

“He’s not too young”: Empowering Parents in Child Language Development Through upWORDS, a Parenting Education Program

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Background

Children of low socioeconomic status (SES) families have higher risk of language delays and poor school readiness compared to children of higher SES; 41% of US children are from low-income homes. The disparity may begin with the home language environment and persists past school entry, leading to higher risk of poor health. Community-based early language programs may improve the home language environment of low SES homes. Still, the literature on parents’ perspective of these programs is limited. UpWORDS is a community-based early language program. It is a 14-week group parent education class that focuses on increasing parent-child language interaction and supporting the language development of young children.

Objectives

- Explore the views and language scores of participants in upWORDS, a community-based early language program.
- Use mixed-methods to describe upWORD’s impact on parents’ views on child development, parental knowledge and behavior change, and continued use of information from upWORDS.
- Identify patterns in parent-reported measurements of children’s language acquisition over time.

Methods

- We applied thematic qualitative analysis to a convenience sample of interviews of parents who completed upWORDS at least 1 year before interview.
- LENA Developmental Snapshots, a parent-reported measure of child language acquisition, were also reviewed.
- We used descriptive analysis to examine LENA Snapshot standard scores (SS) at baseline, during and after upWORDS.

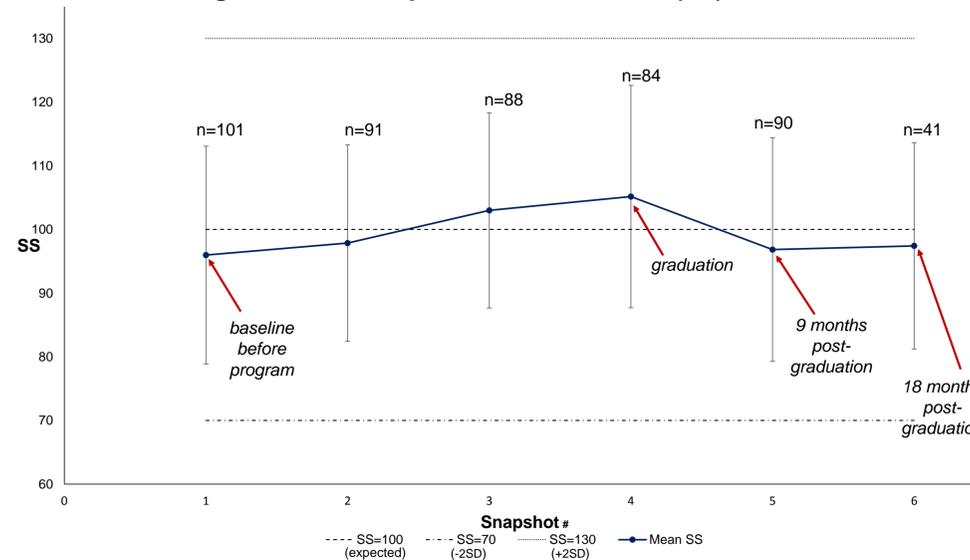
Results

Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data revealed no correlation between SS and reported challenges or sustained behavior changes.

Demographics

	Interviewed	All Snapshots
Total Participants	9	101
Language of Class		
English	5 (56%)	57(56%)
Spanish	4 (44%)	44 (44%)
Child’s Mean Age at 1st Snapshot (months)	6.6	11
Child’s Gender		
Male	5 (56%)	
Female	4 (44%)	

Changes in Mean Snapshot Standard Score (SS) Over Time



Themes and subthemes from qualitative analysis of interviews

Child Development

- Child’s interest in reading
- Child’s communication
- Concerns about child development

Parent Knowledge and Behavior Change

- Awareness of developmental delay
- Better understanding of normal child development
- Impact on childcare and school
- Parent-child interaction
- Challenges to applying program information and sustained behaviors

Selected Quotes

“She is using more words because we talk more to her.”

“The pediatrician says he is fine, but I feel like he should be talking more.”

“My expectations for my son’s development were higher because of the program.”

“So yeah, we read a lot. I like that for her. My love for reading was discovered late in my life and I want her to have that early in life.”

“I didn’t realize daycares should be having activities with kids and to dedicate time to the kids. [...] Now I have more knowledge in development, and I would ask them if I were to take them to daycare ‘other than just taking care of my kids, what else can you do with my child?’”

Child Development

“I have a table in the living room with all the stories from the program and he is always grabbing them and even takes them to the car.”

“Learning something that culturally I didn’t have or know or didn’t know I was capable of doing because I wasn’t raised that way. I wasn’t raised in a home where you got to read or spend quality time, or describing and being descriptive about what we’re doing.”

Parent Knowledge and Behavior Change

“To an extent, the program helped me sense a problem with his language.”

“read to your child and interact with them verbally and show them how to do things, rather than letting TV or iPad or other electronic devices to teach them.”

Conclusion

- Parents noted many sustained benefits of upWORDS, such as better understanding of child development, increased parent-child interaction, and perceived improvement in children’s communication skills.
- These benefits may help professionals in early language programs and pediatric primary care.
- Next steps should include a follow up study to better describe SS patterns after program graduation and if booster interventions are needed to sustain SS gains made during upWORDS.