



A Concurrent Mixed-Methods Study of Midwestern Latino Parents Participation and Preferences for Parenting Education Programs

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Abstract

Parenting programs are an important tool that can provide support for parents and families and improve family functioning. This concurrent nested QUANT + qual mixed methods study sought to better understand parenting education program participation and examine format, delivery, and content preferences for parenting programs among Latino parents in Nebraska. Results from a statewide survey ($N = 173$) indicated that 31.4% of parents in the sample had participated in a parenting program. Significant predictors of participation in parenting education programs included being unmarried, not working full-time, having a higher income, and having excellent or very good health. Major barriers to participation included lack of information about available programs and logistical concerns. Focus group participants discussed key program design concerns which included: (1) cultural clashes related to acculturation gaps between parents and children; (2) cultural relevance of programming; (3) logistical considerations; and (4) the inclusion of technology to enhance parenting. Overall, participants were particularly interested in group-based learning, flexible scheduling, and improving the cultural relevance of programs. Implications for program design and outreach to improve Latino parents' access and willingness to participate in parenting education programs are presented. Future research should explore the effectiveness of parenting program implementation and dissemination with Latino parents in rural communities, if there are differences in the benefits of parenting programs by Latino subgroup or level of acculturation, and assess the impact of near-peers in the delivery of parenting programs with Latinos.

Keywords Latino/Hispanic · Parenting program · Cultural preferences · Program design · Mixed methods

Highlights

- Less than one third of Latino parents had participated in a parenting program.
- Parents' demographic characteristics like marital status, employment status, and income were associated with participation in parenting programs.
- Lack of information about available programs and logistical concerns were major barriers to participating in parenting programs.
- Programs should be culturally, linguistically, and contextually tailored to enhance the relevance for Latino communities.
- Dissemination and implementation science related to parenting program participation among diverse parents is needed.

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Parenting can be complex, challenging, and rewarding. As such, parents should be encouraged and empowered to strengthen their parenting skills. They should have access to appropriate information, coaching, and resources that may equip them with a greater sense of agency (Kim, 2015; Lakind & Atkins, 2018). Parenting programs can provide such support and have been used across the world to strengthen parenting skills, improve family dynamics, and promote family well-being. Studies have shown that parents who participate in parenting programs are better positioned

to use positive parenting skills (Leidy et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2012; Kim, 2015) and that communication between parents and children improves (Williams et al., 2012).

Although there are tangible benefits of parenting programs, many evidence-based interventions suffer from poor participation (<10% attendance rate in real-world service delivery), particularly among racially and ethnically diverse parents (Mauricio et al., 2018). Perceptions of parenting education needs may be differentiated by parental education levels, family income, ethnicity, and language (Finders et al., 2016; Kim, 2015) as well as cultural values, beliefs, and experiences (Vesely et al., 2014). In order to be relevant, parenting programs must be specifically designed for their intended audiences and address participant preferences in terms of format, delivery, and content (Vesely et al., 2014; Garcia-Huidobro et al., 2016; Kim, 2015).

Parenting Across Multiple Worlds

Latinos (i.e., individuals from Mexico, Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands, Central or South America or those born in the United States of Mexican, Spanish-speaking Caribbean island, or Central or South American descent) are the largest and one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States and in Nebraska. Already, about one out of every four children is Latino (U.S. Census, 2016), and Latinos, especially Latino immigrants, represent one of the driving forces of population stabilization and growth in rural areas of the country (Lichter & Johnson, 2020); however, these “non-traditional” settlement areas such as communities throughout the Midwest may not have the multilingual infrastructure, social support networks, or resources to fully serve and promote the health and well-being of Latino immigrant families (Lima Cross et al., 2021; Ramos, 2016).

There is an inherent tension in parenting programs because parents may view participating in such programs as an indication that they do not have the knowledge or skills to be good parents, particularly when parenting programs enhance outcomes for children. Latino and immigrant parents may feel that programs challenge accepted cultural norms and patterns of behavior, creating a sense of perceived inferiority of their parenting practices. However, parents have knowledge and skills to offer, and they know their children best. Parenting programs provide an opportunity to integrate knowledge and skills into Latino families’ existing world views.

Research has shown that Latino parents want to further their learning about parenting and will participate in parenting interventions that are culturally relevant, respectful, and responsive to their life experiences (Parra Cardona et al., 2009). Latino parents are specifically interested in instilling

values and cultural pride, implementing effective discipline strategies, and protecting children from negative experiences (Perreira et al., 2006; Domenech et al., 2009; Leidy et al., 2010). First, for many immigrant parents the idea of losing one’s cultural heritage is disconcerting, particularly since there is such great community cultural wealth. Many immigrant parents want to ensure their stories, history, and cultural pride are passed down to their children (Vest Ettekal et al., 2019). These parents may be trying to make sense and navigate multiple cultures, languages, and social norms concurrently – essentially living in two or more worlds (Parra Cardona et al., 2012). This may cause challenges due to parental ethnotheories about the role and importance of the family in relation to the individual, family hierarchy between parents and children in the country of origin compared to mainstream United States, and differing notions and expectations of respect (including deference to parents or other adults). It may also cause tension related to acculturation gaps between parents and youth stemming from competing value systems, perceived or real power differentials, family role expectations, and differences in the speed of language acquisition (Chavez et al., 2018; Vesely et al., 2019). Second, notions of appropriate discipline vary cross-culturally, particularly in relation to physical punishment (Su et al., 2019). Parents with positive attitudes towards physical discipline are more likely to adopt corporal punishment than those otherwise (Jackson et al., 1999). Among Latinos, parenting has been characterized by high levels of warmth but also a greater reliance on harsh parenting (Serrano Villar et al., 2017). Parra Cardona et al., 2017 found that for Latino parents who had experienced adversity and harsh parenting as children, concepts such as positive involvement and encouragement could be difficult to grasp. However, it must be noted that the concept of harsh parenting suffers from limited objective observational data, often relying on self-reports of Anglo-defined positive behaviors. When observed, Latina mothers engaged in few instances of harsh parenting, relying primarily on verbal commands stemming from the parental position of authority (Livas-Dlott et al., 2010). Finally, Latino parents want to protect their children from negative experiences, especially those found within a sociopolitical climate that propagates a racial, ethnic, and social class hierarchy (Ayón, 2016; Ayón et al., 2019). Many Latinos fear bias, discrimination, being victims of anti-Latino or anti-immigrant bullying and hate crimes, family separation, and deportation (Herda, 2016; Lima Cross et al., 2021). Latino parents want to prepare their children for a world that may be unfriendly, biased, and hostile towards them as a strategy to protect them from the incivility that exists in society (Ayón, 2016; Ayón et al., 2019).

Family-based approaches to parenting education programs for Latinos may be able to address some of the unique needs of this population. Programs that engage both

children and parents in working and learning together may be especially important for Latino immigrant families. Unfortunately, Latino parents may face challenges in participating in parenting programs due to various structural and logistical barriers including immigration-related fears, scheduling due to the economic reality of having to work multiple jobs, having limited transportation to the location of services, or having child or family care duties (Morawska, et al., 2011; Vesely et al., 2019). Programs may charge fees, which may be difficult for families. Services may not be available for limited English proficient individuals and families. A study of state early childhood administrators found that there was a large gap between need and availability of multilingual and multicultural service providers (Buysse et al., 2004). Improving access to parenting programs for Latino communities, particularly those with limited English proficiency, has been called a “demographic imperative” given the large growth in the population, limited available support, and stress and isolation that may be experienced by these parents (Dumas et al., 2010; Raffaelli & Wiley, 2012).

Current universal methodologies for disseminating parenting information may be ineffective and culturally irrelevant due to a limited understanding and incorporation of cultural values and scripts, incongruency to the specific population’s context, and a lack of culturally and linguistically concordant staff (Calzada et al., 2012; Kumpfer et al., 2017). Most parenting programs have been designed and tested with White middle-class English-speaking families, not Latino or immigrant families who may be culturally and linguistically diverse; therefore, the “social validity” (significance, appropriateness, and importance) of these programs for Latinos may be questionable (Calzada et al., 2012). Few programs have been specifically tailored for Latino families with more than surface level changes (e.g., translation into Spanish or including representative pictures of Latinos) (Leidy et al., 2010); however, research has shown that Latino populations could benefit from cultural, linguistic, and logistical adaptations to programs that would better serve the community (Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2011; Parra Cardona et al., 2017).

Study Purpose

Parenting programs can be a useful tool for parents, providing knowledge, skills, and resources; however, a more nuanced understanding of the differences in parenting program participation, content and topics of interest, and program delivery concerns among diverse parents is needed (Chavez et al., 2018; Kim, 2015; Vesely et al., 2014). No studies to the authors’ knowledge have assessed parenting program participation among Latino parents within the

general public, and few studies have examined parenting education preferences among Latino parents in the Midwest. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better understand factors associated with parenting program participation and examine the format, delivery, and content preferences among Latino parents in Nebraska. Data from this study were intended to help state agencies and partners develop, implement, and disseminate programming to better support Latino parents.

Method

“Mixed methods research is a systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study for purposes of obtaining a fuller picture and deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 119).” This mixed methods study sought to explore parenting education participation and preferences, with “parenting education” defined broadly as any type of parenting skill development program. A concurrent nested QUANT + qual design was used to merge both the quantitative and qualitative research strands to provide a more complete understanding of Latino parents’ participation and preferences for parenting programs (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, the quantitative strand was designed to gain information on the extent of participation in parenting education programs and related contributing factors, while the qualitative strand was focused primarily on in-depth perspectives and experiences related to participation in parenting education programs and preferred features of an ideal program.

We adopted a mixed methods approach because a real-world contextual and cultural understanding beyond what just a quantitative or qualitative study alone would provide was necessary, given that the information was going to be used to generalize findings on participation in parenting programs and contextualize program design and delivery method preferences to improve accessibility and acceptability. Mixing occurred at multiple phases including in the design phase with questions that supplemented the research aims in both the survey and focus groups, the data collection phase through sampling and drawing from a similar pool of participants during the same time period, within the analysis phase through using an iterative approach to interpretation, and the integration phase with the reporting of the results. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Participants

To be eligible to participate in the study, individuals had to be at least 19 years of age (the age of majority in the state of

Nebraska), identify as Hispanic or Latino, and be a parent of a child aged 0 to 17 years old at the time of the study. A total of 173 people participated in the survey (quantitative strand) and 8 people participated in the focus group (qualitative strand).

Procedures

Quantitative

Bilingual and bicultural members of the research team recruited individuals to participate in the survey from public locations (e.g., shopping plazas, food pantries, community organizations, etc.) in minority-concentrated neighborhoods in Omaha and from smaller rural communities throughout the state of Nebraska between June–July 2015. First, a member of the research team would explain the purpose of the study to individuals and then invite them to participate if they met the inclusion criteria. If the individual agreed, then informed consent was obtained. Respondents could choose to complete the hard copy questionnaire in either English or Spanish on their own or with the assistance of a member of the research team. The survey consisted of 40 questions that addressed parenting preferences, parent and children’s demographic and health information, previous experience with parenting programs, and format and delivery preferences. Surveys took approximately 15 min to complete, and each participant received a \$10 gift card for their participation.

Qualitative

A focus group was designed to understand Spanish-speaking Latino parents’ perceptions and experiences with parenting education programs. Potential participants were informed of the focus group by community-based service providers in the Omaha, Nebraska metropolitan area. The focus group was held at the university campus in July 2015. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. First, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire. Then, the focus group was facilitated in Spanish by a bilingual and bicultural Latina researcher. It was carried out using a semi-structured interview guide with five questions and prompts related to the need for parenting education programs in the community, participants’ prior experience with parenting education, and format, delivery, and content preferences of an ideal parenting education program. The focus group lasted approximately an hour and a half, and each participant received a \$40 gift card for their participation. The focus group was audio-recorded, and one researcher took notes throughout the discussion. The audio recording of the focus group was transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English from the verbatim Spanish language transcription.

Measures

Participation in Parenting Education

Participants’ participation in parenting education programs was assessed through a single survey and focus group question, “Have you participated in any parenting education program before?” Survey responses were dichotomous, no (0) and yes (1). If survey respondents had participated in parenting education, then they were asked, “How useful was the program in helping you improve your parenting skills?” Response options were categorical and included: very useful, useful, not useful, a complete waste of time, or no opinion. Focus group participants who had participated in parenting education were asked to describe the program and if and why they liked it. Survey respondents who had not participated in parenting education were asked about barriers, “Could you please explain why you have not participated in any parenting education program so far?” There were a variety of response options, which included but were not limited to the following: I have no time; I don’t see the need; I don’t have transportation to the program site; The schedule of the program conflicts with my schedule; and language barriers. Participants also had the option to write in other responses. Focus group participants who had not participated in parenting education were asked if they had heard about any parenting education programs.

Format and Delivery Preferences for Parenting Education Programs

Both survey and focus group participants were asked about the desired format and delivery style for a parenting education program. Multiple response options were provided for survey participants such as online educational program, group-based to allow for interaction with other parents, 1-on-1 program in the home, offers childcare, includes interactive role playing, close to home, and flexible scheduling. Focus group participants were asked broadly, “What does an ideal parenting education program look like?”

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics used in this analysis included age (continuous, in years); sex (male or female); nativity (born in the U.S. or foreign-born); rural versus urban residence; educational attainment (completed less than high school (0) or completed high school or more (1)); relationship status (single/never married, married, or divorced); employment status (employed full-time, employed part-time, unemployed, or other); primary language (English or Spanish); individual annual income (<\$10,000, \$10,000–

\$24,999, \$25,000–\$49,999, \$50,000 or more); and self-rated health (excellent, very good, good, fair, poor).

Analysis

Quantitative

SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the survey data. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables of interest. A multivariate logistic regression model was developed to identify significant predictors of participation in parenting education programs. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Qualitative

Atlas.ti 7 software was used to code and analyze key themes from the focus group. Three trained coders reviewed the transcript to code dialogue and identify basic patterns and themes using an open coding process based on a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). Sixty-nine codes were developed between the three coders based on their initial reading of the transcript. These codes were condensed through axial coding down to 29 by discussion and consensus among all three coders. Then, the transcript and all coding was reviewed by three members of the research team to ensure consistency. Any remaining discrepancies in the coding were discussed between coders until a consensus was achieved. A total of four themes emerged from the data. Given the exploratory nature of the qualitative component of the study, saturation was not expected.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

A main rationale behind our adoption of a mixed-methods approach was that integrating quantitative and qualitative data on parenting education participation and program design would lead to a more complete and in-depth understanding of the issue. The quantitative strand helped to understand participation while the qualitative strand provided rich information about design preferences for an ideal parenting program. Data integration occurred in multiple ways, including through parallelism in the design and methods as well as the interpretation and reporting of results. This was reinforced through narratives using a contiguous approach (i.e., presenting quantitative and qualitative results separately) as well as through joint displays where both quantitative and qualitative results were combined and cross-examined to illustrate findings (Fetters et al., 2013). Such an approach allowed for identification of topical areas of convergence, whereby the two sources of data complemented and reinforced each other, as well as areas of divergence.

Results

A total of 173 people participated in the survey and 8 participated in the focus group. Table 1 highlights the characteristics of survey and focus group participants. More than 79% of survey participants were foreign-born, with 109 participants from Mexico and the remainder from Guatemala, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Most survey participants were female (77.1%), living in urban areas (79.2%), employed full-time (51.2%), married (57.1%), had an annual income of less than \$25,000 (68.5%), had a high school education or less (74.1%), rated their health to be good, very good, or excellent (77.3%), and had not previously participated in a parenting education program (68.6%). Similarly, the vast majority of participants in the focus group discussions were female (75%), foreign-born (75%), spoke Spanish as their primary language (87.5%), and had a high school education or less (75%).

Predictors of Participation in Parenting Education Programs

Among the 170 Latino parents who responded to the question on whether they had participated in parenting education programs before, 53 (31.4%) said yes. Results from the multivariate logistic regression (Table 2) suggested that marital status, employment status, income, and self-rated health were significant predictors of participation in parenting education programs. In particular, relative to parents who were unmarried, parents who reported being married were less likely to participate in parenting education programs, AOR = 0.39, 95% CI (0.16, 0.92). Parents who had full-time employment were less likely to participate in parenting education programs compared to those otherwise. Higher annual income was associated with increased odds of parenting program participation. Parents with excellent or very good self-rated health were more likely to participate in parenting education programs than those with good, fair, or poor self-rated health.

Experience with Parenting Education Programs

Almost 95% of survey participants who had participated previously in a parenting program felt like the program was useful or very useful. Several focus group participants shared experiences about participating in parenting programs. One participant noted:

It's interesting and you learn a lot in that not everything is about, "I am going to punish you" or "you are going to get grounded." It's more about, "If you behave well, you get something good. If you

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of Latino study participants

Variables	Survey (<i>N</i> = 172)		Focus group (<i>N</i> = 8)	
	<i>N</i> (%)	Mean	<i>N</i> (%)	Mean
Sex				
Male	39 (22.9)		2 (25.0)	
Female	131 (77.1)		6 (75.0)	
Age (in years)		35.9		34.6
Nativity				
Born in United States	36 (20.9)		2 (25.0)	
Foreign-born	136 (79.1)		6 (75.0)	
Mean length of time in U.S. (of immigrant participants in years)		14.9		14.0
Education				
Less than high school	85 (50.0)		2 (25.0)	
High school graduate	41 (24.1)		4 (50.0)	
At least some college	44 (25.9)		2 (25.0)	
Relationship Status				
Single/Never married	59 (34.7)		1 (12.5)	
Married	97 (57.1)		4 (50.0)	
Separated/Divorced	14 (8.2)		3 (37.5)	
Average number of children		2.23		2.13
Employment status				
Employed full-time	86 (51.2)		4 (50.0)	
Employed part-time	31 (18.5)		1 (12.5)	
Unemployed	35 (20.8)		1 (12.5)	
Other	16 (9.5)		2 (25.0)	
Variables	Survey (<i>N</i> = 172)		Focus group (<i>N</i> = 8)	
	<i>N</i> (%)	Mean	<i>N</i> (%)	Mean
Primary language				
English	37 (21.5)		1 (12.5)	
Spanish	135 (78.5)		7 (87.5)	
Individual annual income level				
Less than \$10,000	67 (42.1)			
\$10,000-\$24,999	42 (26.4)			
\$25,000-\$49,999	42 (26.4)			
\$50,000 or more	7 (4.1)			
Self-rated health				
Excellent/Very good	59 (34.3)			
Good	74 (43.0)			
Fair/Poor	39 (22.7)			
Previous participation in a parenting education program	53 (31.4)		5 (62.5)	

misbehave, you will be punished.” Positive and negative consequences. That has helped me a lot in terms of consequences because I tell him, “Whatever

Table 2 Logistic regression model predicting participation in parenting education programs among Latino parents (*N* = 143)

Significant predictors	Adjusted odds ratios	95% C.I.
Being married	0.40*	(0.17, 0.94)
Working full-time	0.30*	(0.11, 0.79)
Individual annual income level	1.65*	(1.03, 2.64)
Self-rated health		
Excellent/Very good (reference)	1.00	
Good	0.30**	(0.12, 0.73)
Fair/Poor	0.25*	(0.08, 0.81)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Odds ratios were adjusted for the effect of age, gender, nativity, education, primary language, and number of children

you do in life whether it is good or bad, you will get something.”

The top five barriers to participation in parenting education programs as identified in the survey are listed in Table 3. As illustrated by the listed sample quotes, focus group participants concurred with most of the barriers identified in the survey including limited information about parenting programs, time, and scheduling. Moreover, focus group participants also identified several additional barriers to participation in parenting education programs such as language and communication issues, being judged by other parents, lack of information on community resources, and logistical concerns such as the cost of such programs.

Parenting Education Program Preferences

Focus group participants believed that there was a need for parenting programs. One participant mentioned, “I think parents now more than ever need a lot of support because they are struggling with difficulties, with problems encountered in the home and do not know who to go to for help.”

The top five enablers for participation in parenting education programs as identified in the survey are listed in Table 3. Focus group participants concurred with the top four desired features of a parenting education program including group-based learning, flexible scheduling, and a convenient location; however, focus group participants provided much more detail on what would make an ideal parenting program for Spanish-speaking Latino parents.

Four themes emerged from the focus group discussion about program format, delivery, and content preferences including: (1) the culture clash that exists between immigrant parents and their U.S. acculturated children (i.e., acculturation gap); (2) cultural relevance of programming; (3) logistical considerations for program delivery; and (4) the inclusion of technology as a tool to enhance parenting. Table 4 highlights the key components from each of these themes.

Table 3 Barriers to participating in and desired features of a parenting education program

Barriers to participation in a parenting program	Survey N (%)	Supporting quotes from the focus group
1. Lack of information about parenting programs in the area	55 (36.4)	Sometimes we need to learn more about what we have in the community...then take advantage of what we already have. (Participant 7)
2. No time to participate	33 (21.9)	For me, time is also important, and like [he] said because I have a family too and that matters a lot. (Participant 7)
3. Program schedule conflicts with parent's schedule	16 (10.6)	Sometimes I don't go to all of [the sessions] because of my work schedule. (Participant 6)
4. No need to participate in a parenting program	15 (10.5)	I think that maybe it's not as attractive because for us Latinos we feel more confident with our culture. (Participant 5)
5. Lack of transportation to program site	5 (3.3)	If the location is too far from home, then maybe I would not like going all the way [there]. (Participant 8)
Desired features of a parenting program		
1. Group-based learning: Facilitated interaction with other parents	84 (50.3)	What I mean is to have groups. (Participant 5)
2. Flexible scheduling: Parents select the time that would fit with their schedule	80 (47.9)	Many groups, but at different times, not all together. (Participant 7)
3. Geographic proximity: Program site close to where parents live	62 (37.1)	It's [the program] where it would be most convenient for the parents and not to have the parents come to us [referring to program facilitators]. It's more difficult, but if we go closer so it may be easier for them. (Participant 1)
4. Childcare services: Offered onsite	59 (35.3)	There could be big kids who take care of the young children so then they begin to learn that they can look after for the little ones. (Participant 3)
5. Materials: Receive educational information in the mail	47 (28.1)	[Not discussed during the focus group]

Culture Clash and Integration

Participants identified navigating cultural differences as a major challenge to parenting in the U.S. Many mentioned the cultural values and traditions that they grew up with in Latin America and how different those were from their children who are growing up in the U.S. One parent noted, “There is a difference in culture because we grew up in a certain way. We were raised in a certain manner and here they are growing up in a culture that is totally different in school and in life.” Another noted, “Sometimes I also tell him [referring to her son] – I grew up in a Mexican household and it is very different. His dad is white so they do things differently [at his house].”

Cultural Relevance

Participants acknowledged that parenting programs for Latinos need to be culturally relevant to meet the needs of the community. Participants described wanting to have a culturally concordant facilitator for the program, not just a person who spoke Spanish, but instead someone who had experienced the emics of growing up Latino. This was particularly important given that many participants felt that there was such a wide gap between their culture and that of mainstream U.S. culture. They emphasized the importance of having trust in the facilitator as well as other program participants. One participant noted:

It could be that the person that gives the class speaks perfect Spanish, but their culture can be American, Hindu, African or any other culture. Then we are back to where we started. We are totally lost. The person is speaking to me in Spanish, but ... can I give you an example? An author writes a book about the history of one of our countries and it is all about the culture, but he wrote it without actually being in the country that the book is about.

Participants were proud of their cultural heritage and shared numerous family stories of growing up in their country of origin. Participants clearly wanted to be able to pass that cultural pride down to their children and integrating opportunities into a parenting program may help facilitate such sharing. One participant emphasized, “For me it is very important that he know where I come from. That way in the future he knows what his roots are because it defines who he is and everything else.”

Participants noted that family structures may be different and that all types of families should be supported through parenting programs. One parent stated:

I also think one of the points that we need to deal with in the parent's group is to know that not everyone who

Table 4 Program design themes and key components from Spanish-Speaking parent focus group

Themes	Components
Culture clash and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture, values, and traditions • Cultural identity and pride • Role of machismo in parent and family roles • Differences in discipline and the concept of <i>respeto</i> (respect) • Structural differences in U.S. educational system
Cultural relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-based structure where parents and children can learn together • Cultural concordance of facilitator and awareness of group dynamics • Trust amongst group members and facilitator • Unity within the group (amongst the parent participants) • Broad definition of “family” (not just the traditional nuclear family) • Proactive assistance and support from other parents in the group
Logistical considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted by a recognized and trusted community organization • Developmentally appropriate activities for youth • Cost of program • Setting time limits for sharing within the group • Rewards for active participation, not payment to participate
Incorporation of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to learning new technologies • Using technology to enhance parent knowledge, parenting skills, and peer support (e.g., Facebook group for Spanish-speaking parents or developing a new app)

is living together is married. There are single parents, widowed parents, and those who share the child on weekends. Then, it’s not just about focusing on couples who are together with children because I can say, “Oh, just that when I am not there, my husband helps me” but maybe she does not have a husband or maybe there are dads without wives.

Participants were interested in a program that included opportunities to engage with their children through a family-based approach. One parent mentioned, “Activities for children...I find it very nice that children participate together with us - that they grow with us.” Focus group participants were interested in both structured lessons and less structured social activities. One participant noted:

Each time does not have to be something organized... For example, next Thursday there is an activity in the park downtown, right? You could tell us, “Look, we are going to meet in such and such a place at whatever time. Bring your chair. Bring food for a picnic for your family and your children.” There you can make some spontaneous activities, right?

Participants felt that the balance between structured and unstructured family-based and group-based activities was important to engaging and maintaining participation as well as building comradery among participating families. They did not want the program to be looked at as another thing

that parents have to do, especially in light the reality of working multiple jobs or long hours, but rather something that the family could enjoy together. One participant mentioned, “Do it more family-friendly [less structured] ... like having a Posada at the end of the year. Do things like that where there is more sharing.” Finally, parents were interested in leadership opportunities for those who had already completed the program as a way to give back. One parent remarked, “For me it would be interesting to have the first generation of this group commit ourselves...As parents be able to give this message and share this group.” Another noted:

It is important to come to receive the education and not just keep it to ourselves, but to try to share it and call other parents that are interested in raising their kids in a safer, healthier manner.

The issue of titles and social hierarchy also arose. Participants were quick to note that in their ideal program there would not be any use of professional titles and that all participants should be treated equally regardless of the education or social status. This would also help to facilitate trust and sharing among participants. One participant stated:

Upon entering the meeting, we are all the same. We are parents who want to give their kids a better education, not – I am a medical doctor and you are a housekeeper. No, we came with the same need of wanting to learn so that we can teach our kids.

Participants endorsed the idea of not just an educational program for parents, but instead wanted to develop a parental support system and foster relationships with other parents who participated in the program. Such support could help participants in navigating acculturative challenges and logistical concerns. One participant noted:

For me, if the session was in a place where I could find relief with peers, whether or not they're professional people. Just another person who tells me, "Ah, well look – this happened to me. This is the solution. Try this." It would be a big help because I'm getting a lot of information from people who have experienced or been through what I'm going through now.

Logistical Considerations

Participants were concerned about logistics (i.e., scheduling, location, transportation) and wanted the program to be convenient and flexible. For example, participants mentioned that some parents often have multiple jobs, work long hours, or are employed in industries where schedules are fixed with limited flexibility and sometimes even mandatory overtime (e.g., meatpacking, food service, or hospitality industries), creating challenges for participation. One parent noted, "I know of many parents that have more than two jobs, and I sometimes work out of town so I can't go to the meetings even though I would like to."

Participants wanted the program to be voluntary, not a program that people had to attend to fulfill some requirement such as a court mandate or community service. Some participants had previously attended a parenting program in order to be eligible to enroll in English or computer classes but felt like this was not an effective way to recruit for and retain quality participation. One participant remarked:

I mean you go on your own will and not to fulfill a requirement that they put a stamp on a card or to give you a pantry or anything else... You want to go learn and not just to get something.

Participants suggested that the program be free. One stated that the program should be, "Free of cost because unfortunately it [cost] scares us, Hispanics. If there is a charge, if there is a payment – um no, better not." They also mentioned the importance of having small class sizes because people, "won't want to disclose as much information in a larger group." Finally, participants wanted to ensure that there were linkages to other community resources, which may in turn help in integrating participants

into their new communities and increasing awareness of available services. One parent noted, "It should be a like a close-knit community where everyone coexists and everyone shares information – well, like a family."

Inclusion of Technology to Enhance Parenting

Participants focused heavily on the role of technology and expressed interest in learning how they could become more adept at using technology to benefit their parenting. One parent discussed her recent experience in trying to help her son with his math homework. She noted:

I was trying to explain division to my son the way I learned it...and he did not understand me. Then, we looked up a video on YouTube about how to make division easier and he understood. So that's why I say, we can use technology to our advantage.

Parents were concerned with children's technology use and not fully understanding what their children were doing online. Children often use technology in school and parents use social media apps on their phones so some participants noted that power of technology could be harnessed for positive activities. For example, one participant came up with the idea of creating a Facebook group for Spanish-speaking parents. She mentioned, "Instead of having a page such as 'Compra y Venta' (Buy & Sell) on Facebook, have a page for parents." Another participant thought of co-developing a cell phone app for parents to use with their children. She remarked:

Technology is ... not bad. We should use it to our advantage and find some tips or have us parents create a page or a game – something that our children can do and say, "You can play it." Knowing that we created it, or we understand it, and that it is beneficial for them.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to better understand factors associated with parenting education participation as well as the format, delivery, and content preferences for parenting programs among Latino parents in Nebraska so as to inform program development and implementation. This was accomplished by our use of a mixed-methods approach in the study design, data collection, and analysis that yielded rich, complementary findings. Based on quantitative survey data, we found that less than one-third of Latino parents had participated in a parenting education program; however,

those parents who had participated were satisfied and found their experience to be useful. Participation was differentiated by demographic factors such as marital status, employment status, income, and self-rated health. In particular, Latino parents' who were married, working full-time, had lower incomes, and those with good, fair, or poor health were less likely to have participated in parenting education programs. It is likely that Latino parents who were married might perceive less need for parenting programs due to stronger family support or being able to co-parent with a spouse. Parents with full-time employment might have relatively less time to participate in parenting programs than those who work fewer hours. On the other hand, parents who had low income or poor health might find it difficult to participate due to limited logistical supports (e.g., childcare, transportation) or health concerns that inhibit their ability to participate. Future efforts in promoting parenting programs among Latinos might need to pay special attention to engaging these groups.

Survey participants identified specific barriers to participation such as a lack of information about parenting programs in local communities and scheduling conflicts, both of which are common structural and logistical barriers that have been supported by previous research and aligned with the focus group findings (Garcia-Huidobro et al., 2016; Mauricio et al., 2018; Morawska et al., 2011; Toure et al., 2020). Therefore, addressing logistical barriers such as offering the program at a convenient time and location, providing childcare, and reducing program fees may be important considerations (Garcia-Huidobro et al., 2016; Ramos et al., 2016), particularly since employment status was a significant predictor of participation. Also consistent with previous literature, the quantitative data revealed enablers that could improve participation in parenting programs such as group-based learning, flexible scheduling, and provision of childcare (Garcia-Huidobro et al., 2016). Service providers should consider flexible scheduling, individualized sessions, or different modalities to accommodate working parents if unable to attend a particular session (Benito-Gomez & Flores Rojas, 2020; Lakind & Atkins, 2018; Mauricio et al., 2018). Combined, these findings point to the need for future parenting programs to address common barriers as well as incorporate reported enablers in program design and implementation to improve the acceptability and accessibility of programs for Latino parents.

Few parenting programs have been designed specifically for Latino families (Benito-Gomez & Flores Rojas, 2020; Williams et al., 2012), which may limit the effectiveness of current programs. Not addressing cultural concerns related to identity, pride, and values; the meaning of respect (*respeto*) and its operationalization within the family; and the culturally-based role of parents could hinder parent-child communication (Ramos et al., 2018), acceptability,

and participation in parenting programs. For example, because some fathers may see their sole role as a financial provider, they may believe that it is not their duty to actively engage or “deal” with their children if they are providing financial support (Garcia-Huidobro et al., 2016; Haralson et al., 2021). Programs should discuss culturally-based family roles, explicitly invite both mothers and fathers, and incorporate broad definitions of family. It was clear from the focus group discussion that participants wanted the concept of “family” to extend beyond just the nuclear family. Special considerations should be made for implementing and staffing parenting programs to ensure cultural and linguistic concordance between the facilitator and program participants to foster trust and improve communication. Additionally, programs may include the use of culturally relevant stories or sayings (*dichos*) to impart pride, strengthen engagement, and enhance understanding among Latino parents (Caal et al., 2019). Consistent with our findings, Van Mourik et al., (2017) found that parenting programs were most effective when they were adapted to include cultural and contextual influences and norms.

Although most Latino children are U.S. born citizens, many families are of mixed immigration legal status. Therefore, the immigration experience may still be an important and recent reality to address when recruiting, promoting, or implementing a program. Recent immigrants are less likely to have a strong local social support network compared to those that have been in the U.S. longer (Pereira et al., 2006), so building trust and comradery among program participants may be especially helpful in supporting families and increasing awareness of community resources. The failure to address the impact of immigration and acculturation on parenting, cross-cultural family interactions, and social support could be detrimental to the nature and success of parenting programs for Latino and immigrant families (Haralson et al., 2021).

Often times, because of limited capacity – both human and financial – programs are not available within Latino and immigrant communities or those that are available may not fully meet the needs of parents in the community. More multilingual and multicultural program staff are needed at social service agencies, especially those in new settlement areas such as Nebraska where large influxes of Latino immigrants are a relatively recent phenomenon (Ramos, 2016). Because of the critical nature of language and culture in being able to connect with program participants and meet the needs of this growing community, developing a pipeline of multilingual and multicultural helping professionals is imperative (Marrs Fuchsel, 2015; Ramos et al., 2013).

Since both our quantitative and qualitative findings showed that Latino parents believed that participating in parenting programs was useful, programs should be promoted and widely disseminated within communities.

Oftentimes, parents, especially racial or ethnic minority parents, do not know about the resources that exist in their community (Chavez et al., 2018). Therefore, using techniques such as social marketing and promotional campaigns may help parents understand the benefits of these programs and how to access them. In our focus group, parents wanted to take an active role in outreaching and supporting the next generation of program participants. Having reputable community organizations as partners and focusing on fostering positive interactions between parents and their children, rather than focusing on “preventing child maltreatment”, may be helpful messaging to address some of the disparities in attendance and participation. Perhaps, promoting the benefits of such programs for children could be a useful strategy for engaging and securing commitment from Latino parents to participate (Calzada et al., 2012). For example, the *Criando con Amor, Promoviendo Armonía y Superación* (CAPAS) program used a motivational interviewing technique to emphasize the potential benefits of the program to children. At the beginning of the program, parents were asked to visualize themselves and their children over time and see the successes or risky situations their children encountered and how their parenting practices constituted a protective factor in their children’s lives. As part of the evaluation, parents stated that they were motivated to continue attending the rest of the program sessions because of this activity (Parra Cardona et al., 2017). Programs should strive to be partners with parents by empowering them to foster positive parenting strategies, resiliency, and self-efficacy -- not just teaching at them, but rather learning with them and adapting (Ramos et al., 2017).

Given that the focus group participants of this study emphasized the inclusion of technology to enhance parenting, incorporating the teaching of technology skills in parenting programs may assist in increasing parents’ understanding of their children’s activities online. Having basic computer literacy and technology skills may also increase parents’ opportunities to participate in their child’s life such as through the school system where more and more communication and teaching is occurring electronically (Rivera, 2014), particularly now given the COVID-19 pandemic. Such skills may give parents a greater sense of agency and help them to be more empowered to monitor their children’s activities and promote stronger engagement in their children’s education. Teaching these types of skills may help parents cross the digital divide in helping their children to use technology not just for entertainment, but also for educational purposes (Gross, 2015).

Limitations

This study had several strengths such as a mixed methods design and responses from Latino parents from a new

settlement area that is underrepresented in the literature, but as with any research study there are limitations. Because the survey used a cross-sectional design with limited sample size, the results may not be generalizable to other states, especially those where there is a stronger multilingual social service infrastructure and a longer history of community integration. As with any self-reported data, social desirability bias may be an issue. Although the study benefited from quantitative responses from both English- and Spanish-speaking parents, only Spanish-speakers were engaged in the focus group. Since only one focus group with Spanish-speaking parents was conducted, the results may not be representative of all Spanish-speaking parents, especially those who may be more recent immigrants. Conducting additional focus groups to reach saturation would allow for greater reliability of the qualitative results. Finally, this study was conducted as part of a statewide “parenting education” needs assessment. We note that the use of the term “parenting education” may carry a negative connotation; however, that was not the intent of the research team.

Conclusion

Latino parent participation in parenting programs is multifaceted. Individual-level factors such as marital status, employment status, income, and self-rated health were significant predictors of Latino parents’ participation in parenting programs. However, contextual factors also need to be considered. As such, we highlighted several barriers and facilitators to improve accessibility and acceptability of parenting programs among Latinos. These findings have practical implications for community services, social work, and public health program design, outreach, and engagement initiatives with Latino parents. If effective programs delivered at scale is the goal, then improving Latino parents’ access and willingness to participate in parenting programs through flexible adaptive programming, addressing cultural scripts, scaffolding from cultural strengths, incorporating elements of social support, fostering trust between the facilitator and participants, and engaging both parents and children to learn together in a family-based environment is critical. To improve cultural relevance, programs should go beyond a simple translation of materials or changing the image on a program brochure and instead be grounded in the culture of program participants. They should be conscious of the cultural and contextual reality in addition to the basic consideration of linguistic competence.

This study has implications for policy. The differential level of participation in parenting programs suggests more efforts are needed to increase the representativeness of program participation, particularly among Latino parents who are

married, working full-time, have lower incomes, or have fair or poor health. Agencies providing parenting programs can enhance the reach of their services through proactive program promotion (i.e., partnering with trusted community agencies, multilingual media outlets, etc.), cost reductions or fee waivers for families with low-incomes, and addressing logistical barriers such as scheduling, transportation, and onsite childcare. Funding support for parenting programs is imperative. Programs should be made available to all parents, regardless of immigration status, in English, Spanish, and other languages as necessary. Funders should support the effective use of communication technology and the provision of alternative program modalities (e.g., in-person, hybrid, remote, or virtual participation), which may also help mitigate challenges to participation. Continued funding is also needed to support research on program development, adaptation, effectiveness, and translation into practice.

Culture influences parenting practices and child adjustment outcomes; therefore, more needs to be done to augment parenting skills through an asset-based cultural framework. Although acculturation and cultural issues have been studied in the psychological, social work, and public health literature for a long time, there are still tremendous discrepancies in the translation of research findings to inform program design, dissemination, and implementation. This study provides a guide for enhancing program relevance and participation of Latino parents in parenting programs. Future research should explore the implementation and dissemination of parenting programs with Latino parents, particularly those in non-traditional settlement areas or rural communities that may have limited access to multilingual infrastructure. Additional studies are needed to understand if the benefits of parenting programs are universal for all Latino families or if there are particular differences based on demographic characteristics or level of acculturation. Finally, research should assess the integration and impact of near-peers in the delivery of parenting programs with Latinos.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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