Effects on Immigrant Parents and Children in Head Start One Year After Program Start

Brief 2.1: Policy Brief Series on CAP Tulsa's Two-Generation Education Interventions for Low-Income Parents and Children

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The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world (Pew, 2019), and 25% of all children in the U.S. (or 18 million children) have at least one immigrant parent (Urban Institute, 2019).

The current brief explores the one-year effects of a model two-generation English as a Second Language (ESL) program based in Head Start on parents and children.

Head Start serves about 300,000 dual language learner children each year, or about a third of all Head Start children. At the same time, only about 5% of Head Start parents receive ESL services (Office of Head Start, 2016).

Fostering the English and home language skills of both parents and children is key to Head Start’s approach (US HHS & US DE, 2016).

The Community Action Project of Tulsa, Oklahoma (CAP Tulsa) developed and operates a two-generation ESL program which offers high dosage ESL services, combined with financial and supportive services and a curriculum designed to support family engagement in children’s schooling, to parents of children enrolled in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start programs.

In our randomized control trial of CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL program, we study the one-year effects in three ways:

- Parent’s success and progress in the program,
- Parent outcomes in three domains: (a) English language skills, (b) parent engagement, and (c) psychological wellbeing,
- Child outcomes in two domains: (a) language skills and (b) cognitive skills

Parents were first assessed on their English proficiency and placed into beginner, intermediate, or advanced level groups. Within each group, parents were then randomly assigned to receive access to CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program, or the usual CAP Tulsa Head Start services without the ESL program.

All children participated in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start program regardless of parent treatment status.

Parents offered CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program had high rates of completion (over 70% for one semester and over 40% for two semesters) and English skill advancement, with most advancing at least one level of proficiency.

Semester completion was higher for the beginner group than the more advanced group.

Almost three-quarters or 74% of all program parents improved their English language skills by at least one National Reporting System (NRS) level over the course of a semester.

This compares to an average of only 46% of students enrolled in federally funded single-generation ESL programs who advance one NRS level over the course of an entire year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).
Parents randomly assigned to the ESL program reported significantly higher English reading skills and teacher/school-based support after one year compared to parents not in the ESL program.
  - The beginner ESL group also demonstrated effects on positive parenting skills.
  - No effects on English language skills and parenting skills and teacher/school engagement were found for the more advanced ESL group.

There were no effects on psychological wellbeing for the whole sample.
  - The beginner ESL group showed significant increases in psychological wellbeing.
  - At the same time, the more advanced ESL group showed reductions in psychological wellbeing.

Children with parents assigned to the ESL program did not show significant differences in language or cognitive skills compared to children with parents not in the ESL program.
  - No effects on language and cognitive skills were found within the beginner English group.
  - Within the more advanced English proficiency group, children with parents in the ESL program scored marginally lower on letter-word skills.

All study children, regardless of parent treatment status, performed similarly to or better than their counterparts in a nationally representative sample of Head Start on vocabulary and letter-word skills.

In summary, we find initial positive, short-term outcomes for parents, especially those who started out with limited English skills, suggesting the potential promise of two-generation ESL programs based in Head Start compared to single-generation programs.

We did not find significant short-term benefits for children on average, above and beyond the positive effects children already received while in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start programs. However, children from immigrant families in the agency’s Head Start programs were doing well developmentally after one year.

We argue for replication of this model to test effects in other Head Start programs. Study of the two-year effects of CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL program are underway.
CAP Tulsa's Two-Generation English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

- CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program pairs early childhood education for children with ESL instruction for parents and coordinates parent classes around children’s school schedule (Sommer et al., 2018).
- This family-centered ESL program is high dosage (i.e., 9 hours per week) with small class sizes. Parents also receive other supportive elements, including weekly coaching sessions, additional childcare, and financial incentives (Sommer et al., 2018).
- CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program recruits parents from their high-quality Head Start centers (Gormley et al., 2008) and offers an ESL curriculum tailored to the specific interests and needs of immigrant parents, including supporting their children’s schooling and wellbeing.
  - The parent curriculum is contextualized to children’s development and supports family engagement in children’s schooling.
  - The program also encourages cultural and linguistic awareness and parents’ ability to speak and read with their children in their home language and English.
Study Design

- The study examines the one-year effects of Two-Generation ESL Program participation (ESL classes for parents combined with Head Start services for children) on parent and child outcomes compared to a control group who received Head Start services only (i.e., no parent ESL classes).
- Parents who expressed interest in learning English voluntarily selected into the program and were first assessed on their English proficiency with the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) Plus assessment.
  - Parents were then placed into beginner (n = 112), intermediate (n = 62), or advanced (n = 23) groups.
  - Within each group, parents were randomly assigned to receive access to the Two-Generation ESL Program.
  - Due to low sample sizes, the intermediate and advanced groups were combined for analytic purposes.
- All children participated in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start program irrespective of parent treatment status.
- Of the 236 recruited families, 197 parents and their children participated at both baseline (Wave 1) and one year after enrollment (Wave 2). Descriptively, study sample families were:
  - From Spanish-speaking (89%; primarily from Mexico) or Zomi-speaking (11%; all from Myanmar) countries,
  - Low-income with an average household income of $22,166 and an average household size of five,
  - Largely mothers (98%) who were mostly married or in a steady relationship (93%),
  - Educated at a range of levels: 42% less than a high school education, 44% a high school education or GED (44%), or 14% a postsecondary certificate or higher,
  - A mix of recent immigrants (immigrated to the U.S. within five years of starting the program; 28%) and immigrants who moved to the U.S. earlier (72%), and
  - Comprised of slightly more boys (57%) aged 4 years old.
- Program semester completion data and English language skill scores – Basic English Skills Test (BEST) Plus scores based on National Reporting System benchmarks (see Sommer et al., 2018 for more information) – were only available for parents who received the ESL classes.
- Parents responded to survey questions regarding the following domains:
  - English language skills: self-reported speaking, reading, and writing skills
  - Parent engagement: positive parenting skills and teacher/school-based support
  - Psychological wellbeing: parenting stress, psychological distress, optimism, and self-esteem
- Children were tested on four assessments:
  - Language skills: vocabulary and English proficiency
  - Cognitive skills: letter-word skills and memory
Almost 80% of the beginner ESL group.

About 65% of the intermediate/advanced ESL group.

Most parents at all levels in CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program completed at least one semester of the program. Yet rates differed depending on initial level of English language skills. Substantially fewer parents completed both semesters.

- Almost 80% of the beginner ESL group completed one semester.
- About 65% of the intermediate/advanced ESL group completed one semester.

Almost 75% of parents who completed one semester advanced their English language skills by at least one level (e.g., moving from Level 3 “High Beginning” to Level 4 “Low Intermediate”). For parents who completed two semesters, approximately 80% of parents advanced their skills by at least one level.

- Over 90% of parents in the beginner ESL group progressed at least one level after completing one semester.
- About 45% of parents in the intermediate/advanced ESL group progressed at least one level after completing one semester.
What are the impacts on parents in CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program? Do these differ by initial level of English language skills?

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<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>ESL Proficiency Subgroup</th>
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<td>Self-esteem</td>
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† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Parents randomly assigned to CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program reported significantly higher English reading skills and more teacher/school-based support after one year. There were no significant effects on English speaking and writing skills, positive parenting skills, parenting stress, psychological distress, optimism, and self-esteem.
What are the impacts on parents in CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program? Do these differ by initial level of English language skills?

Among parents with beginner level English proficiency, impacts were found on English language skills, parent engagement, and psychological wellbeing after one year.

Parents in the beginner ESL group reported:
- higher English reading skills,
- higher positive parenting skills,
- more teacher/school-based support and
- less psychological distress.

Parents did not report significant differences on English speaking and writing skills, parenting stress, optimism, and self-esteem.

Among parents with more advanced English proficiency, impacts were found on psychological wellbeing after one year.

Parents in the intermediate/advanced ESL group reported:
- more parenting stress and
- more psychological distress.

Parents did not report significant differences in English speaking, reading, and writing skills, positive parenting skills, teacher/school-based support, optimism, and self-esteem.
Children with parents assigned to the ESL program did not show significant differences in language or cognitive skills compared to children with parents not in the ESL program. No significant differences emerged among children with parents in beginner group. Among the intermediate/advanced group, children with parents in the ESL program scored marginally lower on letter-word skills.

It is important to note that all children in the study, who were dual language learners participating in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start programs regardless of parent treatment status, performed similarly to or better than their counterparts in a nationally representative sample of Head Start on vocabulary and letter-word skills after one year. The dotted line represents the average standard scores of Head Start children from the FACES dataset whose primary home language is not English (Aikens et al., 2017).
Conclusion

- Overall, we find that two-generation ESL programming can have positive impacts on the English language skills and school engagement of Head Start parents after one year.
- Most parents in CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program completed at least one semester and advanced their English language skills at substantially higher rates than adults in other community-based ESL programs (Condelli et al.; Good et al., 2010).
- Parents who began the program with the lowest English proficiency benefited the most from the program, increasing their English language skills, parent engagement, and psychological wellbeing.
- Conversely, parents with more advanced English proficiency did not improve their English language skills and parent engagement.
- Results also suggest a negative impact on psychological wellbeing among the more advanced group. These parents may have had higher expectations for their performance, and thus may have become dissatisfied with their slower than expected rate of progress (Granger & Cytron, 1999).
- Importantly, these findings suggest that an intensive two-generation ESL program has substantial benefits to parents of children enrolled in Head Start, especially for those with low levels of English proficiency.
- These benefits seem to surpass those of typical community-based ESL programs, which are often less intensive with few supportive services, have fewer attendance requirements, and lack a family-focused curriculum (Sommer et al., 2018).
- The lack of significant benefits for children from the Two-Generation ESL Program is not surprising given CAP Tulsa’s high-quality Head Start services and their well-documented benefits for children (Gormley et al., 2008; Phillips et al., 2016).
- The children participating in the study, irrespective of whether their parent received ESL services, performed above or near the average standard score of Head Start children on well-established language and cognitive assessments.
- We do not know whether improvements in parents’ English language skills translates to children either in the near- or longer-term. It is possible that the direct effect of parents’ improved English on children takes time and that these effects may be indirect.
- Study findings suggest the potential promise of two-generation ESL programs from a base of Head Start. The state of the field calls for innovation, and future directions include further testing of two-generation ESL programs in other Head Start contexts.
- Evaluation of the two-year impacts of CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL program are underway.
Learn about our two-generation research:

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Program/Study Description and Measures

- Parents were eligible for CAP Tulsa’s Two-Generation ESL Program based on several selection criteria, including interview scores (e.g., parent motivation for success, schedule availability, transportation, and support network), background checks, and completion of the BEST Plus oral interview assessment to determine English language proficiency and placement.
- CAP Tulsa’s ESL curriculum is implemented in courses designed only for parents of children enrolled in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start centers and is delivered in small groups (up to 15) each semester.
  - The program’s structure allows for a single group of students to advance together with the same instructor (i.e., cohort model).
  -Parents enrolled in a 16-week course for a semester, meeting for three hours a day, three days per week.
- Parents also had the opportunity to participate in a weekly, two-hour peer group meeting facilitated by the ESL coach. Outside the classroom, parents met individually with the ESL coach twice per semester and with the Head Start caseworker, or family support specialist, on an as-needed basis.
- CAP Tulsa addressed financial barriers to participation by offering an ESL program that is free of charge.
  -Parents could earn up to $500 in gas cards as incentives for on-time and regular attendance over the course of one semester, or $1,000 maximum for a year.
  -Free childcare was available for children ages one to five at the same location as the ESL class and peer group meetings.
  -While attending the ESL program, parents were also eligible for childcare vouchers for children who are under age one (or not yet walking) and not enrolled in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start programs.
- To maximize the number of parents receiving ESL services, participants were allocated into treatment conditions using a 2:1 (treatment versus control) randomization ratio.
- We studied all families in the program according to their original randomization assignment (i.e., intent-to-treat analysis).
- In this analysis of the one-year effects of the program, parents could participate in a maximum of two semesters over a 12-month period.
- Of the parents assigned to receive ESL services, 13% of parents did not enroll in the first (or second) semester.
Program/Study
Description and Measures

- All parent outcome measures were standardized so coefficient estimates can be interpreted as effect sizes and represent the mean difference (in standard deviation units) in outcomes between parents enrolled in the Two-Generation ESL Program and those randomized to the control group, who did not participate in the ESL program. The parent survey measures include:
  - **English skills**: Three items (“How well do you speak/read/write English?”) answered on a scale from 1 = not at all to 4 = very well.
  - **Positive parenting skills**: 6-item Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Frick, 1991) rated on a scale from 1 = never to 5 = very often. Example items: “Play games or do other fun things with your child” and “praise your child when he/she did something well”. Items were summed with higher scores representing more positive parenting skills.
  - **Teacher/school-based support**: 4 items rated on a scale from 1 = never/not yet to 6 = nearly every day. Example items: “How often did {CHILD}’s teacher provide you with advice or emotional support?” and “How often did you talk to the teacher about your career/job?” Items were summed with higher scores indicating more support.
  - **Parenting stress**: Four items from the Aggravation in Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; CRCW, 2013) answered on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Example items: “Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be” and “I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent”. Items were summed with higher scores representing higher levels of parenting stress.
  - **Psychological distress**: 6-item Kessler 6 (K6; Kessler et al., 2002) answered on a from 1 = all of the time to 5 = none of the time regarding the past 30 days. Example items: “About how often did you feel hopeless?” and “How often did you feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?” All items were reverse coded then summed so that higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological distress.
  - **Self-esteem**: Four items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1989) answered on a scale from 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree. Example items: “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” [reverse coded]. Items were summed with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem.
Program/Study Description and Measures

- All child outcomes measures were standardized so coefficient estimates can be interpreted as effect sizes and represent the mean difference (in standard deviation units) in performance between children whose parents were enrolled in the Two-Generation ESL Program and children with parents randomized to the control group. The child assessment measures include:
  - **Vocabulary:** The Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test: Spanish-Bilingual Edition (EOWPVT: SBE) measured children’s total acquired vocabulary on norm-referenced tests of single-word picture naming. Only Spanish-speaking children were administered the EOWPVT: SBE ($n = 157$). Raw scores were converted to standardized scores ($M = 100, SD = 15$).
  - **English proficiency:** The Pre-IDEA Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT) measured a child’s proficiency in the English language. Proficiency level scores range from A (1) to E (5) with E representing advanced proficiency.
  - **Letter-word skills:** Woodcock Johnson-III Tests of Achievement, Letter-Word Identification subtest was used to measure children’s reading decoding skills through the sight recognition of isolated letters and words (Mather & Woodcock, 2001). Raw scores were converted to standardized scores ($M = 100, SD = 15$).
  - **Memory:** The Memory for Digit Span assessment measured short-term memory as children listened to and repeated a sequence of numbers (Wechsler, 1974). Each correct response was worth one point.