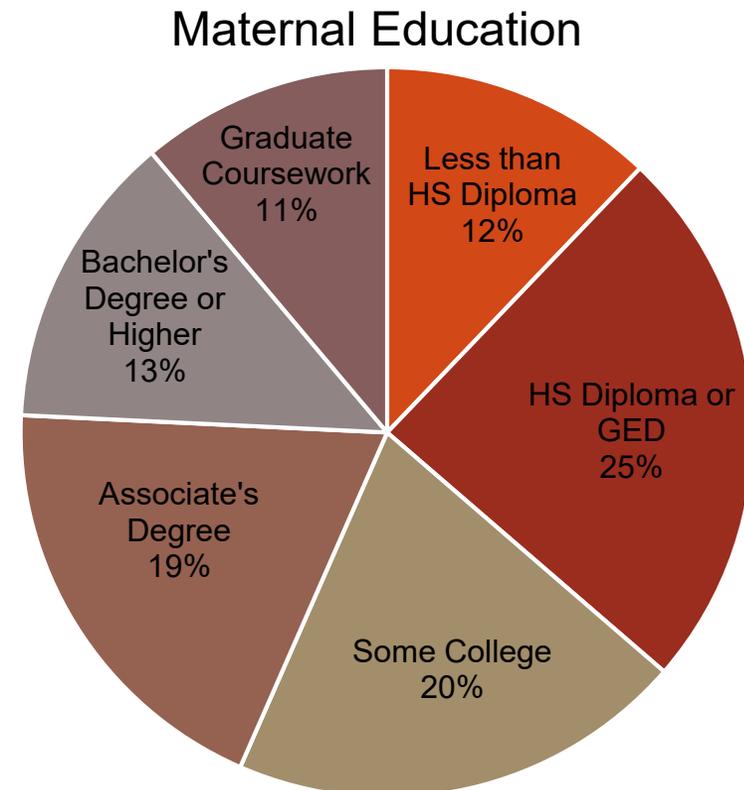
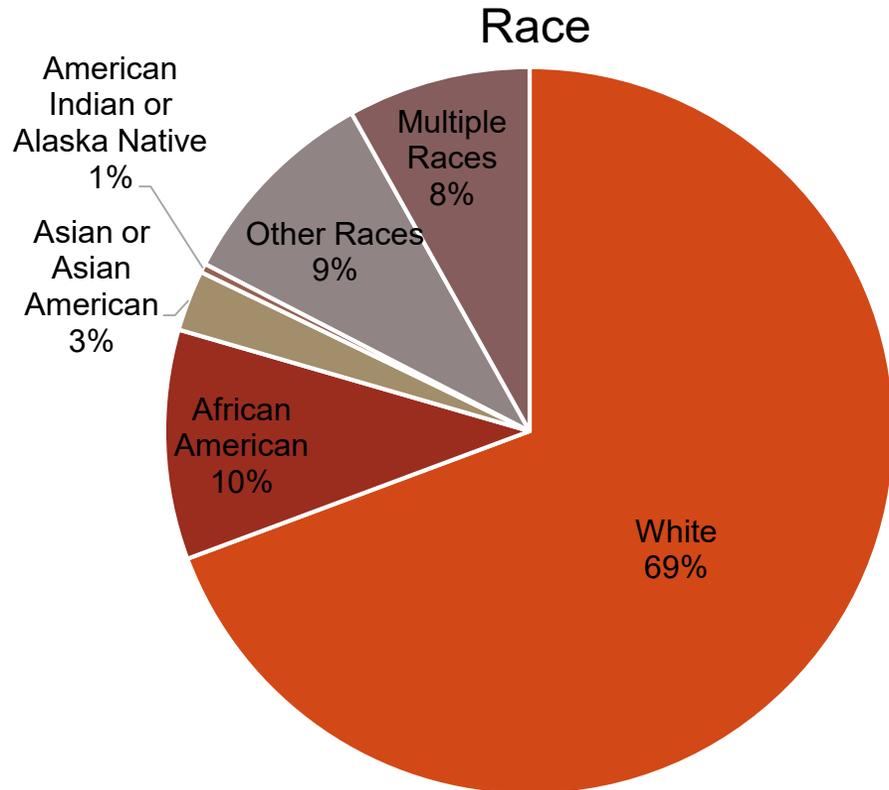
Participants

Approximately 25% ($n = 212$) of the children were classified as multilingual as they resided in households where languages other than English were regularly spoken.

The most represented languages in our sample included Spanish (127), Somali (23), and Arabic (15).

Other examples of languages included Burmese, French, Cambodian, German, Hakha Chin, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Lao, Punjabi, Swahili, etc.

Child Characteristics



Eighteen percent ($n = 150$) of children reported to be Hispanic or Latino

Teachers

82 classroom teachers.

Almost all of the teachers were female (95%), and no teachers reported being fluent in a language other than English.

Teachers were fairly well educated with 90% completing a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

Teachers were also experienced with the majority (57.5%) reporting teaching for 10 or more years.

Measures

Teacher-child relationship closeness and conflict was measured using the **Student-Teacher Relationship Scale-Short Form** (STRS; Pianta, 2001).

Children's vocabulary skills were assessed using the **Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement Picture Vocabulary subtest** (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001).

Analytic Approach

Applied multilevel modeling to account for the clustering of children within classrooms.

Controlled for two factors that have been linked to teacher-child relationships, child gender and grade (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McCormick & O'Connor, 2015).

To examine whether language skills account for the differences in closeness and conflict for multilingual and monolingual children we conducted additional analyses controlling for vocabulary skills in the fall.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Teacher-Child Relationships and Vocabulary Skills*

Variable	Full Sample <i>M (SD)</i>	Monolingual English speakers ^a <i>M (SD)</i>	Multilingual children ^b <i>M (SD)</i>
Fall Teacher-Child relationship (<i>N</i> = 662)			
Closeness	3.13 (0.69)	3.16 (0.66)	2.97 (0.81)
Conflict	0.64 (0.81)	0.64 (0.82)	0.63 (0.77)
Fall Vocabulary skills (<i>N</i> = 616)	17.40 (4.29)	18.12 (3.84)	14.28 (4.77)
Spring Teacher-Child relationship (<i>N</i> = 832)			
Closeness	3.26 (0.69)	3.27 (0.69)	3.22 (0.71)
Conflict	0.72 (0.90)	0.75 (0.94)	0.65 (0.78)
Spring Vocabulary skills (<i>N</i> = 802)	17.77 (4.46)	18.88 (3.78)	14.38 (4.70)

^aDoes not reside in home where languages other than English are regularly spoken.

^bResides in home where languages other than English are regularly spoken.

RQ 1: Do multilingual students experience a different quality of teacher-child relationships than their monolingual peers?

Table 2. Results of Multilevel-Effects Models to Predict Conflict and Closeness in Fall and Spring from Language Background

Predictor	Fall Conflict		Spring Conflict		Fall Closeness		Spring Closeness	
	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.79	< .001	0.90	< .001	3.03	< .001	3.26	<.001
Language background (speaks multiple languages = 1)	0.03	.71	-0.11	.12	-0.19	.005	-0.12	.03
Gender (female = 1)	-0.27	< .001	-0.27	< .001	0.23	< .001	0.23	<.001
Grade level (preschool = 0, elementary school = 1)	-0.02	.88	-0.02	.88	0.02	.87	-0.14	.16

Note: Coefficients in bold were statistically significant at $p < .05$.

RQ 2: After accounting for differences in language skills, do we still see differences in the relationship quality of multilingual and monolingual students?

Table 3. Results of Multilevel-Effects Models to Predict Conflict and Closeness in Fall and Spring from Language Background and Language Skills

Predictor	Fall Conflict		Spring Conflict		Fall Closeness		Spring Closeness	
	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.94	< .001	1.09	< .001	2.57	< .001	2.78	< .001
Language background (speaks multiple languages = 1)	-0.01	.94	-0.15	.06	-0.08	.26	-0.03	.66
Language skills ^a	-0.01	.28	-0.01	.13	0.03	< .001	0.03	< .001
Gender (female = 1)	-0.27	< .001	-0.27	< .001	0.23	< .001	0.24	< .001
Grade level (preschool = 0, elementary school = 1)	0.04	.77	0.05	.67	-0.15	.22	-0.30	.00

Note: Coefficients in bold were statistically significant at $p < .05$.

^aLanguage skills were measured using the Picture Vocabulary subtest of the Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement. For models predicting fall scores, fall language skills were included as a predictor. Spring language skills were included as a predictor in the spring models.

Discussion

Results suggest multilingual children experience levels of conflict with their teachers throughout the school year that are comparable to their peers.

Similar to Fumoto et al. (2007), we find that teachers perceived slightly less closeness with multilingual students than English speaking students in the fall.

In the current study, differences in closeness persist into the spring.

Limitations and Future Directions

Relies on teacher report of relationships with students.

Language status reported by parents.

Teachers may have different perspective on children's language abilities.

Discussion

When accounting for children's language skills, the differences in teacher-child relationships between monolingual students and multilingual students are no longer significant.

Teachers' struggles to form and maintain close relationships with their multilingual students may be largely attributed to children's limited use of English skills.

Differences in closeness across the year may suggest a need for training focused on children who speak languages other than English.

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Thank you!
