

“HE’S NOT TOO YOUNG”: EMPOWERING PARENTS IN CHILD LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH UPWORDS, A PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

Lynda C Aririguzo¹, Cary Cain², Kimberly K Lopez²

¹ Baylor College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Academic General Pediatrics

² Baylor College of Medicine, Pediatrics, Public Health

Background: Children of low socioeconomic status (SES) families have higher risk of language delays and poor school readiness compared to children of high SES; 41% of US children are in low-income families. The disparity may begin with the home language environment and persists past school entry, leading to higher risk of poor health outcomes in adulthood. Community-based early literacy programs may improve the home language environment of low SES households. However, the literature on parents’ perspective of these programs is limited.

Materials/Methods: Using mixed-methods, we explored the perspectives and language scores of participants in upWORDS, a community-based early literacy program. We conducted thematic qualitative analysis on a convenience sample of interviews of parents who completed upWORDS at least 1 year before the interview. LENA Snapshots, the parent-reported measurements of children’s language skills, were also reviewed. Descriptive analysis was used to examine LENA Snapshot standard scores (SS) at baseline, during, and after program graduation.

Results: Qualitative analysis of 9 parent revealed 2 themes: Child Development and Parent Knowledge and Behavior Change. Child Development subthemes included child’s interest in reading, child’s communication, and concerns about child development. Parent Knowledge and Behavior Change subthemes included awareness of developmental delay, better understanding of normal child development, impact on childcare and school, parent-child interaction, and challenges to using program information and sustaining behaviors. 101 participants’ Snapshots were reviewed. Mean SS was 97 at baseline, peaked to 105 by graduation, and returned to 97 post-graduation. There was no correlation between SS and parents’ report of challenges or sustained behavior changes.

Conclusions: Overall parents reported multiple sustained benefits of upWORDS, including better understanding of child development, increased parent-child interaction, and perceived improvement in children’s communication skills. These benefits can be helpful for early literacy program implementers and pediatric primary care providers. Future steps should include a follow up study to better characterize SS patterns long after program graduation.