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Pre-kindergarten teachers' family engagement practices and English Language Learners' attendance and early learning skills: Exploring the role of the linguistic context ☆

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ABSTRACT

As linguistic diversity increases in the U.S., it is essential for pre-kindergarten (pre-k) programs to expand their capacity to serve families whose home languages are not English. Family engagement is a key component of early childhood education; however, it is unclear whether family engagement practices uniformly benefit students from diverse backgrounds, including English Language Learners (ELL). In this mixed methods study, we explored whether teachers' family engagement practices were associated with ELL children's attendance and early learning, focusing on whether two aspects of the linguistic context—classroom composition of ELL students and teachers' practices for communicating in families' home languages—moderates these associations. Additionally, we used parent focus groups to shed light on ELL families' experiences with family engagement. We found consistent evidence that associations between teachers' family engagement practices and ELL children's attendance and socioemotional skills were moderated by classroom composition of ELL students. Specifically, family engagement practices were associated with better attendance and higher socioemotional skills among ELL children in minority ELL classrooms (less than 20% ELL) but not in classrooms with more ELL students (20% or more). Results aligned with themes from our qualitative analysis, which found that having few ELL families in the classroom made it difficult for ELL parents to make connections with other families, which might make it challenging to build a sense of community. This suggests that families without access to networks of linguistically similar peers at school might need additional support from teachers to feel welcome and encouraged to participate.

1. Introduction

In 2019, about 25% of children in the United States lived in immigrant households, and this percentage is expected to rise to 34% by 2050 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020; Passel & D'Vera Cohn, 2008). As the number of linguistically diverse families continues to increase, it is essential for preschool programs to expand their capacity to serve families whose primary languages are not English (Barrueco et al., 2016). There are many strengths associated with linguistically diverse families; for example, Latino parents with limited English proficiency convey high educational aspirations to their children through storytelling and conversation (Billings, 2009) and are actively involved in promoting their children's school readiness skills (Galindo et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2022). However, these families are also more likely to experience poverty, live in linguistically isolated communities, and experience discrimination, which can pose a risk for their children's development (Cannon et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2010). Furthermore, many educators report feeling unprepared to work with students and families with limited English proficiency (Gándara et al., 2005), which can further exacerbate the inequities that children identified as English Language Learners (ELL) face.

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Family involvement in preschool is consistently, positively associated with children's development (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Arnold et al., 2008). Recent work suggests preschool programs' family engagement practices can improve children's academic and socioemotional outcomes by promoting family involvement (Barnett et al., 2020; Puccioni et al., 2020). However, it is less clear whether the positive effects of family engagement practices are distributed evenly among students from different demographic backgrounds. For example, a recent study found pre-k teachers' communication practices were positively associated with children's outcomes among those whose primary language was English, but these associations were null among ELL children (Pilarz et al., 2022). The linguistic context—including linguistic match with peers and teachers—might be an important factor for family engagement among families whose primary languages are not English. Although prior research has not examined the role of the linguistic context, students' demographic match with teachers and peers is associated with families' school involvement (Markowitz et al., 2020) and early school achievement (Dee, 2004; Downer et al., 2016). These studies suggest that the effectiveness of family engagement efforts might depend upon contextual factors, including demographic and linguistic (mis)match.

The purpose of this study is to provide novel evidence on how family engagement practices are associated with ELL children's attendance, socioemotional skills, and early literacy skills. Using survey and administrative data from a public pre-k program in an urban, Midwestern school district, we examined how the associations between family engagement practices (i.e., teachers' efforts to communicate with and involve families) and ELL children's outcomes vary across two components of linguistic match: the percentage of ELL children's classmates who are also identified as ELL (i.e., ELL classroom composition) and how often teachers communicate with ELL children's families in their primary language (i.e., ELL communication practices). Further, we contextualize these findings by analyzing qualitative data from parent focus groups to explore ELL parents' perspectives of teachers' family engagement practices. This study offers insight into how the linguistic context of pre-k programs shape the effectiveness of teachers' family engagement practices for supporting ELL children's outcomes.

2. The link between family engagement practices and children's early learning

Family engagement practices are a key component of early childhood education (ECE) because they promote partnerships between ECE programs, teachers, and families, which in turn support children's development. Teachers and programs actively engage families in multiple ways, including regular two-way communication and collaboration with families, providing involvement opportunities to participate in program activities, helping families access community resources and services, providing direct services to families (e.g., parenting classes), and involving families in school decision-making processes (Castro et al., 2004; Epstein, 1995; Sabol et al., 2018). In this study, we focus on two central components of teachers' family engagement practices: (1) two-way communication and collaboration with families about their children's development, and (2) invitations to families to participate in involvement opportunities (e.g., volunteering or sharing family traditions in the classroom).

Teachers' efforts to communicate with families and involve them in program activities are expected to promote children's early learning through two primary pathways: home-based and school-based parental involvement (Hindman & Morrison, 2011). By communicating regularly with families about their children's learning, teachers help parents expand their knowledge and strategies for supporting school readiness skills at home (McWayne et al., 2016). Teachers' communication efforts can also make families feel welcome and more comfortable talking with teachers about their hopes, concerns, and questions. Importantly, these partnerships between teachers and families can help teachers better support children's development at school by using parents' insights to help guide instruction (Forry et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers' family engagement practices can promote parents' school-based involvement through invitations to participate in activities like parent-teacher conferences and family social events. When families participate in these activities, it can provide opportunities for them to socialize with other families and thereby expand their social networks and support systems, which can further facilitate their children's development (Sommer et al., 2017). Additionally, participating in involvement opportunities can facilitate relationships between teachers and parents by building trust and mutual respect. Using communication and involvement practices to build strong family-school partnerships can reduce absenteeism in pre-k by promoting parents' beliefs about the value of preschool and making them feel welcome, and in turn, improving children's early academic and socioemotional skills (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Ehrlich et al., 2018).

Family engagement as a broad construct includes both parental involvement (i.e., actions that families take to be involved in their children's education) and family engagement practices (i.e., efforts that teachers and programs do to encourage and facilitate partnerships with families). The distinction between parental involvement and family engagement practices matters because strong family-school partnerships rely on efforts from both parents and teachers; furthermore, parental involvement can be shaped by teachers' engagement practices (McWayne et al., 2016). Prior research on the relationship between family engagement and children's early learning has typically focused on parents' levels of involvement as a predictor of children's outcomes, showing that parental involvement is consistently positively associated with children's cognitive and socioemotional development (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Arnold et al., 2008; Barnett et al., 2020; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Marcon, 1999; Powell et al., 2010). Parental involvement activities that have been associated with children's outcomes include the frequency of communication with the teacher, participation in classroom activities (e.g., volunteering, parent-teacher conferences), and attending program activities (e.g., social events, parent teacher organization), with studies typically using a composite measure of parental involvement (e.g., Ansari & Gershoff, 2016) and sometimes examining associations with specific types of activities (e.g., Barnett et al., 2020). Although prior studies have focused on parental involvement and children's outcomes, understanding whether family engagement practices predict children's outcomes is especially useful knowledge for ECE teachers because family engagement practices are malleable and might be an important tool for promoting children's early learning.

Research on how family engagement practices matter for children's preschool attendance and early learning is limited and has produced inconsistent findings. Intervention studies provide some evidence that improving family engagement practices in preschool can boost children's cognitive and socioemotional outcomes (Grindal et al., 2016; Mendez, 2010), whereas correlational research has produced mixed findings. Earlier studies provided little evidence of family engagement practices in preschool being associated with children's outcomes (Hindman & Morrison, 2011; Sabol et al., 2013); however, these studies used a broad, composite measure of family engagement practices ranging from parents being invited to serve as classroom aides to helping with administrative tasks, some of which might not matter for children's outcomes. More recently, two studies using the same nationally representative sample found that parents' positive perceptions of family engagement practices that are directly related to supporting chil-

dren's learning (e.g., how well the program informs them on how their child is doing) predicted better literacy and socioemotional skills in kindergarten (Barnett et al., 2020; Puccioni et al., 2020).

There is also evidence of heterogeneity in the associations between family engagement practices and children's outcomes by child and family characteristics. Using data from a public pre-k program, Pilarz et al. (2022) found that associations between family engagement practices and children's attendance, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills varied by family income, children's ELL status, child race and ethnicity, and program type. With respect to ELL children, family engagement practices were associated with better early literacy skills but not attendance or socioemotional skills; instead, the positive associations between family engagement practices and children's attendance and socioemotional skills were concentrated among children whose primary language was English. This suggests the need to consider heterogeneity in who benefits from teachers' family engagement practices as well as identify factors that can help explain the contexts in which family engagement practices are most effective for ELL children.

3. Family engagement, linguistic context, and early learning among ELL children

For preschool programs to equitably serve all families, it is important to consider the unique experiences of ELL children and their families who face additional barriers to both parental involvement and early learning, including linguistic, social, economic, and cultural factors (Pyle et al., 2005). Ecocultural theories of family engagement emphasize the importance of understanding the ecological factors that influence how families from different cultures engage in their children's learning, including cultural values, available resources, and community norms (Calzada et al., 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, Latino immigrants often have language differences, inflexible work schedules, and lack of familiarity with U.S. schools, which can hinder the development of strong family-school partnerships (McWayne et al., 2016). However, prior research also demonstrates how Latino families have been informally involved in their children's education by demonstrating high educational aspirations through storytelling and emphasizing positive behaviors at home, despite their lower rates of school-based involvement (Billings, 2009; Bridges et al., 2012; Chao & Kanatsu, 2008; Simons et al., 2022). Similarly, in a parent-derived measure of preschool parental involvement among low-income Latino families, the importance of home-based engagement emerged as a salient component of family engagement for this group, making up three out of the four dimensions put forth by families (McWayne et al., 2013). Given the importance of home-based involvement for immigrant families, teachers' communication practices that strengthen the link between what children are learning at preschool and at home may be particularly valued and impactful for ELL families.

From this ecocultural perspective of family engagement, the effectiveness of teachers' efforts to engage families will depend upon families' ecological contexts as well as the classroom and program environment. Although contextual factors for immigrant families include family-level characteristics like socioeconomic status and cultural norms, classroom and teacher characteristics might also influence when and how family engagement practices are most effective for ELL families. For ELL families, the linguistic context of the classroom might be important in shaping the effectiveness of family engagement practices. Two potentially salient factors are the composition of children who are also ELL and speak the same home language (i.e., linguistic match with peers) and the extent to which teachers regularly communicate with families in their preferred languages.

There is limited research on the role of classroom linguistic composition for family engagement practices and ELL children's outcomes. One study examined how linguistic composition influences teachers' tolerance towards multilingualism in the European context (Strobbe et al., 2017), finding that teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism were most positive in mixed linguistic settings (i.e., neither minority nor majority dominated). Given that tolerance towards multilingualism might be important for teachers' practices for engaging families, this study suggests that teachers with exposure to children with multiple home languages might have more positive attitudes towards engaging multilingual families. In a study on how classroom composition of ELL students influenced children's outcomes, Meng (2018) found that ELL children's socioemotional skills were dependent on the linguistic diversity of their classroom. Specifically, having fewer ELL children was associated with lower socioemotional skills, suggesting ELL children benefit socially from having other ELL children in their classrooms. While neither of these studies examined family engagement practices, they provide insights into the role of linguistic diversity in classrooms and evidence that classroom linguistic composition can influence teachers' attitudes and children's development.

Recent studies have examined the influence of students' demographic match with peers and teachers on parental involvement and children's early learning skills in preschool. Parent-teacher and child-teacher racial/ethnic match is positively associated with parental involvement in preschool, suggesting demographic match is an important factor for parental involvement (Calzada et al., 2015; Markowitz et al., 2020; Mundt et al., 2015). Additionally, Benner and Yan (2015) found that for children with more same-race/ethnic representation among their kindergarten classmates, greater classroom diversity promoted parental involvement, which led to higher rates of socioemotional skills and reading achievement. These authors suggest that having more demographic match between children and their peers might promote family involvement because families feel represented and respected in these contexts. Additionally, teachers who have multiple, more equally represented demographic groups in their classrooms might place greater attention to diversity, leading families to feel more comfortable getting involved. Conversely, families with less demographic match might feel more isolated and require additional support from teachers to feel welcome and encouraged to participate in activities.

Although these prior studies on demographic match do not focus on ELL families or linguistic match per se, these findings suggest that greater demographic match, including shared language, between teachers and families can facilitate parental involvement in preschool, which in turn could promote children's attendance and early learning skills. It is less clear from prior research how the linguistic match between children and their peers might matter for teachers' family engagement practices. It is possible that family engagement efforts will be more effective for ELL families when their children are in classrooms with more ELL peers because greater match with peers helps ELL families feel comfortable getting involved (Benner & Yan, 2015; Calzada et al., 2015; Markowitz et al., 2020; Mundt et al., 2015). On the other hand, family engagement practices might be most beneficial for ELL families in linguistically isolated classrooms because these families might feel less welcome and be less likely to engage without additional outreach from teachers; whereas in majority ELL classrooms where ELL parents are able to communicate with most other parents, parents may be more likely to organize themselves without the teachers' intervention. Given this, we expect the associations between family engagement practices and child outcomes will depend on the classroom composition of ELL children. We expect that the moderation will be non-linear as there might be a threshold in the percentage

of ELL children in the classroom at which the positive association between family engagement practices and child outcomes becomes more or less pronounced.

Furthermore, when teachers do not speak families' primary languages, their practices for communicating with ELL families should be considered, including translating and interpreting all written and oral communication in families' preferred languages (Gaitan, 2004). A qualitative study with Head Start teachers serving migrant workers emphasized the importance of providing written materials in families' primary languages and interpretation services; however, teachers noted that these practices are only effective when materials are reliably translated, and even so, they can exclude families who are not proficient readers (Smith, 2020). Given the importance of written and oral communication for effectively engaging families, we expect that teachers' practices for communicating with ELL families will moderate the associations between family engagement practices and children's outcomes. Specifically, we expect family engagement practices will be more strongly associated with ELL children's outcomes when teachers communicate more frequently in families' preferred languages.

4. Method

4.1. Data and sample

We used survey and administrative data from a study of family engagement practices in a Midwestern, urban school district during the 2016-2017 school year. Teachers and administrators at public schools and community-based early care and education centers that offered public pre-k were invited to participate in a mailed survey (response rate=82%). Teachers reported on their family engagement practices, including two-way communication and collaboration with families, opportunities for family involvement, and communication practices specific to ELL families (e.g., translating written materials). We linked teacher survey data with student records, including demographic characteristics, attendance, early literacy skills measured by the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening PreK (Invernizzi et al., 2004), and teacher-reported socioemotional skills adapted from Teaching Strategies GOLD (Lambert et al., 2015).

In the current study, we restricted the analytic sample to children identified as ELL by the school district (N=380 children; N=60 teachers). We then excluded 13 teachers (and 22 children) who indicated that all the parents of children in their classroom spoke English fluently. The data do not contain a measure of parents' English fluency or primary language at the child level. Our final sample includes 358 ELL children clustered within 47 teachers; see Table 1 for sample descriptive statistics. Although ELL students represent a heterogeneous group, the majority of ELL children in our sample identified as Hispanic (60.1%). The school district reported that 60% of children classified as ELL spoke Spanish as their primary home language, less than 10% spoke Hmong, less than 5% spoke Mandarin, and the remaining students classified as ELL spoke a variety of other languages (Deidentified Citation).

Missing data in covariates was minimal, except for parent education, for which 10.9% of cases had missing data. Cases with missing data on parent education were similar to those without missing data in terms of our key dependent and independent variables; however, they were more likely to have a teacher who reported a higher frequency of ELL communication practices and differed significantly on several teacher- and site-level covariates (see Table A1 in the online appendix). To address this missing data, we imputed parent education using multiple imputation with chained equations in Stata 16 with 20 imputed datasets. Due to missing data in our measures of early literacy and socioemotional skills, the analytic samples for those models are smaller (N=312 and N=349, respectively). Tables A2 and A3 in the online appendix compares the characteristics of our sample for children with and without missing data on these two dependent variables.

Table 1
Sample descriptive statistics.

	Mean (SD) or %
Child Outcomes	
Attendance rate (%)	92.30 (7.49)
Chronic absenteeism	22.35%
Early literacy skills (PALS)	47.00 (33.13)
Socioemotional skills	3.12 (0.41)
Family Engagement Practices	
Communication (not standardized)	2.18 (0.68)
Involvement opportunities (not standardized)	1.82 (0.72)
Moderators	
ELL classroom composition: <20%	18.16%
ELL classroom composition: 20-60%	51.40%
ELL classroom composition: >60%	30.45%
High Frequency of ELL Practices	68.44%
Control Variables	
Child is female	55.31%
Child race/ethnicity: Hispanic	60.06%
Child race/ethnicity: Asian	27.65%
Child race/ethnicity: Multiple/other	12.30%
Parent education: High school or less	56.01%
Parent education: Some college or tech school	17.31%
Parent education: College degree	9.51%
Parent education: Graduate degree	17.16%
Child eligible for free/reduced lunch	67.60%
Child has an IEP	8.38%
Child:teacher ratio	6.60 (1.34)
Frequency of reading/language activities	13.20 (3.23)
Teacher attitudes: commitment to teaching	3.81 (0.31)
Teacher attitudes: respect for families	3.10 (0.43)
Teacher years of experience	12.56 (7.70)
Teacher education greater than a bachelor's degree	66.20%
Teacher is white non-Hispanic	78.49%
Site type is school	71.79%
Number of children enrolled in pre-k	53.28 (21.14)
Free/reduced lunch (% of students)	64.52 (24.37)

Notes. Mean or % are shown with standard deviations in parentheses. N = 358, except for early literacy skills (N=312) and socioemotional skills (N = 349).

To assess parents' perspectives on teachers' family engagement practices, we used data from focus groups with parents and caregivers of children enrolled in public pre-k conducted towards the end of the school year in May and June of 2017. The research team purposively selected focus group sites to include a diversity of programs that varied by site type and percentage of ELL students to conduct at least one focus group with Spanish-speaking families; only sites that participated in the survey portion of the study were considered. The directors and principals at four school sites and four community sites were invited to participate; three school sites and one community site agreed to participate (four total sites). To recruit parents and caregivers to participate in the focus groups at these four sites, the research team distributed flyers to parents and caregivers during child drop-off or pick-up times and left flyers in the classrooms. Parents and caregivers who signed up to participate were sent a reminder phone call or text message a few days before the scheduled focus groups. Recruitment materials were available in English and Spanish. All focus groups took place at the pre-k sites during program hours and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Participants completed a short survey before or after the focus group that collected information on their demographics, work, child care, and participation in program activities. Participants received $25 as a thank you gift.

We conducted four focus groups, each at a different pre-k program site. The lead project investigator led the focus groups using a semi-structured protocol, and a graduate student research assistant took notes and administered the survey. The protocol included questions and prompts related to parents' and caregivers':

(1) reasons for selecting the pre-k program and their hopes and expectations for themselves and their child; (2) relationships with the program and staff, including feeling welcome and communication with their child's teacher; (3) opportunities for involvement, including likes/dislikes, barriers, and opportunities for connecting with other parents; and (4) programs' family support services, including connecting families to community resources (full protocol is provided in the online appendix). The number of parents and caregivers who participated in each focus group ranged from two to six. One focus group was held at a pre-k program with a majority of Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers and was conducted in Spanish by the lead investigator who is a native Spanish speaker; we refer to this as the majority ELL classroom. The other three focus groups were conducted in English with parents who spoke English as their primary (or sole) language. At one site, both English- and Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers signed up to participate, so we scheduled two focus groups; however, only one of the two Spanish-speaking parents showed up to the focus group, so we conducted a one-on-one interview with her and refer to this as the minority ELL classroom. In total, 15 parents and caregivers participated in the focus group component of the study; 14 completed the short paper-and-pencil survey. Nine participants were the mother of a child enrolled in pre-k, five were fathers, and one participant was the grandmother of a child in pre-k; we hereafter refer to focus group participants as parents. All participants described being the pre-k child's primary caregiver or being actively involved in caregiving and in the child's schooling; all resided with the pre-k child except for two fathers. Five participants were predominantly Spanish-speaking, born outside the U.S., and identified as Hispanic or Latino; two of these parents had less than a high school degree, two had a high school degree, and one attended some college but had no degree. The other participants spoke English as their primary language, were born in the U.S., and identified as White ($n = 6$) or Black ($n = 3$); one of these parents had a high school degree, six attended some college but had no degree, and two had a bachelor's degree.

4.2. Measures

Descriptive statistics for all measures are shown in Table 1. We include a correlation matrix for all variables used in the study in the online appendix (see Table A4).

4.3. Children's early learning skills

We measured two components of children's early learning: early literacy skills and socioemotional skills. Both constructs were measured at the end of the pre-k program during the fourth quarter of the school year (typically between April and June). Early literacy skills were measured using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) PreK, a direct assessment of early English literacy skills administered by teachers (Invernizzi et al., 2004). All children are tested in English on this assessment because it is intended to capture their English literacy skills rather than their overall language ability. Our measure includes four out of six PALS-PreK subscales: (1) alphabet knowledge, (2) beginning sounds, (3) print and word awareness, and (4) rhyme awareness. Subscale scores were summed to create a total score ($M = 47.00$, $SD = 33.13$). Socioemotional skills were measured using teacher-reported children's prosocial classroom behavior, including ability to regulate emotions and exercise self-control, recognizing feelings of others, engaging in social interactions and negotiating conflict with peers, and following classroom rules and routines ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.41$). Teachers rated children's behavior on seven items using the following response scale intended to measure children's progress towards the pre-k early learning standards: (1) emerging, meaning child shows initial understanding of pre-k standards; (2) developing, meaning child is developing understanding and is approaching pre-k standards; (3) meeting, meaning child consistently meets pre-k standards; and (4) exceeding, meaning child consistently exceeds pre-k standards. Many of these items were adapted from the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment (Lambert et al., 2015).

4.4. Children's attendance in Pre-K

We measured children's pre-k attendance in two ways: attendance rate (continuous) and chronic absenteeism (dichotomous). Attendance rate was measured as the percentage of days that a child attended the program during the school year ($M = 92.30$, $SD = 7.49$). Chronic absenteeism was measured as an indicator for being considered chronically absent from pre-k, defined as lower than 90% attendance rate. About 22.35% of children were chronically absent.

4.5. Teacher-reported family engagement practices

Our measures of family engagement practices were drawn or adapted from multiple instruments of family engagement, including the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) instruments (Kim et al., 2015), the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991), and the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (Malone et al., 2013). These three scales are widely used in other studies (e.g., Ansari & Gershoff 2016, Kohl et al. 2000, Markowitz et al. 2020, Mautone et al. 2015) and have been tested for reliability (Kim et al., 2015; Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud, 2000). For example, the internal consistency reliability (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) of the two FPTRQ subscales we adapted range from 0.77 to 0.91 (Kim et al., 2015). We also created new items specifically related to the pre-k program. See Table A5 of the online appendix for descriptive statistics and exact wording of the items used to construct our measures of family engagement practices. We report Cronbach's alpha for our adapted scales below.

Teachers reported their two-way communication and collaboration with families by responding to 13 items (Kim et al., 2015). We asked these 13 items across two survey questions asking them how often they met with or talked to most parents about a series of topics (e.g., sharing information about their child's day, seeking input or information from parents about their child). One question used a 7-point scale from never to everyday, and the other used a 5-point scale from never to more than once per month. These 13 items were selected to capture the underlying construct of teachers' communication and collaboration with families about their children's learning, and we expected each item to have a similar relationship with children's outcomes. Therefore, rather than relying on each separate item, we averaged the items together into one measure that captures teachers' overall communication and collaboration practices. Because the items were on two different scales, we standardized the items prior to averaging them together ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.68$, $\alpha = 0.91$).

Teachers reported their provision of parental involvement opportunities by responding to six items from two survey questions. The first question asked how often they invited the families of children in their classroom to participate in a series of activities (e.g., participate in children's learning activities in your classroom, share something about their family in your classroom, such as their family or cultural traditions) on a 5-point scale from never to about once per week or more. The second question asked how often they invited the families of children in their classroom to participate in family social events for parents to get to know each other, like sharing meals or other activities, on a 6-point scale from never to

more than once per month. Like our construction of teachers' two-way communication and collaboration practices, we selected these six items to capture the underlying construct of teachers' provision of involvement opportunities, and therefore, we averaged the items together to create an overall scale rather than using each individual item separately. Because the items were on two different scales, we standardized the items prior to averaging them together ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.72$, $\alpha = 0.80$).

4.6. Linguistic context

We constructed two measures of the linguistic context of the classroom to be used as moderators in our analyses. To capture the linguistic (mis)match between ELL children in our sample and their peers, we measured classroom composition of ELL children using administrative data by calculating the percentage of teachers' students who were identified to be ELL. We created three categories of ELL classroom composition: less than 20%, 20–60%, and more than 60%. We selected these cut-offs to capture contexts in which ELL children would be in the minority (e.g., less than 20% represents three or fewer ELL children in a typical classroom with 18 children and similar to our minority ELL classroom focus group), in the majority (e.g., greater than 60% or 11 out of 18 children and similar to our majority ELL classroom focus group), and in between (20 and 60%). These three categories also have sufficient numbers of children and teachers represented in each category (less than 20%: $n = 65$ children and $n = 19$ teachers; 20–60%: $n = 184$ children and $n = 22$ teachers; and more than 60%: $n = 109$ children and $n = 6$ teachers). Because of the limited research on the linguistic context of pre-k classrooms and the lack of a conventional approach to selecting these thresholds, we tested the sensitivity of our findings by using alternative thresholds for minority ELL classrooms: 0 to <25% and 0 to <30%.

Our second measure of the linguistic context was the frequency of teachers' ELL communication practices. Teachers responded to four items that asked, "For pre-k parents who do not speak English, how often are you able to do the following" and included practices such as providing written materials in all languages spoken by parents and using an interpreter to translate when meeting with parents. Each item was on a 5-point scale from never to always; see the online appendix (Table A5) for descriptive statistics on each of the four individual items used to construct this measure of ELL communication practices. We averaged the four items together to create a scale score and then created a dichotomous indicator for teachers using ELL communication strategies frequently, defined by reporting to use the strategies often or always, on average; 68.44% of teachers reporting to use ELL communication practices frequently. For both measures of the linguistic context, as a sensitivity test, we also estimated models that used continuous versions of these measures.

4.7. Control variables

We selected control variables representing child, family, teacher, and program characteristics that could theoretically be linked to both teachers' family engagement practices and children's program attendance and early learning skills and could confound these associations. Child-level controls included child sex (i.e., indicator for child is female), race and ethnicity (Hispanic [any race], non-Hispanic Asian, and non-Hispanic multiracial or other race), parents' level of education (high school or less, some college or technical school, college degree, and graduate degree), an indicator for the child is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (as a proxy for low family income), and an indicator for the child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP; as a proxy for having a disability). Teacher-level controls included child-to-teacher ratio in the classroom, frequency of reading and language activities in number of days per month (e.g., practicing the sounds that letters make), years of experience as lead teacher, an indicator for the teacher has more than a bachelor's degree, and an indicator for the teacher identifies as non-Hispanic White. We used two scales with five and seven items, respectively, to measure teachers' attitudes towards commitment to teaching as their career and profession ($\alpha = 0.63$) and their respect for and willingness to partner with families ($\alpha = 0.68$). Site-level controls included an indicator for being a school site (versus community site), number of children enrolled in pre-k at the site, and percentage of children at the site eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

To assess selection into the different categories of our moderator variables, we examined the descriptive statistics of control variables at different levels of our two moderators (see Tables A6 and A7 in online appendix). Compared to children in mixed (20-60% ELL) and majority ELL (>60% ELL) classrooms, children in minority ELL classrooms (<20% ELL) were less likely to be Hispanic, more likely to have a parent with a graduate degree, less likely to be eligible for free/reduced lunch, and more likely to be in a school site. There were no consistent patterns in indicators of program quality by ELL composition. For example, although children in minority ELL classrooms were more likely to be in a classroom with more frequent reading/language activities and have a teacher with more years of experience, they were also more likely to have higher child:teacher ratios and a teacher who reports lower scores on respect for families. Children who have teachers who frequently communicate with families in their preferred languages were more likely to be Hispanic, have a parent with lower education, be eligible for free/reduced lunch, and be in a community site. We again found differences in indicators of quality but no consistent patterns (e.g., less frequent reading/language activities but have teachers with higher scores on respect for families).

4.8. Analytic approach

4.8.1. Quantitative component

We estimated associations between teachers' family engagement practices and children's outcomes in the spring of pre-k, adjusting for child, teacher, and program characteristics. We used OLS regression for continuous child outcomes (attendance rate, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills) and logistic regression for the dichotomous outcome (chronic absenteeism). Our two measures of family engagement practices (two-way communication and involvement opportunities) were entered into separate models that used clustered standard errors to account for clustering of children within teachers. To test interactions between family engagement practices and classroom context, we added the following moderators: (1) a three-category variable for the percentage of ELL children in the classroom and (2) an indicator that teachers often or always used ELL-specific communication practices. We included interaction terms between each moderator and each measure of family engagement practices in separate models.

Every model presented in the results included each control variable listed in Table 1. We also estimated models that entered the control variables in a stepwise process. We first estimated models with child-level controls, then added teacher-level controls, and then added site-level controls. The results were unchanged (see Tables A8 and A9 in the online appendix). Because child, teacher, and site-level characteristics are all theoretically important for teachers' family engagement practices and child outcomes, we present the models that include all controls.

4.8.2. Qualitative component

We used qualitative data from parent focus groups to supplement our quantitative findings and give voice to parents' perspec-

tives on family engagement. Focus group recordings were professionally transcribed and, for Spanish-speaking transcripts, also translated into English. The lead investigator and native Spanish speaker compared the English translations to the original Spanish transcripts and edited for accuracy. All transcripts were analyzed in NVivo. Focus groups were analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach (LaRossa, 2005). First, the research team developed a coding scheme based on the key research questions and focus group protocol and coded and analyzed a priori themes as well as emergent themes across interviews using NVivo qualitative analysis software (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). All transcripts were double-coded by two members of the research team. Coding was done through an iterative approach. After each researcher coded a transcript, coding discrepancies and emergent themes were discussed and resolved in team meetings, and codes were revised and applied to remaining transcripts. Reliability among coders was high; agreement was above 90 percent and Kappa coefficients were above 0.80 across codes.

In the next phase of analyses, we compared parents' perspectives on family engagement across cases, focusing on differences between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents and across pre-k sites. We focused our analyses on codes related to teachers' family engagement practices, including parent-staff relationships, feeling welcome in the program, programs' communication about children's learning and development, and parental involvement opportunities. For example, all chunks of text coded under "parental involvement opportunities" were analyzed to identify similarities and differences across cases. Patterns that emerged from these analyses were compared with the focus group transcripts to guard against misattribution of the meaning of text chunks and to further elaborate understanding of the themes. Because our goal in this study is to understand ELL parents' experiences with family engagement, we forefront Spanish-speaking parents' perspectives and words but also include English-speaking parents' perspectives to show similarities and differences in parents' experiences within and across sites. We present the English translation of Spanish-speaking parents' quotes in the main text of the manuscript and include the quotes in Spanish in footnotes.

5. Results

5.1. How are teachers' family engagement practices associated with ELL children's outcomes?

Teachers' two-way communication practices were associated with higher early literacy skills for ELL children (see Table 2 Panel 1). A one standard deviation (SD) higher level of communication practices was associated with 0.13 SDs higher early literacy skills in ELL children. Teachers' involvement opportunities were not associated with any outcomes, on average (see Table 3 Panel 1), but measures of the classroom linguistic context were. ELL children in classrooms with 20–60% ELL students scored lower on early literacy and socioemotional skills compared to children in classrooms with less than 20% ELL students. More frequent ELL communication practices were also associated with lower early literacy skills and socioemotional skills.

Results from moderation models suggest that the associations between teachers' family engagement practices and ELL children's outcomes vary by ELL classroom composition, but not by teachers' ELL communication practices (see Table 2 Panels 2-3 and Table 3 Panels 2-3). Specifically, for ELL children in classrooms that had fewer than 20% of ELL children, a one standard deviation higher level of teachers' communication practices was associated with higher attendance rates (attending 3.7 more days), 67% lower odds of chronic absenteeism (odds ratio = 0.33), and 0.32 SDs higher socioemotional skills (see Figs. 1–3). For ELL children in classrooms with 20–60% or 60% or more ELL children, we found null associations between teachers' two-way communication practices and children's attendance and socioemotional skills (see Figs. 1–3). We found no evidence of moderation in predicting children's early literacy skills. Similarly, teachers' involvement opportunities were associated with 57% lower odds of chronic absenteeism ($p<.10$) among children in classrooms with fewer than 20% ELL children but had a null relationship with chronic absenteeism in classrooms with 20% or more ELL children (see Fig. 4). Although the interaction terms were not statistically significant in the models predicting attendance rate and socioemotional skills (see Table 3 Panel 2), we observed a similar pattern of findings as for teachers' communication practices, suggesting positive associations between teachers' involvement practices in classrooms with fewer than 20% ELL children but not in classrooms with 20% or more ELL children.

We tested the sensitivity of these findings to alternative specifications of the moderator variables. Results from models that used continuous versions of the moderators and models that used alternative thresholds for defining minority ELL classrooms (<25% and <30%) showed a similar pattern of findings as in our main models, suggesting that positive associations between family engagement practices and children's attendance and socioemotional skills are concentrated among children in minority ELL classroom (see Tables A10–A12 and Figs. A1–A4 in the online appendix). We find a less consistent pattern of findings, however, for early literacy skills in the alternative threshold models. In some specifications, the interaction terms are statistically significant suggesting that the positive associations between teachers' communication practices and children's early literacy skills are concentrated among minority ELL classrooms. In sum, our results for chronic absenteeism and socioemotional skills are robust across all models; whether ELL classroom composition moderates the associations between family engagement practices and early literacy skills is sensitive to the thresholds used to define ELL classroom composition.

5.2. How do ELL parents perceive and experience teachers' and pre-k programs' family engagement practices?

Parents described teachers' communication and involvement practices as being important for building strong parent-teacher relationships. Frequent opportunities for regular, two-way communication were essential to building strong relationships, characterized by mutual trust and honesty. Parents described that pick-up and drop-off times are key times for checking in with their child's teachers and asking questions, whereas parent-teacher conferences were used to discuss children's learning and goal-setting more in-depth. Parents described the importance of teachers being honest about challenges their child is facing and helping parents overcome them. When discussing how the teacher communicates with parents about what their children are doing and learning in the classroom, one Spanish-speaking parent in the majority ELL classroom said:

I drop him off and pick him up everyday, that's when I talk with her. And because sometimes I arrive early, she'll talk to me. And one day she almost started crying. Yes, because she says, "He has progressed so much. It makes me happy to see that he is now able to communicate with his friends, when at first he was so shy." But everyday, when I pick him up, that's when she tells me: today he did this, today he was able to say this or whatever else.[1]

[1] Yo lo traigo y lo recojo cada día, así es como yo hablo con ella. Y, como llego temprano a veces, se pone a hablarme. Y una vez casi empieza a llorar. Sí, porque dice, ha avanzado tanto, me da felicidad verlo que ya se puede comunicar con sus amigos, que al principio era tan tímido. Pero cada día, cuando lo vengo a recoger, es cuando me dice, hoy hizo esto, hoy ya pudo decir esto o cualquier otra cosa.

Table 2
Associations between teachers' communication practices and ELL children's attendance in pre-k, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills.

	Attendance Rate (%)	Chronic Absenteeism	Early Literacy Skills	SE Skills
Panel 1: Main Model				
Communication Practices	0.26	0.97	0.13*	0.03
	(0.50)	(0.16)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Classroom Composition: 20-60% ELL Students	0.68	0.63	-0.29	-0.34*
	(1.24)	(0.24)	(0.16)+	(0.15)
Classroom Composition: >60% ELL Students	1.66	0.58	-0.05	0.02
	(1.58)	(0.28)	(0.25)	(0.21)
Frequent ELL Practices	0.31	0.88	-0.49**	-0.39*
	(1.23)	(0.38)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Panel 2: Interaction Model with Classroom Composition				
Communication Practices	3.68**	0.33**	0.30+	0.32**
	(1.30)	(0.12)	(0.18)	(0.12)
Classroom Composition: 20-60% ELL Students	1.25	0.60	-0.26+	-0.29+
	(1.24)	(0.22)	(0.15)	(0.16)
Classroom Composition: >60% ELL Students	1.92	0.70	0.01	0.02
	(1.82)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.22)
Communication Practices X 20-60% ELL Students	-4.33**	3.71**	-0.22	-0.36*
	(1.54)	(1.58)	(0.20)	(0.14)
Communication Practices X >60% ELL Students	-3.60+	4.11**	-0.14	-0.36
	(2.05)	(2.09)	(0.29)	(0.24)
Panel 3: Interaction Model with Frequent ELL Practices				
Communication Practices	-0.12	0.91	0.08	-0.02
	(0.66)	(0.26)	(0.08)	(0.13)
Frequent ELL Practices	0.12	0.85	-0.52**	-0.41*
	(1.37)	(0.38)	(0.15)	(0.18)
Communication Practices X Frequent ELL Practices	0.62	1.10	0.09	0.08
	(0.98)	(0.42)	(0.11)	(0.14)
N	358	358	312	349

Notes. Estimates are coefficients from OLS regressions models (for attendance rate, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills) and exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios) from logistic models (for chronic absenteeism); standard errors are in parentheses. All models controlled for child, teacher, and classroom characteristics (see Table 1 for a list of control variables), and clustered standard errors were used. SE skills = socioemotional skills. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Associations between teachers' involvement opportunities and ELL children's attendance in pre-k, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills.

	Attendance Rate (%)	Chronic Absenteeism	Early Literacy Skills	SE Skills
Panel 1: Main Model				
Involvement Opportunities	-0.26	1.08	0.04	-0.01
	(0.46)	(0.17)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Classroom Composition: 20-60% ELL Students	0.84	0.59	-0.30+	-0.33*
	(1.22)	(0.24)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Classroom Composition: >60% ELL Students	1.40	0.60	-0.13	-0.00
	(1.55)	(0.24)	(0.27)	(0.21)
Frequent ELL Practices	0.39	0.85	-0.53**	-0.39*
	(1.20)	(0.38)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Panel 2: Interaction Model with Classroom Composition				
Involvement Opportunities	1.31	0.43+	0.03	0.07
	(1.37)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.17)
Classroom Composition: 20-60% ELL Students	0.43	0.87	-0.30+	-0.35*
	(1.24)	(0.41)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Classroom Composition: >60% ELL Students	0.73	0.96	-0.12	-0.04
	(1.59)	(0.51)	(0.27)	(0.23)
Involvement Opportunities X 20-60% ELL Students	-1.72	2.80+	0.02	-0.08
	(1.38)	(1.47)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Involvement Opportunities X >60% ELL Students	-2.71	4.11*	-0.04	-0.15
	(2.71)	(2.96)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Panel 3: Interaction Model with Frequent ELL Practices				
Involvement Opportunities	-0.76	1.24	0.02	0.03
	(0.59)	(0.24)	(0.07)	(0.11)
Frequent ELL Practices	0.40	0.87	-0.53**	-0.39*
	(1.23)	(0.39)	(0.14)	(0.18)
Involvement Opportunities X Frequent ELL Practices	0.88	0.79	0.02	-0.06
	(0.78)	(0.21)	(0.11)	(0.13)
N	358	358	312	349

Notes. Estimates are coefficients from OLS regressions models (for attendance rate, early literacy skills, and socioemotional skills) and exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios) from logistic models (for chronic absenteeism); standard errors are in parentheses. All models controlled for child, teacher, and classroom characteristics (see Table 1 for a list of control variables), and clustered standard errors were used. SE skills = socioemotional skills. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

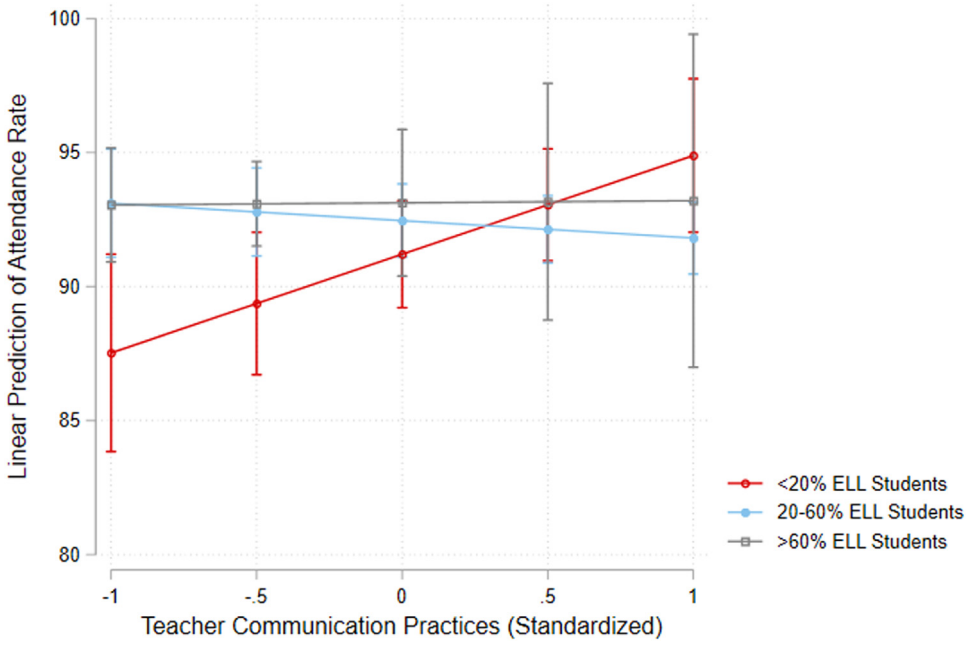

Fig. 1. ELL children's attendance rate by teachers' communication practices and ELL classroom composition.

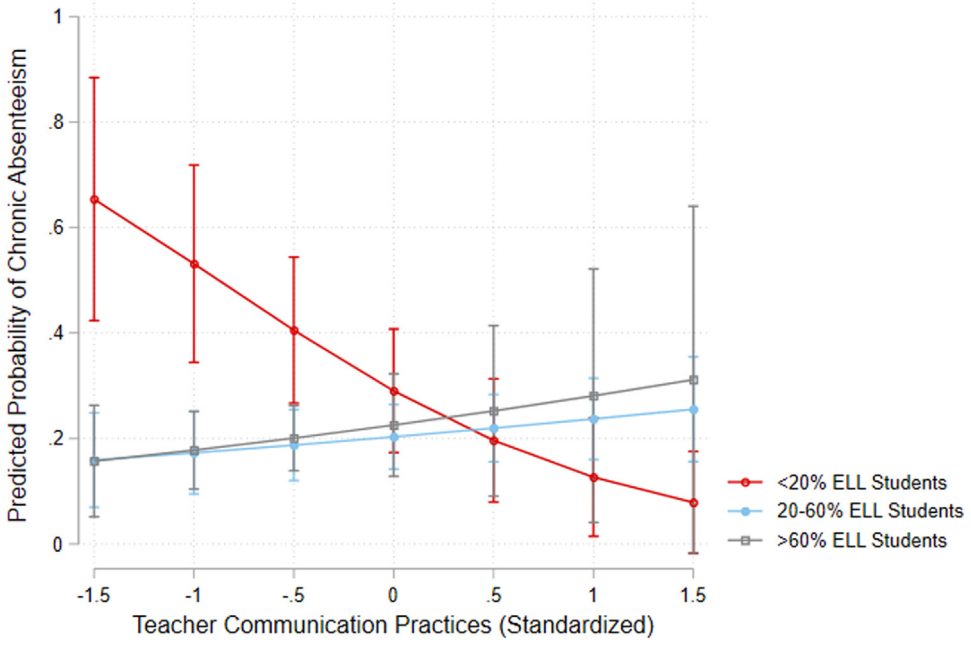

Fig. 2. ELL children's chronic absenteeism by teachers' communication practices and ELL classroom composition.

For Spanish-speaking parents, the ability to communicate with their child's teacher in Spanish was vital for these exchanges to take place. English-speaking parents described similar experiences and perspectives regarding their relationships and communication with their child's teacher as well as the importance of bidirectional communication. In a discussion about how their child's teacher communicates with them about how parents can support their child's learning, one parent said "I want to make sure that what I'm doing at home is being supported at school. Or what they're doing here, I'm doing it at home so it's vice versa for me." Another English-speaking parent in a school site described how teachers' inviting them to volunteer in the classroom and participate in classroom activities "builds trust."

Regular communication was also important for keeping parents informed about what their children are learning in the classroom. In addition to talking to parents at pick-up and drop-off times, teachers also sent weekly letters or emails about what children were learning and what activities they did that week. Most parents described these materials as being useful for them to know what children are learning and reinforce that at home, although a couple of English-speaking parents noted that they lack the time or energy to review the materials that are sent home. The Spanish-speaking parent in the minority ELL classroom described how the information that the teacher sends home every week—about what the children are learning and activities for parents and children to work on at home—is helpful and emphasized the importance that

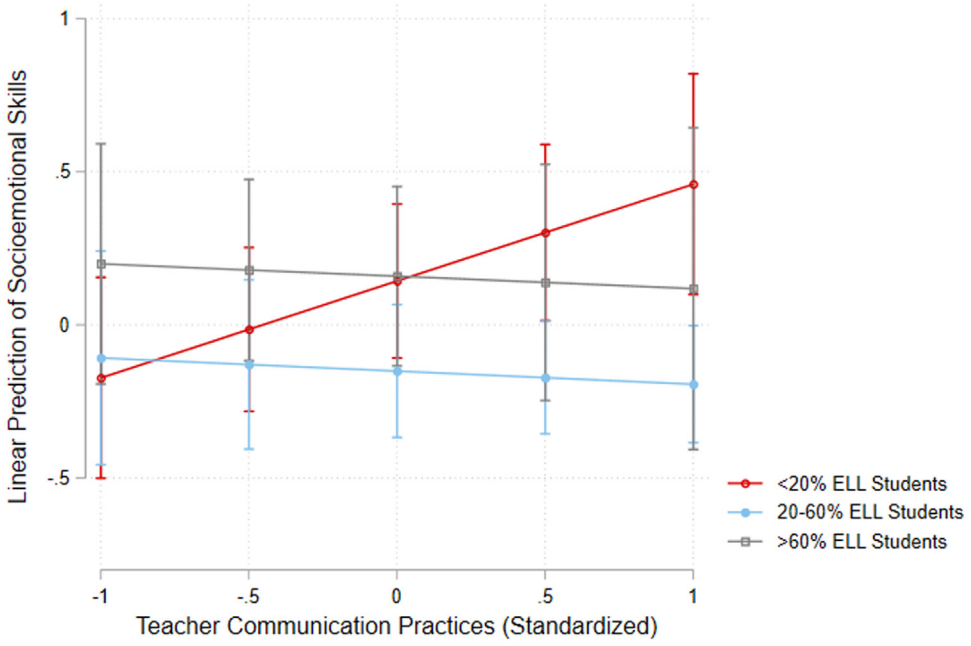

Fig. 3. ELL children's socioemotional skills by teachers' communication practices and ELL classroom composition.

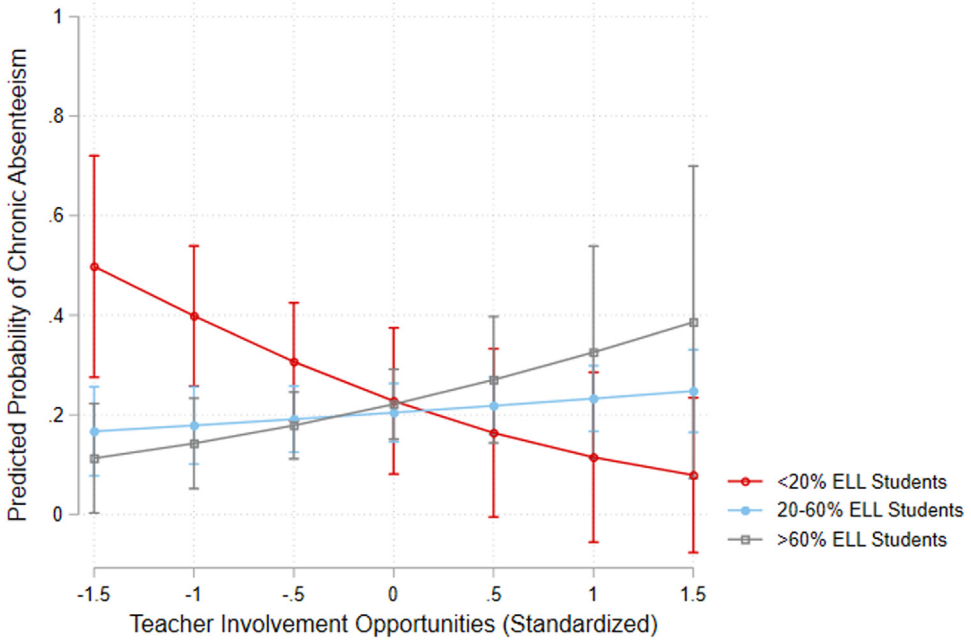

Fig. 4. ELL children's chronic absenteeism by teachers' involvement opportunities and ELL classroom composition.

these materials are in English and Spanish. When asked how useful she finds the information that the teacher sends home, this parent said:

Yes, because that's the way that I know where they are now, where they are going and how I can help him at home. And now, it's reading to him, telling him stories and things like that, so that he starts, his mind starts learning more. [The teacher] sends books home with him. He comes and tells me, "My teacher gave me books so that you can tell me a story." It's in English and in Spanish, that is very important. His sister reads to him in English, and I read to him in Spanish.[2]

This parent contrasted this with the information she receives from the school, which is not always translated to Spanish: "There are times when they send me the documents in Spanish, when they are going out on a field trip or something like that, but they are not all in Spanish."[3] This made her unsure of what other opportunities for involvement or resources are available from the

[2] Sí, sí, porque así yo solamente puedo saber en dónde van, hacia dónde están ahorita y lo que puedo ayudar yo en casa a él. Y ahorita, es estarle leyendo, estarle contando cuentos y cositas así, para que él vaya, su mente vaya aprendiendo más…Me manda libros con él. Llega y me dice, mi maestra dio libros para que me cuentes un cuento. Está en inglés y en español, que es muy importante. Y su hermana le lee a él en inglés y yo en español.

[3] Hay veces que me mandan los papeles en español, cuando van a salir a una excursión o algo, eso sí, pero no todos están en español.

school that she is unaware of because she cannot read the emails in English.

In contrast to most parents' experiences, one English-speaking parent at a school site described the communication practices of their child's teacher as "communication exists when a need arises" as opposed to "a daily or weekly kind of check in." This parent felt like he did not know what his child did in the program and wanted more communication about what was happening in the classroom. He noted that it was difficult to talk with the teacher at drop-off because the children were playing outside at the end of the day, making it difficult to engage in a conversation with the teacher and to observe the children in the classroom. This parent also acknowledged that he may miss communication from the teacher because he feels he lacks time to check his child's backpack for materials that are sent home and finds it too difficult to access an app that the teachers use to send updates.

Parents described teachers' and programs' involvement opportunities as being important for building connections to the program and making them and their family feel welcome. These included having meals in the classroom with the kids, classroom parties (like for holidays), field trips, family fun nights, and parents reading books to the class. In the majority ELL classroom, Spanish-speaking parents described that family members are invited to have breakfast every morning with the kids and have also participated in field trips and in classroom activities. One Spanish-speaking parent with a pre-k child and a younger child said:

[The teacher] allows us parents to bring our other kids, and I like that very much, because that allows me to be here…When she calls home to remind us or let us know of something, she says, "Parents and siblings are welcome," and that's the truth. I like that because it makes us all feel welcome.[4]

Parents viewed building connections with other parents as a key benefit of involvement opportunities. Spanish-speaking parents' ability to make connections with other parents differed by ELL classroom composition. In the classroom where a majority of parents were Spanish-speaking, parents reported many opportunities for involvement and interactions with one another, including the daily family breakfast. By contrast, in the classroom with only two Spanish-speaking parents, the parent described that she had not met any other parents. This was both due to the teacher not organizing activities as well as a language barrier to communicating with other parents. This parent had attended school-wide family fun nights but desired events only for her child's classroom. When asked what she thinks about the family fun nights, she explained:

It's a bit complicated because since it's the whole school, it's like a little bit difficult. If it were only the classroom, it would be different, it would be more like you would know who is in each classroom. But when it is the entire school, yes, I've come with my daughter, but there are a lot of us and then you don't know, you don't know who's who—that's a bit complicated.[5]

This parent later described the need for a bilingual person to facilitate communication with other parents: "Always have someone there, that could help us, and translate, and understand what the other parents are saying. Because there are times when you want to communicate with the other parents, but you don't know how to respond."[6] When asked if she had been able to meet other parents in any way, she noted that she had met other parents only "When we have come to conferences, when they are waiting outside, but a formal introduction, no. That's the difference."[7] The two English-speaking parents from this same classroom also reported feeling "disconnected" and wanting more opportunities to get together with other parents; however, in contrast to the Spanish-speaking parent, they had been able to talk with other parents during pick-up and drop-off times and arrange a few playdates with other families in the program.

Parents viewed family involvement opportunities as being beneficial for their children as well. In the majority ELL classroom, two Spanish-speaking parents described that they feel their children value and enjoy having their parents participate in classroom activities and field trips. One mother said, "Like they say, the material things are not remembered, it is the moments."[8] In other focus groups, English-speaking parents also mentioned that family involvement opportunities benefit their children by making "school fun outside of school."

6. Discussion

As the number of linguistically diverse families in the United States grows, understanding how preschool programs contribute to ELL children's attendance and early learning skills is imperative for supporting ELL children's early childhood development. Although preschool programs' family engagement practices have been, on average, associated with positive child academic and socioemotional outcomes, it is possible that for ELL children the effects of family engagement practices may depend on the linguistic context of the classroom. In this study, drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from a study of family engagement in public pre-kindergarten program, we examined how teachers' family engagement practices were associated with ELL students' attendance and early learning outcomes, focusing on whether two aspects of the linguistic context—the percentage of ELL students in the classroom and teachers' practices for communicating in ELL families' primary languages—moderate these associations. We also used data from focus groups with parents in the pre-k program to shed light on parents' experiences with teachers' family engagement practices.

Our findings provide consistent evidence that the associations between teachers' family engagement practices and ELL children's attendance and socioemotional skills in pre-k are moderated by the classroom composition of ELL children. The results suggest that teachers' more frequent two-way communication and involvement practices were associated with better attendance among ELL children in minority ELL classrooms (those with fewer than 20% ELL children), but not among ELL children in classrooms with 20% or more ELL children. Effect sizes were modest in size, ranging from 57% to 67% lower odds of chronic absenteeism. Teachers' more frequent two-way communication practices were also associated with higher socioemotional skills (about one-third of a standard deviation higher) among children in minority ELL classrooms only. Importantly, teachers' two-way communication practices were associated with higher early literacy skills among ELL children, regardless of classroom composition of ELL students. This suggests that teachers' family engagement practices, particularly two-way communication with families, are positively related to ELL children's early literacy skills but are more strongly related to ELL children's

[4] [La maestra] nos deja como padres traer a los otros niños y eso a mí me agrada mucho, porque así me permite yo estar aquí. Porque mi más chiquito es tremendo, así que es difícil a veces venir a cosas que se quede, en términos de [inaudible], pero ella dice no, tráelo. Sí, en todo. Cuando llama a las casas para recordar o avisar, dice, los padres y hermanos están bienvenidos, y eso la verdad, me agrada, porque pues nos hace sentir bienvenidos a todos.

[5] Es un poco complicado, porque como es toda la escuela, es como un poquito difícil. Si fuera solamente el salón, ya sería otra cosa, sería más como que en cada salón sabes quiénes están. Pero ya cuando es toda la escuela; sí he venido con mi niña, pero sí somos bastantes y ya no sabes, no sabes quién– Es un poquito complicado eso.

[6] Siempre que haya alguien ahí, que nos pueda ayudar y traducir y entender lo que los demás padres dicen. Porque hay veces que uno quiere comunicarse con los padres, pero no sabes cómo responder le eso. Es lo que le complica un poco.

[7] Cuando hemos venido a reuniones luego están esperando afuera, pero así presentado, no. No. Esa es la diferencia, sí.

[8] Como dicen, las cosas materiales no se recuerdan, son los momentos.

attendance and socioemotional skills in classrooms with few ELL children.

Our qualitative focus groups with parents provide insights into how the classroom linguistic context shapes parents' and caregivers' experiences with teachers' family engagement practices. Spanish-speaking parents in both minority and majority ELL classrooms described the value of teachers' two-way communication and involvement practices for building strong, trusting relationships with the teacher, for knowing what their child is learning in pre-k and how to support their learning at home, making their child and family feel welcome in the program, and building connections with other parents. However, due to a lack of involvement opportunities for families to spend time together and language barriers for communicating with non-Spanish-speaking parents, the Spanish-speaking parent in the minority ELL classroom had been unable to make connections with other parents. By contrast, in the majority ELL classroom, Spanish-speaking parents had ample opportunities to connect with one another (e.g., via family breakfasts and field trips) and were able to communicate with each other in their native language, which facilitated building a sense of community and connections.

These findings suggest that for ELL families in minority ELL classrooms, in which language barriers might hinder their ability to connect with other families and build a sense of community, teachers' family engagement efforts may be particularly important for making ELL families feel welcome and creating an inclusive environment. Because we expect that feeling welcome and included in the program can motivate regular child attendance and promote children's socioemotional skills, this may help explain our quantitative findings that suggest family engagement practices are most beneficial for ELL children in minority ELL classrooms. Although the focus group analyses provide insight into Spanish-speaking ELL parents' experiences with family engagement, the study did not collect survey data from families, which prohibits us from testing whether parental involvement at home and school might explain the associations between teachers' family engagement practices and children's early learning. This is an important question for future research.

We found no evidence that teachers' practices for communicating with ELL families in their preferred languages moderated the associations between teachers' family engagement practices and children's attendance and early learning skills. However, Spanish-speaking parents in the focus groups described the importance of teachers being able to communicate orally and in written text in their home language. This allowed them to communicate regularly with the teacher about their child and understand what their child is doing and learning in the classroom. Prior studies also suggest that communicating in families' preferred languages is essential for family engagement with ELL families (Gaitan, 2004; Smith, 2020). One Spanish-speaking parent also described how important it was for her that the teacher sent home bilingual books so that she could read to her son in Spanish and her daughter could read to him in English. This is reminiscent of prior research showing that Latino immigrant parents view language and literacy skills as the most important skills for school readiness and are actively involved in their children's school readiness (Galindo et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2018; Simons et al., 2022). Spanish-speaking parents in both the majority and minority ELL classrooms reported that their children's pre-k teacher was proficient or fluent in Spanish, and therefore, our qualitative results cannot speak to ELL parents' experiences when their children's teachers were not. It is possible that our quantitative measure of teachers' communication practices in families' primary language is too imprecise to capture heterogeneity in teachers' practices, and unfortunately, the study did not collect information about teachers' proficiency in other languages. Our measure included four items about the frequency with which teachers communicated orally or via written text in ELL families' home languages, but most teachers scored high on this measure, reporting that they often or always communicate in ELL families' primary languages. Given these limitations, future research should continue to explore how the language in which teachers communicate with ELL families might shape families' experiences with family engagement in pre-k.

Our findings consistently show that associations between teachers' two-way communication and involvement practices and ELL children's attendance and socioemotional skills are moderated by the percentage of ELL children in the classroom. In ELL minority classrooms, teachers' family engagement practices might be especially important for making families feel welcome and included in the program, which might increase families' motivation to send their children to the program. More consistent attendance might, in turn, translate to better socioemotional skills. It is possible that parental involvement, children's attendance, and socioemotional skills are already promoted in classrooms where ELL children have more similar peers because families inherently feel more represented and included in these contexts. This would align with prior research showing that ELL children have higher socioemotional skills when they have more ELL peers (Meng, 2018) and studies showing that demographic match promotes parental involvement for racially and ethnically diverse families (Benner & Yan, 2015; Calzada et al., 2015; Markowitz et al., 2020; Mundt et al., 2015). Another possible explanation for these findings is that ELL families do more to organize themselves outside of the classroom in contexts where there are many Spanish-speaking ELL families with a non-Spanish speaking teacher. This would help explain why teachers' family engagement efforts are not associated with children's outcomes in majority-ELL classrooms, yet overall, children in these settings have lower absenteeism and higher socioemotional skills.

With respect to children's early literacy skills, teachers' communication practices may be associated with better literacy skills for ELL children regardless of classroom composition if these skills are more dependent on parents' knowledge of what children are learning about and their home-based involvement rather than on feeling welcome and included in the program, which might matter more for attendance and socioemotional skills. It is also possible that early literacy skills are an area in which all ELL children have more room for growth compared to attendance and socioemotional skills, which could explain why teachers' communication practices are associated with early literacy skills more uniformly across this group.

Similar to prior research showing positive associations between family engagement practices and children's early literacy skills among diverse samples of families (Barnett et al., 2020; Pilarz et al., 2022; Puccioni et al., 2020), we found that teachers' two-way communication practices were, on average, associated with higher early literacy skills in our sample of ELL children. Extending beyond prior research, the bulk of our findings suggest that these positive associations are present regardless of the classroom linguistic context. It is possible that we find little evidence of moderation for early literacy skills if these skills are more strongly determined by parents' knowledge of what children are learning in the classroom and their home-based involvement rather than by feeling welcome and included in the program, which might matter more for attendance and socioemotional skills. It is also possible that teachers' communication practices benefit early literacy skills more uniformly because this is an area in which all ELL children have more room for growth compared to attendance and socioemotional skills. In some models, however, we found inconsistent evidence as to whether ELL classroom composition moderates the positive associations between teachers' communication practices and children's early literacy skills, and thus, we interpret this finding with caution. Future research should endeavor to test for

potentially divergent patterns in the associations between family engagement practices and children's early literacy and socioemotional skills among ELL children.

Teachers' two-way communication practices were more consistently associated with children's attendance and early learning outcomes than teachers' involvement practices, and Spanish-speaking parents of ELL children in focus groups also noted the value of communication with teachers for supporting their children's learning at home. This is reminiscent of prior research showing that Latino immigrant families are more likely to engage in home-based parental involvement than school-based parental involvement (Billings, 2009, McWayne et al., 2013). Future research should investigate variation in ELL families' perceptions of and preferences for different types of family engagement practices.

Because our study is observational, we cannot rule out potential bias from omitted variables that are correlated with both family engagement practices and children's outcomes. Although our control variables include several indicators of classroom quality, such as frequency of reading activities in the classroom and teachers' years of experience and commitment to ECE, we did not collect observational measures of classroom quality. If ELL minority classrooms are systematically higher-quality than ELL majority classrooms and classroom quality moderates the associations between family engagement practices and child outcomes, then it is possible that differences in classroom quality are driving our findings. In descriptive analyses, we found no evidence that our quality indicators varied systematically across different levels of our moderator variables. This lends confidence in our findings that our measure of ELL classroom composition is not simply capturing classroom quality, but we cannot completely rule out this possibility. Furthermore, while we included control variables that measured other aspects of the program context (e.g., percent of students receiving free/reduced lunch), there might be unobserved factors about the neighborhood or program environment that are associated with teachers' family engagement practices and children's outcomes. Future research is needed to disentangle the effects of neighborhood factors, program quality, and family characteristics that could be shaping both teachers' family engagement practices and children's attendance and early learning skills.

Our study findings should be interpreted in the context of several data limitations. Data come from a public pre-k program in a mid-sized, Midwestern city. ELL children comprised a substantial minority of children enrolled in pre-k (24%), and a majority (60%) of ELL children identified as Latino or Hispanic. Our findings may not generalize to more diverse or less diverse contexts. Our focus groups included four pre-k sites and Spanish-speaking parents from only one majority ELL and one minority ELL classroom and may not capture the full range of ELL parents' experiences, including the experiences of non-Spanish-speaking parents. The focus groups also potentially excluded the experiences of parents with lower literacy skills because participation required reading the recruitment flyers and signing-up to participate. Our measures of linguistic context are limited in a couple of ways. Our measure of ELL classroom composition lacks information on the extent to which the ELL children within the same classroom speak the same language; there is likely heterogeneity across pre-k programs in the extent to which ELL families within the program speak similar or different languages. Our measure of teachers' ELL communication practices does not tell us if the teacher is fluent or proficient in the language(s) spoken by ELL families or if they use translation and interpretation services; this likely matters for teacher-parent relationship building. Additionally, our two control variables that measure teachers' attitudes had acceptable but slightly low internal consistency (i.e., α=0.63 and α=0.68), which might limit our ability to adequately controlling for teachers' attitudes.

Amid growing interest in family engagement in pre-k programs and increasing linguistic diversity of pre-k students, our study provides a first look at how the linguistic context of pre-k classrooms might shape ELL children and families' experiences with family engagement practices. Together, our quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that both ELL classroom composition and teachers' practices for communicating in ELL families' primary language matter for how ELL families experience teachers' practices for communicating with and involving families, but we found more consistent evidence that teachers' family engagement practices are more strongly associated with children's attendance and socioemotional skills among ELL children in minority ELL classrooms. Given the little research in this area and the exploratory nature of our study, more research is needed to understand how family engagement and the classroom context can best support ELL children and families during the preschool years. Our findings highlight the importance of examining family engagement practices in the context of linguistic (mis)match between ELL children and their peers and teachers.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Elizabeth Premo: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. **Alejandra Ros Pilarz:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Ying-Chun Lin:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – review & editing.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.10.005.

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