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Parent-Teacher Communication in the Infant-Toddler Setting

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MS, Mercy College, 2007

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Leadership & Advocacy

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Abstract

There is a lack of understanding in terms of how to support effective parent-teacher communications in infant and toddler education programs. Early childhood educators are necessary to communicate with parents about what occurs in classrooms as parents are vital sources about what occurs in homes. The purpose of this study was to explore parent and teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communication to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication and support early learners. Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems, particularly the mesosystem, which involves interactions between two or more settings such as homes and schools, guided the research. For this basic qualitative design, in-depth interviews were collected from 10 participants (five parents and five early childhood teachers) who had children or taught in an infant toddler setting in a school district in the Northeastern state. Data analysis included identification of codes and themes and revealed four themes: parent-teacher communication strategies, classroom engagement barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience for parents in circumference of their homes. A recommendation was made for additional studies with larger school districts addressing effective communications in infant and toddler settings. This study addresses elements of positive social change in that it promotes development of new strategies that would strengthen parent-teacher communication which could enhance effective outcomes in the infant-toddler setting.

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Dedication

To my family, to my Mom & my Dad (ayeee yooooo U GOT ONE!), my sister Juicey, my late sister-in-law Toya for holding onto the kids while I attended my residencies to fulfill the residency requirements to achieve my Ph. D. To my oldest two children Talia and Sean Jr., I love you two for holding me down with Ryan & Dakota by cooking, bathing, taking them outside, going to the laundry anything necessary for me to get some work done. You two were instrumental to my achievements here and I hope that I have shown you guys how to be persistent and determined to succeed for those things you want in life. I love you all for not just being there, but being here for me through my smiles, my tears, chopping my hair off and supporting me all the way. To my Sorors who stepped in and continued to encourage me that quitting was NOT an option and also becoming my accountability partners. To my initial cohort group, we labeled ourselves as "The Fun Table" for endless support and assistance with helping each other. We are no longer mere friends, but FAMILY.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Parental involvement includes the time parents give to their children's education, including communication between home and school. Parents who are regularly able to communicate with their children's teachers and work with them at home provide opportunities for positive academic outcomes (Houri et al., 2019). Kim and Riley (2021) stated parent engagement is essential during the early years as children are unable to communicate their needs, and early stimulation promotes their development. Parents can inform their children's teachers about temperament, likes, dislikes, and day-to-day feelings. This, in turn, leads teachers to consider daily objectives and moods of children in care. Children's two most important environments, home and school, are key elements in early childhood education (ECE) (Albaiz & Ernest, 2021).

Parent-teacher communication is a principal factor in child development. There continues to be a gap in literature regarding how parent-teacher communication is established and maintained in early childhood settings. Determining what parents and teachers can do to establish effective communication between teachers and parents can lead to positive impacts on children's learning and ability to reach developmental milestones (Spreeuwenberg, 2019). Kim and Riley (2021) found the first 5 years of life are a critically important developmental period, and early development of parent-teacher relationships may set the stage for later home-school partnerships. The first years are critical in terms of brain development, and early childhood education supports increased brain development (Giri & Kumar, 2019). Most research on parent-teacher communication and relationships has focused on older children and less on development

of infants and toddlers. When parents inform teachers of concerns and share home events, teachers have a better understanding of children. Parent-teacher relationships in infant and toddler programs may lead to a variety of ways to communicate and are among the first home-school connections many families' form. According to Kim and Riley (2021), home-based family activities were first recommended by early education programs such as Head Start to promote children's outcomes. This research may have contributed to helping close the identified gap in research. Through individual interviews with teachers and parents, I was able to provide insights about ways to overcome communication barriers in infant and toddler settings. According to Coleman et al. (2018), when adults at home and school work together to support children's education, increased sensitivity and greater confidence in terms of parenting and teaching roles are achieved.

My research could result in positive social change with the development of new strategies for teachers and parents to improve effective communication in infant and toddler education programs.

Background

During the early years, children's learned experiences in the classroom are influenced by parent-teacher communications and interactions (Legg & Walker, 2018). Building positive teacher-parent relationships requires time and input. Ogg et al. (2021) indicated trust is needed from parents and teachers in order to collectively build upon their relationships. Therefore, teachers need to understand children in their care according to parents to ensure healthy communication and positive child outcomes. Grace and Onchwari Ariri (2022) stated teachers gain a deeper understanding of children and

families when engagement is genuine and reciprocal. Training and parent activities assist children with addressing problematic behavior and prosocial skills (Anders & Cohen, 2019).

According to Lin (2019), with computerized innovation, requirements for evolving specialized instruments such as mobile apps led to positive and effective communications between teachers and parents. Modern technology can assist family-school communication, encouraging its use to establish positive outcomes via improved communication. Nontraditional forms of communication between teachers and parents are leading to positive results. Beyond parent-teacher conferences and letters to parents, electronic communication keeps parents informed. Examples of nontraditional communication tools include text messaging applications. According to Senin and Halim (2021), the most popular mobile app for sharing information between parents and teachers is WhatsApp.

Open communication between teachers and parents leads to better outcomes in terms of student development and parent-teacher partnerships. According to Gebretensae and Hornstein (2019), strategies that enhance communication include engaging children in dramatic play. Through activities like music, cooking meals, and sharing cultural practices, children connect their home lives to classroom workstations, enriching their developmental experiences. These activities not only enhance cultural awareness but also create opportunities for collaboration between families and educators, building community and leadership skills (Gebretensae & Hornstein, 2019). When children see their home lives reflected and respected in the classroom, it creates a foundation of trust

and mutual understanding that supports their developmental and educational progress. These insights align with broader goals of fostering inclusive and culturally responsive educational practices that enhance family engagement and student success. Beyond these creative strategies, fostering effective communication relationships between parents and teachers is vital for reinforcing classroom techniques at home. Additionally, Lin et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of studying outcomes of parent-educator communication, particularly regarding its role in supporting home learning during the preschool years. While substantial progress has been made, there is still much to explore to maximize the benefits of parent-teacher engagement.

Home-school connections help families feel comfortable and build stronger relationships between teachers and parents (Gilbet & Harte, 2019). Societal changes affect parenting, and early childhood education increases parental knowledge regarding creating change in their children's schools. Albaiz and Ernest (2021) stated building community partnerships connects families with additional resources to assist their children in schools. There are numerous helpful tools in early childhood settings to assist families in gaining more knowledge. An example is the Parent Family and Communication Stimulation Tool PFCE) questionnaire, which was created by Head Start to help engage parents through understanding classroom routines and activities that assist in child development (Paz-Albo Prieto, 2018). This tool was used by parents to engage in effective communication regarding student needs with teachers. This questionnaire also assists Early Head Start and Head Start staff with relationship building with families to enhance school readiness (Paz-Albo Prieto, 2018).

Effective family-school cooperation could strengthen communications between teachers and families, improving home-school emphasis on education development (Wang, 2019). Wolf (2020) showed engaging parents during the early years could be a starting point to increase involvement in their children's future education, and a greater understanding of expectations of teachers and parents can support building effective relationships. Hadley and Rouse (2018) determined community-based long daycare centers supported incorporating and building trust between families and teachers. Early childhood education (ECE) centers provided parents and teachers with opportunities to build on parent-teacher relationships as they pertained to the development of children. Perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse families assisted with establishing positive and respectful relationships with parents and teachers. This ensured families about teachers' abilities to create safe, happy, and loving learning environments, and outdoor spaces provided infants and toddlers with opportunities to breathe fresh air while exploring their surroundings and engaging in outdoor play with teachers and classes (Hadley & Rouse, 2018).

Problem Statement

There is a lack of understanding regarding how to support effective parent-teacher communication in infant and toddler education programs. In this study, I addressed parent-teacher communication as essential to supporting young children in terms of reaching developmental milestones. This involved providing opportunities for parents to learn and understand what child development entails to enhance their children's academic skills and create partnerships between homes and schools (Epstein, 2018). According to

Hadley and Rouse (2018), developing partnerships with parents increased support for educators teaching in the early childhood sector. When educators help parents to understand the process of child development, they enable them to become proactive advocates for their children.

There is a gap in research about improving quality of parent-teacher communications, specifically in infant and toddler programs. Smith (2020) suggested improved parent-teacher communication in infant-toddler settings increased parents' understanding of developmental milestones. Creating activities to use with teachers and parents has the potential to engage parents as well as build strong home-school connections which can also contribute to fostering cultural backgrounds of families (Smith, 2020). Encouraging teachers to engage in home-school communication can provide families with a deeper understanding of their roles in terms of supporting their children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore parent-teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication and support early learners. Through individual interviews, I was able to determine parent and teacher perspectives regarding existing communications and perceived barriers to effective communication. I was then able to identify important insights that could potentially increase and improve parent-teacher communications. Results of my research may encourage teachers to improve effective parent-teacher interactions. Parents need to be encouraged to actively communicate with teachers

regarding child development as they learn alternate ways to interact with their children to assist with developmental milestones of children in homes (Wang, 2020).

Research Question

RQ: What are perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers on home-school communication and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my study was Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the mesosystem involves the interaction of two or more settings, such as homes and schools. Bronfenbrenner stated environments in which relationships are formed at home and school are essential to children's overall development. As children grow, they experience a variety of environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory was used for understanding home environments where learning begins, and school activities are implemented and strengthened. I applied this theory to support the development of my research question.

Nature of the Study

I chose the qualitative design to explore the experiences of parents and teachers in early childhood settings. Using a basic qualitative research approach with interviews, I asked semi-structured interview questions to receive direct responses from participants. This methodology was suitable for investigating outcomes of nontraditional communications between parents and teachers. The basic qualitative design was particularly well-suited for this research because it emphasizes understanding

participants' perspectives and meanings they assign to their experiences. I conducted Zoom and phone interviews due to COVID-19 with participants from an urban infant and toddler center in a school district in a Northeastern state. I used one-on-one interviews to gather valuable and informative data about the issue. By using a basic qualitative research approach, I explored perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers on home-school communications and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners during interviews. I searched for patterns and themes in collected data using coding to clearly identify four themes as a result of my data analysis. Ten participants, including five parents and five early childhood teachers, were recruited to participate in my study. Analysis of interviews included coding data.

Definitions

Cognitive Development: The ability to perceive and act on environmental information (Jones et al., 2019).

Early Childhood Education: Accessible services that are provided to young children and families to support children and families in child development (Erdreich, 2020).

Fine Motor Development: Coordination of small muscles with eyes, hands, and fingers (Bingham et al., 2021).

Gross Motor Development: Use of large muscles for climbing, jumping, running, kicking, and stability of movement during physical activities (Jones et al., 2019).

Language Development: Receptive and expressive language resulting in vocabulary development in terms of word knowledge, word order, comprehension, and production of words (Broekhuizen, 2019).

Social/Emotional Development: Development of positive behaviors and self-regulation of crying and fighting (Armstrong et al., 2021).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed participants were truthful and accurate in their responses to interview questions. This assumption was necessary because I relied on honesty and authenticity of participant perspectives. Given the qualitative nature of this research, I depended on in-depth interviews to explore and describe parents' and teachers' viewpoints on home-school communication that supports early learners in meeting developmental milestones. If participants were not truthful, data would not accurately reflect their lived experiences, which would possibly lead to unreliable conclusions.

As a researcher with an extensive background in early childhood education, I also assumed my personal experiences involving communicating with parents would provide context for the study. However, I remained open to the possibility my experiences might differ from participants' perspectives. This assumption was necessary to maintain a balance between my professional insights and objective exploration of home-school communications according to participants. Recognizing and acknowledging my own positions was necessary to approach research with curiosity and focus on addressing authentic findings without judgment.

Scope and Delimitations

This basic qualitative study involved exploring parent and teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication and support early learners. Teacher-parent communications are pivotal to the success of children's outcomes in terms of reaching developmental milestones (Ousley et al., 2022). I chose to exclude the center in which I worked due to personal relationships with both families and educators. I did not hold any supervisory position at the research site, and there were no concerns about authority relationships. I wanted to explore parents and teachers of students who were 3 and under.

Participants in this study were parents and teachers of children in an urban infant-toddler center in a northeastern state. The majority of students were African American and Latino. The center where I implemented my research served a high number of students from low-income backgrounds who used free lunch and childcare voucher programs. This information was not used. The early childhood education center enrolls infants to prekindergarten students.

Most communication in ECE settings happens primarily during pick-up and dropoff times and may or may not include mid-day conference calls, emails, mobile communication apps, and in-person visits (Oakes et al., 2020). Pick-up and drop-off times do not allow for comprehensive discussions or rich communications between parents and teachers. I focused on gathering information from early childhood teachers and parents on how to improve parent-teacher communications. Participants were

informed via email about study confidentiality and how their participation could support future teachers and parents and not affect their employment or status in the community.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses that are identified by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Potential limitations in my study involved sample size and researcher bias. Data collection was limited to a specific early childhood center in a northeastern state. Purposeful sampling was a limitation because the findings represented perspectives of preschool teachers and parents from one early childhood center. Another potential limitation involved the population of infants and toddlers. As an early childhood teacher, I had specific expectations about ways in which teachers create schedules to inform and address milestone development information with parents. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2018), researchers need to be aware of their own biases and perspectives. I used a reflective journal to address biases I might have had during interview sessions.

Significance

This research may help to close the identified gap in research regarding how to support effective parent-teacher communications in infant and toddler education programs. Through individual interviews, I was able to provide insights about how home and school environments can overcome barriers to communication. According to Coleman et al. (2018), when adults at home, and the school, work together to support children's education, an increased sensitivity and understanding the children with whom they live and work and greater confidence about parenting and teaching roles are

achieved. This study could result in positive social change with development of new strategies in which teachers and parents are able to improve effective communications in infant and toddler education programs.

Summary

In Chapter 1, the background of the study was presented, along with the problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. In my study, I was able to seek early childhood teachers' and parents' perspectives about ways they could support developmental milestones by improving communication strategies beyond pick-up and drop-off times.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature regarding parent-teacher involvement and communication, Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems as the conceptual framework, school family community partnerships models, stages of development, teacher and parent challenges involving communication, and perspectives on communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a lack of understanding regarding how to support effective parent-teacher communications in infant and toddler education programs. Relationships between families, schools, and communities can impact academic achievement of students (Epstein, 2018). Little was known about how parents and teachers communicate related to family and child developmental milestones in early childhood programs. According to Jeynes (2018), positive relationships develop when parent involvement increases and home and school communication improves, resulting in improved academic achievement for students. According to Rattenborg et al. (2019), children's academic success is consistently linked with parent engagement which aids in mastery of early school skills for academic success.

This chapter includes research related to parent-teacher partnerships, parent involvement, the theoretical framework, barriers to parent involvement, and stages of development for infants and toddlers. This was necessary to identify current experiences involving parent-teacher communication. I addressed communication that supports early learners' development. This study is designed to bridge a gap in current research and explore perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication and support early learners.

Literature Search Strategy

Databases were accessed through the Walden University Library. Those databases were Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and Taylor & Francis

Online. I used the following keywords: *parents*, *teachers*, *communication*, *involvement*, *relationships*, *early childhood*, *infant toddler*, *preschool*, *home*, *school*, and *development*.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my study was Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems, specifically the mesosystem. I used this theory to address how home-school environments support overall development of child and parent-teacher communications. Employing Bronfenbrenner's theory allowed for deeper thinking on how caring relationships are essential in infant and toddler settings. Nonfamilial adults are responsible for fostering emotional wellbeing of infants in and out of home care, both in the U.S. and abroad (Recchia et al., 2018). Bronfenbrenner stated parent-child and teacher-family relationships are essential home-school partnerships. Academic success and wellbeing are influenced by families. Effective relationships between children and parents encourage parents to be proactive through participation and assist with positive reinforcement of learning in the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The microsystem is the first system and includes the child's immediate environment as well as actions, reactions, and interactions (Tahir et al., 2019). The exosystem involves events that occur around the developing persons (Tahir et al., 2019). The final system is the macrosystem.

Mine (2018) stated there are benefits to parent involvement including better school-community relationships which include attending school events and reading at home. Family involvement has a positive influence on development of children's learning and school outcomes (Tao et al., 2019). Gestwicki (2015) stated it was essential for

teachers to cultivate productive relationships with their students to recognize they are members of families. It was important for teachers to establish effective relationships with their students and understand that they are a product of a family system.

I focused primarily on the mesosystem because it involves actions between two or more settings, such as homes and schools, which are critical settings that influence child development. This framework emphasizes the importance of relationships between parents and teachers in terms of supporting developmental milestones of infants and toddlers.

I chose Bronfenbrenner's theory to address how children's growth and learning are shaped by connections between home and school environments. The home is where learning begins, and schools strengthen and build upon those foundations. This can create opportunities for open communication, which is essential for understanding and addressing developmental milestones.

Jeynes (2018) found increased parental involvement and improved communication positively impacts student success. However, much existing research has focused on older children and not communication techniques in infant-toddler programs. I addressed specific communication needs of parents and teachers in the early childhood setting for children who were 3 and under. The study also fills a gap in literature regarding lack of research strategies to improve parent-teacher communications in infant-toddler programs. While studies have explored communication methods in preschool and kindergarten, there are few studies about how communication can help parents and teachers support developmental milestones in the earliest years of a children's lives.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

I addressed current literature regarding parent-teacher communications and perspectives of parents and teachers involving creating effective communication systems for infant-toddler education programs. The literature review includes stages of development, the social constructivism theory, cognitive development theory, definitions of early childhood education, parent-teacher involvement and communication, school-family-community partnership model, teacher and parent challenges to communication, teacher and parent perspectives on communication, and mobile technology to support parent-teacher communications. A conclusion and summary are provided at the end of Chapter 2.

Stages of Development

The stages of development closely observed during infant and toddler development are gross and fine motor skills, language/communication, social/emotional and cognitive development (Zukauskas, 2020). Included stages of development that are vital to child development are Vygotsky's theory on social-constructivism theory and Piaget's cognitive development theory (Babakr et al., 2019; Yasnitsky, 2018).

Gross and Fine Motor Development

Grohs et al. (2018) indicated that gross motor development fosters a greater interaction with the environment in early childhood. Gross motor or physical development, as it is also referred to, focuses on the child's ability to use their overall body such as muscle tone, body reflexes, walking, crawling, running, jumping, climbing, and more (Jones et al., 2019). Ochoa Rodríguez et al. (2021) shared how fine motor skills

are an important factor in school readiness as the use of the small muscles assists with eye-hand coordination. Fine motor development refers to the smaller, more defined use of the body such as writing, eating, grasping, and holding objects (Zukauskas, 2020).

Language Development

Children's language development is both receptive and expressive. Children begin to exhibit language from birth as their cries and coos begin to turn into babbling and then words. They begin to imitate words as they are spoken to. Their babbles turn into words such as no, and yes, and often shaking of the head and waving good-bye (Zukauskas, 2020). According to Hew et al. (2020) Vygotsky (1978) believed that speech becomes a means of thinking developed through social interactions within the community. Vygotsky clarified language securement as consisting of not just everyday listening to various words, but it is a particular cycle of advancement including language and thought. Vygotsky fostered the understanding that language is created from social collaborations for correspondence purposes and that language is the most prominent device for interacting with the rest of the world. Arca et al. (2019) expressed how children need vocabulary skills with verbal reasoning abilities and having these skills assists with positive peer interactions, enhanced their understanding, and listening skills that aid in problem-solving skills. According to Emen and Aslan (2019) children of low socio-economic status are exposed to a smaller number of words and less verbal and written language when compared to children from affluent backgrounds. A child's academic advancement is significantly connected with language advancement (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social-Emotional Development

According to Goldschmidt and Pedro (2019), social-emotional development supports how children manage their feelings and emotions; the ability to develop empathy for others. Social-emotional development occurs when children can display feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, and/or guilt. As children age, they can verbally share their feelings of joy, love, and explain when they are hurt. They may have also learned the ability of compassion and want to help others who display feelings of sadness or joy (Zukauskas, 2020). Children start to have emotional contact outside of the home when they begin to learn what behavior is acceptable and unacceptable socially as they gain skills in resolving issues during their interactions with others (Alwaely et al., 2020). Having contacts outside of school and/or home encourages practice with social-emotional interactions. Cognitive development is an assembly of thought processes, including problem-solving, memorization, and decision-making from the childhood stage to adolescence into adulthood. The cognitive development of the brain and human processing develops continuously from birth to adulthood according to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020).

Social Constructivism Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) theory on child development is known as the social-constructivism theory. Developed through practical actions in a social environment, Vygotsky's central focus was on developmental and psychological growth relating to children's academic development (Yasnitsky, 2018). In order to attain learning in a social environment, effective communication must be a priority. Vygotsky's theory on social

development emphasized the importance of social interaction. He detailed the process of making meaning through social development to involve social interaction of the community where learning occurred. Vygotsky's most recognized theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which takes place in an environment in which parents and other caregivers provide guidance to scaffold achievement. Jamero (2019) indicated that the use of Vygotsky's social constructivism theory assists as a framework in early childhood education for inclusion practices. According to Jamero (2019) learning comes with the ability to practice and learn from others through a variety of interactions and observations were supported by positive communication between home and school.

Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget's contribution to early childhood education had a significant effect on future child development research and the need for effective communication at various stages of development (Babakr et al., 2019). Piaget was a psychologist who identified four stages of early childhood cognitive development (Babakr et al., 2019). Piaget's four stages of cognitive development theory are: sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage, and formal operational stage (Babakr et al., 2019). Each stage develops through interaction, problem-solving, and decision-making which is assisted through communication between home and school. Children will be able to develop their own authentic learning structures and experiences when family members interact with them, engage in active learning, and solve problems together (Almahdi, 2019). For example, increasing a child's vocabulary often develops through adult communication. As children continue to grow, their brain development provides cognitive growth with

relatability to language in the receptive language. Throughout the four stages of development children should be able to successfully use new learned vocabulary to support their continued growth in communicating thoughts and ideas within their community, via effective communication (Zukauskas, 2020). Cognitive development occurs in all stages of development requiring observation, communication, and the use of memory (Kurt, 2020). Communication between home and school allows a bridge for the development of the child to be supported as their learning continues to grow.

Sensorimotor Stage

Gould and Howson, (2019) stated that Vygotsky's sensorimotor stage begins from infancy to age two. At this stage, children begin to exhibit skills such as sucking, grasping, eye movements, the orientation of sounds, and the use of language (Pitrowski & Zobairi, 2019). Zukauskas (2020) shared how the interaction of exploring their environment occurs in this stage. According to Krawczyk (2018) children exhibit basic functions from their actions and outcomes in their environment.

Piaget (1936) described the sensorimotor stage as how children's ability to adapt to the world is a function of their ability to interact with the environment through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation learning infers that new information is connected to current mapping as it effectively finds a place with gained connections. Accommodation learning happens when latest information cannot properly be connected or identified with any current construction and must be supported (Bertram et al., 2018). According to Jones et al. (2019) Piaget's theory implied that development is a combination of learning, experience, and motivation.

Preoperational Stage

During the preoperational stage, between the ages of 2 and 7 years old, children begin to learn the use of language that represents people, places, and things (Gould & Howson, 2019). Piotrowski and Zobairi (2019) shared how children lack the ability to understand the point of view of others as their cognitive skills are being defined. Zukauskas (2020) expressed how children's language expands from one to two-word sentences to more detailed sentences with several words, which shows an early understanding of developing cognitive skills. Educational opportunities can be enhanced when children are engaged in daily activities that assist with the development of their senses, thus supporting developmental growth (Lerner et al., 2019; Sanghvi, 2020).

Concrete Operational Stage

From the age of 7 to 11 years old, children are beginning to understand and accept the views of others, developing logical and abstract thinking skills (Gould & Howson, 2019). The ability to sort things out, sequence events, and understand how to quantify occurs in the concrete operational stage (Pitrowski & Zobairi, 2019). Children who exhibit the ability to understand beginning math concepts such as addition, subtraction, and building numeral sense are a few examples of their developing cognitive abilities (Gould & Howson, 2019).

Formal Operational Stage

Overall, Piaget's cognitive development theory entailed how children's cognition enhanced their language development (Pitrowski and Zobairi, 2019). Children from the age of 11 years old and older have developed the ability to ask open-ended questions, use

logic and make rational decisions (Gould & Howson, 2019). Reasoning among various topics dictates their ability to draw conclusions (Pitrowski & Zobairi, 2019). Gould and Howson, (2019) expressed how environmental factors play a significant role in cognitive development as children begin to socialize not only with people in the home, but outside the home as well as in schools, parks, and other community environments.

Piaget's four stages of development supported adult understanding of how the child grows and achieves success within their developmental stages. The order does not vary, however the rate of individual progression may. Understanding the four stages of development supports teachers and parents as they support children's continued growth in communicating thoughts and ideas within their community (Zukauskas, 2020).

ECE

Early childhood education is defined as any state-licensed or regulated program or provider, regardless of setting or funding source that provides care for children from birth to kindergarten (United States Department of Education, n.d.). These programs/providers can include childcare centers, in-family childcare homes, federal, state, or local agencies that also include Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funded programs, Early Head Start/ Head Start programs, and providers who have two or more non-related children in their care for a fee in the provider's setting (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the most influential early childhood association today, is committed to assisting children from areas with limited resources while building self-determination among children and

families to overcome systemic barriers by educating both children and parents (NAEYC Statement, 2020). One important goal of child development programs is to educate parents on how their child is developing. The goal is to better inform the parent of which skills require additional work (Konca & Ilhan, 2021). Children attend early childhood education programs from all backgrounds with a greater concentration of children from low-income and disadvantaged homes (Ansari et al., 2019). Abshire et al. (2021) suggested that early childhood education allowed children to engage in school readiness activities such as play, which increases language development, self-regulation, literacy, and teacher-child interactions in both home and center-based programs. NAEYC is significantly responsible for purporting what we now accept as the purpose of early childhood education and the need for parent and teacher communication.

Parent-Teacher Involvement and Communication

Parental involvement encompasses the time parents give to their child's education, including the communication of what occurs in the home and sharing it with the school (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Puccioni (2018) stated that in the early years, parent involvement is critically important as the child is unable to communicate their needs. Wang (2019) indicated that parent involvement could be defined as parents' understanding of school activities, including the importance of fundraisers and being a part of a parent association. Parent-teacher communication is beneficial to the child's success since teachers are communicating their child's needs with parents. Conus and Fahrni, (2019) stated that schools should design a system that encouraged communication between parents and teachers. Teachers also benefit from the information parents shared

about the child to promote positive outcomes in the classroom (Ogg et al., 2021). It is important to the overall progress of the child that parents inform their child's teacher of their likes and dislikes, temperament, and even how they have been feeling overnight. Teachers from primary and preschools agree that parent involvement is a significant indicator for student achievement as it assisted with transitions (Tao et al., 2019). Understanding students' daily well-being allowed the teacher to be able to consider the objectives planned for the day and the health and mood of the students in their care. Most forms of parent-teacher communication occur in the form of parent-teacher conferences (Wang, 2019). Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) shared that parental involvement has a positive impact on student achievement and is an essential component of early childhood education. Parent involvement includes sharing a variety of traditions of the home environment by bringing ideas into the classroom such as cultural events and community activities (Wang, 2019). It is often stated that 'parents are their child's primary teacher,' as learning begins in the home environment (Gestwicki, 2015). Johnson et al., (2019) suggested that parent-teacher interactions accounted for mutual accountability when home-school connections are developed and monitored.

Tao et al. (2019) indicated that parent involvement changed as the child transitioned within school levels and as they transitioned from half-day programs to whole-day programs. According to Özkan Yildiz and Yilmaz (2021) cooperation from parents of children in preschool was important for teachers as they were then able to jointly build upon the goals of the curriculum. Schools in the U.S. have increased their

integration of family engagement liaisons due their ability to foster positive school climate and culture (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Broomhead (2018), discussed the responsibility for developing and maintaining home-school partnerships by exploring the experiences of parents and practitioners. Boonk et al., (2018) shared that when programs for children, between the ages of 0-3, provided opportunities for parents to work with teachers to help develop an environment conducive to assisting children's overall development. According to Conus and Fahrni, (2019), minimal opportunities are provided by schools to support reciprocal communication from school to home. Potential reciprocal communication engagements could occur both in and outside of the school and home such as volunteering in the classroom or parent committees working inside the school or providing homework assistance at home (Yngvesson & Garvis, 2021). Natale and Lubniewski (2018) agreed that both teachers and parents were often open to home-school communication, usually regarding homework and behavior. Macphee et al. (2018) shared that creating policies and procedures that considered busy parents' modern-day lifestyles and understanding the potential of social media could significantly encourage more parent involvement. Teachers' reluctance to share developmental information with parents is a rare occurrence. Baroncelli et al. (2018) indicated that the higher the quality of the caregiver's background in ECE the more frequent communication opportunities exist among parents and caregivers. When teachers provide designated times to inform parents of the developmental aspects of their early learners, communication among teachers and parents became more effective (Carmehl et al., 2018). Edwards (2018) indicated that there is

often a disconnect between home-school communication in identifying and sharing obstacles to effective communication among low-income families and immigrant families. Jeon et al., (2020) expressed that providing school readiness programs for children in low-income families was critically important in creating positive home-school connections.

Berklan and Hughes (2020) expressed how critically important the relationship between teacher and parent is and how communication between home-school has seen an increase in daily challenges and societal demands impacting families and educators. Broomhead (2018) indicated teachers are accountable for home-school communication, as it is their responsibility to encourage and maintain parental engagement and communication regarding their child's developmental milestones. It is important to assess the success of home and school communication. End-of-year surveys are an effective tool used to explore perceptions of administrators and teachers and provide a vehicle for family feedback. Without parental involvement, it is difficult for preschools to provide the support needed for developmental milestone achievement.

School-Family-Community Partnership Model

Epstein (2018) created a model that recognized parent involvement as a vital tool in the quality of instruction for children. In Epstein's (2018) School-Family-Community partnership model, there are six types of parental involvement: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making and (6) collaborating with the community. Epstein's model provided a framework in which parents and teachers could develop a relationship that would support student learning.

Epstein's model, specifically encouraging communication and learning at home, supported the foundation and focus of this study.

Building pathways of communication between parents and teachers take place in a variety of forms, such as mail, email, and texts, and using newer technology such as video chats (Skype, FaceTime, Zoom). These technologies support teachers, specifically working parents, to communicate connecting home and school. When teachers send assignments or activities home with students it encouraged the home-school environmental relationship to develop as parents are able to sit with their child and assist them with things they have learned in school and reinforced things that were taught in the home (Cuenca-Alava et al., 2018). McWayne et al. (2022) stated that it was essential for teachers, parents, and the school, to work together to ensure that the child transitioned into school successfully. Epstein, (2018) indicated that a communication system was a two-way process that should involve families, the community, and the school. In this study, I utilized Epstein's School-Family-Community partnership model to assist in developing credible interview questions and discussed Epstein's six types of involvement in further detail.

Parenting

Epstein (2018) stated that parents play a significant role in raising their children. Schools should be able to support and meet parental needs with developmental strategies to work with their children. Vuorinen, (2018) stated that parent involvement occurs primarily in the home, and it is an essential quality of learning. Epstein indicated a need for workshops to be incorporated to increase parental knowledge on child developmental

milestones. Soto et al. (2020) shared that boosting family engagement assisted with positive student outcomes showing improvement in students' academic performance. Trzcinska-Krol, (2020) stated that a reciprocal approach was needed for families to assist them in understanding their child's needs and the ability of the school to assist the families to meet their child's needs.

Communication

Epstein (2018) also shared that schools were required to inform parents of events occurring at the school, whether it was a parent-teacher conference, school shows, or workshops. Documents should be written not only in English but translated into other languages of the school community. Clear communication offers parents the ability to volunteer and attend the events offered in the school. The use of technology assists parents in learning more about what was occurring in their child's school and how their children are progressing (Trzcinska-Krol, 2020). Özkan Yildiz and Yilmaz, (2021) shared how clearer communication with parents on teacher expectations allowed for less confusion while assisting with their child's schoolwork. The most common form of communication in preschool programs takes place during in-person drop-off and pick-up times which allows the teacher to brief the parent on daily occurrences at school (Oakes et al., 2020). Goldman et al. (2019) expressed how home-school notes provided the teacher and parent a platform to work together towards a common goal of improving student behaviors in school.

Volunteering

Trzcinska-Krol (2020) stated that schools should assist parents in understanding the process of volunteering. Offering parents the opportunity to volunteer in their child's education is viewed as a motivator for parents to also "volunteer" in the home (Epstein, 2018). Motivating parents to attend school events has been a challenge for many years as many families have shared that they do not feel welcome in their child's school (Epstein, 2018). Epstein also indicated that schools should offer a variety of ways parents could volunteer at their child's school. Vuorinen's (2018) research stated that parents and teachers expressed their experiences with parental collaborations in preschools. The experience of or lack of dialogue for both parties tended to be brief or did not occur at all. According to Özkan Yildiz and Yilmaz, (2021) parents were more likely to volunteer if their child asked them to join in school activities: teachers could also express the need for parents to attend school functions.

Decision-Making

Assisting parents to become leaders and representatives in their child's school is a wonderful outcome of volunteerism as it builds self-esteem and comfort levels to fulfill important roles within their community (Trzcinska-Krol, 2020). As a way to increase parental involvement, schools should give parents the chance to take on leadership roles and express their thoughts on school-related decisions (Epstein, 2018). Leadership opportunities are available to parents through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), by becoming a class advisor or volunteering as lunchroom aides. Lin et al. (2019) expressed parents communicated more during the preschool years than in other grade levels

therefore having the opportunity to be part of the decision-making process. This provided parents a voice in the school's climate and agreed-upon programs.

Learning at Home

Epstein (2018) purported that learning at school could reinforce what has been learned in the home environment. Goldman et al. (2019) expressed how the school-home newsletters and notes offered assistance to parents in reinforcing what was learned each day and allowed for better feedback during teacher-parent sessions. Parents often face difficulties needing homework assistance and felt teachers were unable to assist them in explaining how it works (Epstein, 2018). Trzcinska-Krol (2020) suggested that sharing ideas with parents on ways to help students at home eliminated some of the difficulties students had with homework and other assignments.

Collaborating with the Community

Epstein (2018) expressed how the community is a resource which contributed to children's learned outcomes and supported parents raising their children. Gahwaji, (2019) indicated parents' willingness to use community resources, such as the library, to support children's education or enrolling in community programs offering additional support for learning and social development. Yet, parents may not understand how to access and utilize these resources. Epstein (2018) suggested that schools should partner with various agencies and businesses in the community as it could build stronger partnerships for healthy families and support life-long learners. Hossain, (2021) indicated that by empowering local community members, especially parents, many school decisions helped to improve academic achievement, attitudes, and behaviors. Contributions from

the community varied from repairing furniture/ equipment, organizing school sports, assisting with cleaning school grounds, assisting with distribution of school meals to assisting in the child's classroom as tutors and shadows (Hossain, 2021). In the infant-toddlers setting, strong partnerships between families, teachers, and community partners strengthen communication by offering additional tools and resources to meet the developmental needs of young children. These efforts provide a basis for teachers and parents to work together, ensuring that learning experiences in the classroom are supported at home and within the community. By creating a collaborative environment, communication barriers can be reduced, and families can feel more confident in their role as partners in their child's developmental journey. This connection between the home, school, and community aligns with the central focus of my study, which highlights the importance of supporting increased parent-teacher communication to support early learners in improving developmental milestones.

Teacher and Parent Challenges Regarding Communication

Chen and Rivera-Vernazza (2022) described timing as an important issue in communicating with parents. Surrain (2021) indicated that the lack of English as a primary language for some families caused them to receive information later than others. Parents having multiple children in multiple grades and different schools is a significant challenge for parents. According to Bordalba and Bochaca, (2019) when parents were given a time or were scheduled for a meeting in advance, they became more aware of their responsibilities. Meetings should be rescheduled to accommodate the parents' needs, allowing them the ability to share information with their child's teacher.

Legg and Walker (2018) stated that when parents and teachers meet, it helps to build effective communication if the parent knew exactly what type of questions to ask. Parents could receive a list of areas for discussion and feel better prepared to attend the conference However, most parent-teacher conferences were usually based on teacher-led communication. Baroncelli et al. (2018) argued that communication among preschool teachers and parents was often limited to brief conversations at the beginning and end of the school day. Having teachers reach out to parents beyond these times helps both in knowing what was happening or will occur during their child's school day, developing an effective form of communication. Stratigos and Fenech, (2021) shared how parent-teacher communication is rare and lacks substance in the majority of childcare settings. My research clearly supports the need to address the current gap in parent-teacher communication. According to Boit (2020), teachers had negative views of parent participation and fail to communicate important school events with them. The socioeconomic status of the family also influenced parents' ability to communicate effectively with their child's teachers (Rispoli et al., 2018).

Socioeconomic status, including education, income, and social support, presented both high and low-stress levels for parents and children (Arikan et al., 2019). Arca et al. expressed how children from low socioeconomic levels were at a disadvantage as there was often a lack of support in language skills, positive social behavior, lesser role models in language usage, and behavioral regulation within their environments. According to Gupta and Lucia, (2019) language development, pre-literacy skills, school readiness, and grade-level success were often minimally-existent for children from low socio-economic

homes. The lack of access to quality health care, safe housing, and nutritious food can affect brain development and cognitive skills including language development and communication (Gupta & Lucia, 2019). Gabrieli et al. (2018) expressed that as a result of socioeconomic status, language exposure differed among all children significantly. Home and school communication continued to bridge the gap between parents and teachers as the growth of learning was fostered and encouraged daily (Gabrieli et al. (2018).

Due to the nature of teachers' schedules and low staffing, center directors do not feel there is enough time for teachers to share information with parents or enough time for parents to share significant changes at home with the teachers (Azad et al., 2021). The time when teacher schedules change and parent pick-ups and drop offs occur often added to the challenges that parents have in their ability to communicate with the lead teacher becoming a significant barrier to communication (Barros et al., 2018).

Teachers often believed that their primary communication with parents was to inform them of their child's behavior exhibited in the classroom (Guo et al., 2019). The Every Child Succeeds Act, included how important parent-teacher communication was in supporting a child's overall development (Coninck et al., 2018). The *E*very Child Succeeds Act contained a plan to utilize parent-teacher conferences to cultivate communication aptitudes, evaluate the understanding of substantial information and the capacity to arrange instruction (Legg & Walker, 2018). However, according to Mutton et al. (2018), there was a lack of training provided to teachers in schools that do not value parent participation, therefore decreasing the communication between teachers and parents. Preschool teachers have shared that their ability to ensure parent participation

and cooperation was to have effective communication which also assisted with conflict prevention (Josilowski, 2019). Lin et al. (2019) indicated that incorporating daily or weekly communication routines to share information with parents regarding their child's learning and development was quite helpful for parents whose time was limited or could not be reached by the school. According to De Jong et al. (2019) sharing students' progress in advance of a scheduled conference offered a greater chance of two-way communication between parents and teachers which allowed for a better opportunity for parents to understand their child's strengths and weaknesses.

These challenges show the need to provide techniques to foster open, effective communication between parents and teachers in the infant-toddler setting. By addressing barriers such as time constraints, language differences, and socioeconomic challenges, educators can build trust and create opportunities for deeper collaboration with families. Overcoming these obstacles is essential to establish a strong home-school partnership that supports children in achieving key developmental milestones.

This study explores the perspectives of parents and teachers on these challenges, trying to create strategies to improve communication. Understanding these perspectives will provide valuable insights into how teachers and parents can work together to build supportive, consistent, and effective communication that benefits early learners.

Teacher and Parent Perspectives on Communication

The primary concern for parents in selecting a preschool placement was to ensure that their children would be safely cared for in a place where they would not be present (Vuorinen, 2018). According to Conus and Fahrni (2019) parents expected teachers to

initiate regular communication with them upon their child's entry to school, however, teachers often envisioned their role was to inform parents about problems or difficulties that occurred at school. Most teachers wanted to ensure that they were able to establish a good relationship with the parents so they would be more comfortable leaving their children in their care (Vuorinen, 2018). Building trusting relationships and developing effective communication between parents and teachers can guide a parent's ability to assist their children at home. Home and school communication gave parents the ability to understand the process of what teachers do daily, creating a working relationship for the success of the child (Bang, 2018). McDevitt and Recchia (2020) revealed that parents and teachers initially had the same thoughts about morning transitions, however, their beliefs and values differed on best practices during the pick-up and drop-off process. Interaction between teachers and parents is key to successful child development and a powerful tool in supporting child development (Berechikidee et al., 2019). Teachers' communication tools varied from emails, texts, letters sent home, and phone calls, depending on the preference of the family (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018). Inviting parents to share their school communication preferences offered parents the opportunity to comfortably share their knowledge about their child with the teacher and allowed the teacher to share school events/activities. Such communication tools provided opportunities to freely ask questions or present possible concerns either parent or teacher may have had (Cook et al., 2019).

Teachers have often viewed parents in passive or active roles which have had an impact on their approach to communication (Silver & Coba-Rodríguez, 2022). In the

active role, parents were expected to be involved during the pick-up and drop-off process and in the passive role teachers felt the need to delay their everyday interactions with the parent and child to allow a sound and calm transition into care (Butler & Ostrovosky, 2018). Parents should see themselves as an equal partner to the teacher or at least see the teacher as their support in childcare. Either way, the perceived role would guide their approach when communicating with the school (Maras et al., 2018). Building a strong relationship among teachers and parents significantly strengthened trust especially for those parents who exhibited elevated levels of distrust (Cook et al., 2019). Baroncelli et al. (2018) indicated how effective communication between parents and teachers created continuity in socializing contexts in the interest of the child. Through effective parent engagement, parents and teachers often perceived themselves as equal, with shared values and ideas to meet the needs of the child (Vuorinen, 2018).

Bang (2018) shared that parents often act passively in teacher-parent communication situations for fear of their child being mistreated in the classroom. They would rather speak directly to the center director, bypassing the teacher for their communicative needs. De Oliveira Lima and Kuusioto, (2019) expressed that home-school communication was more positive when parents took an active role in engaging with the schools and how teachers became more receptive to active and involved parents. Arnot and Schneider (2018), stressed the need for centers to identify barriers to communication and develop strategies to counter those barriers such as language, time, and/or communication methods. Parents of children with disabilities found it difficult to communicate with teachers due to their own lack of knowledge of their appropriate

child's developmental milestones. Teachers who were not specialists in the field of special education needs, such as children with disabilities, had difficulties expressing the needs of the child for placement with fear of sharing inadequate information (Bakkaloglu & Sucuoglu, 2018). According to De Jong et al. (2019) teachers were conflicted as to whether parents fully understood what was involved in the decision-making process for their special needs child.

Kalland and Linnavalli (2021) expressed social, emotional, and language development as concerns in the preschool setting. The authors identified teachers' perspectives on receiving additional support for preschool development. Teachers and parents shared their perspectives on how preschool helps prepare the child with adjustments and transitioning to the elementary school setting, thus contributing to the development of their academic skills (Burns et al., 2022). Communication between educators and parents often did not include parents' goals for their children while in their care (Hadley & Rouse, 2018). When teachers' and parents' perceptions are better understood, then students' achievement can be supported and improved (Hedlin, 2019). Preschool teachers shared that their ability to ensure parent participation and cooperation improved the opportunity for effective communication, and that good communication assisted them with conflict prevention (Hedlin, 2019). The support from both teacher and parent is a powerful tool to build a successful relationship and increase student achievement (Berechikidee et al., 2019). Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) acknowledged that the relationship between parents and teachers were mutually important to building partnerships that can foster a child's educational success. Johnson

et al. (2019) expressed how meaningful regular communication between parents and teachers is in influencing parents to advocate for their child not only in regular school but in outside activities including after-school and tutoring.

Conus and Fahrni (2019) shared that it should be the school's obligation to create a line of communication with families between home and school. It is exceptionally vital for instructors to start communication, particularly with guardians of minority children since they are faced with numerous obstructions in respect to parental involvement. A few boundaries parents experience are; how communication with teachers lack certainty, language barriers, and overall, the inability to discuss certain things with the teachers (Conus & Fahrni, 2019). Conus and Fahrni stated that parents often trust teachers and accepted that they would be contacted in the event their children were having issues at school. It has traditionally been assumed by parents when they are not contacted by teachers that "no news was good."

Understanding how teachers and parents perceive communication allowed for the identification of both strengths and weaknesses in current practice. This study builds on the perspectives to uncover opportunities to create more effective, two-way communication strategies that assist early learners' development. By examining the viewpoints of both parents and teachers, my research sought to provide solutions to bridge gaps in communication and strengthen the home-school connection in the infant-toddler setting. Improved communication plays a significant role in supporting children's developmental milestones while fostering stronger partnerships between families and educators.

Mobile Technology to Support Parent-Teacher Communication

An increased amount of mobile technology has been designed to assist with teacher-parent communication (Erdreich, 2020). Educational apps such as Remind, Class Messenger, Class Dojo, and Simple Circle enable teachers to be able to send texts or photos to families/ individuals without sharing personal contact information (Erdreich, 2020). According to Snell et al. (2018), these apps also allowed for the translation of languages other than English. Many preschool parents currently use these apps which have encouraged increased communication regarding child development and increased family involvement (Snell et al., 2018).

Ziden et al. (2020) shared how essential communication between parents and teachers was in fostering parent involvement and keeping parents informed of school activities. The use of emails, cell phones, websites and digital applications provides schools with greater opportunities to reach parents and keep them informed (Ziden et al., 2020). Teachers and parents agree that the use of mobile applications was appreciated by informing them of what was going on in their child's classroom (Chen & Lin, 2021).

According to Chen and Lin, (2021) there has been an increase in the use of mobile applications in education. Mobile applications have been found to be an improved form of communication among teachers and parents (Cuenca-Alava et al., 2018). Using advanced mobile technologies like smartphones, the home-school communication systems now allows for a larger output of information provided to parents by teachers (Gauvreau & Sandall, 2019). Maphosa and Dube, **(**2021**)** stated that schools have started to spend more money and time on technological means of communication due to the

increasing dependency on technology. Reynolds et al. (2019) shared how principals have found the use of school-based mobile communication applications acceptable in increasing communication such as; weekly school lunch menus, upcoming holidays, and teacher meetings.

Lin (2019) shared how parents in Taiwan recognized the need for changing teacher-parent communication with the development of smartphones and technology through LINE. LINE is a mobile application used among parents and teachers that provides continual and uninterrupted connections for parent and teacher dialogue (Lin, 2019). Lin, (2019) indicated that LINE, the 360-class monitoring application, improved parent-teacher communication, and assisted parents with the ability to monitor homework, receive school newsletters, school updates, and eliminated the loss of information sent home for parents via paper copies.

The use of mobile technology in parent-teacher communication shows a growing need for flexibility and adaptability in the early childhood education setting. However, this study seeks to discover how non-traditional communication tools can assist and/or provide strategies that improve communication between parents and teachers. By understanding how technology is currently used and identifying its limitations, my research seeks to provide insights to create a system to promote parent-teacher communication along with traditional methods. This focus on technology aligns with the overall goal of my study: to identify strategies to improve parent-teacher communication and support early learners in achieving their developmental milestones.

Summary and Conclusion

Parent-teacher communications are essential for student achievement (Singh et al., 2021). Many different models of parent-teacher communication and parent involvement were identified that suggested ways to improve communication, a priority for school systems throughout the United States. School leadership was pivotal in terms of engaging parent-teacher communication. School leaders were the source for facilitating, collaborating, and building partnerships with families, teachers, and communities.

Lin et al. (2019) indicated more frequent communication regarding learning and development improved parent-teacher correspondence and home learning experiences. Bang (2018) recognized sharing of information between parents and teachers regarding children's language, culture, and experiences led to increased learning opportunities. By working and communicating with teachers, parents are better able to understand needs of their children during their transition from home to school. Communication is valued in home-school environments. Smith (2020) stated parents and teachers should have meaningful exchanges that also foster improved positive communication to support developmental growth. However, basic communication predominately occurred during pick-up and drop-off times (Hummel et al., 2022). Quick exchanges during these times were not enough to foster understanding and shared goals for student achievement. More efforts on behalf of teachers to communicate with parents is necessary, especially when there is a need to provide information regarding children's daily developmental achievement (Anders & Cohen, 2019).

According to Lehrl et al. (2020), since the family home is the first environment where children learn behaviors and skills development, communication was a major factor in terms of preschool teachers' understanding of student experiences. Any inability to communicate with parents about exhibited behaviors or lack of skill development was seen as a disservice to children, and potentially limited achievement. Sheridan and Smith (2019) showed positive results in terms of overall school achievement when communication was two ways and informed both parents and teachers.

This research filled a gap in literature because although there is research regarding parent-teacher communications, there was a lack of research focusing on parent-teacher perspectives about ways to improve home-school communications and support early learners in terms of meeting developmental milestones. Building new knowledge in the field can lead to teacher and parent methods that focus primarily on factors for communication in early education outside of pick-up and drop-off verbal exchanges. The intent in developing this research was to understand how preschool teachers can increase parents' knowledge of developmental milestones and support their ability to have conversations relating to these milestones. More work needs to be done to address gaps in communication and collaboration in the school setting.

In Chapter 3, a comprehensive description of the qualitative research design is provided. I also address the methodology to obtain and gather data via parent and teacher in-depth interviews, as well as trustworthiness, ethical procedures, data analysis, and credibility of my research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore parent and teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication and support early learners. In this basic qualitative study, I used interviews to collect data regarding early childhood teachers' perspectives about effective communication strategies to improve communications between teachers and parents regarding preschool children's developmental milestones. In this study, I was able to provide information about what early childhood teachers and parents believed was necessary for effective parent-teacher communications. The goal of my research was to identify strategies in which effective communication was developed to improve these communications.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), relationships between the home and school are crucial to children's overall development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework for my research. Through interviews, I gathered detailed parent and teacher perspectives about how home-school communications supported, confirmed, and hindered early learners in terms of meeting developmental milestones.

This chapter includes the research design and rationale, research question, and my role as the researcher. I describe participant selection and how participants were recruited and contacted. The chapter also includes issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical procedures, and a summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ: What are perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers regarding home-school communications and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners?

A basic qualitative approach was used to explore parent and teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve and support home-school communications and support early learners. I carefully considered the research design for my study and determined a qualitative design with in-depth interview questions was the best methodology to answer my research question and explore the central phenomena.

I used the qualitative approach to gather teacher and parent perspectives on their present communications and identify strategies and procedures to improve them.

Role of the Researcher

My primary role as the researcher was to interview participants in a comfortable environment while collecting, recording, and transcribing responses in a nonbiased manner. Due to COVID, participants were interviewed via Zoom or by phone. I used a reflective journal to identify biases I may have had during each interview. Participants were teachers and parents of children in the infant-toddler center. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with participants. I did not work in a supervisory role at the research site or have any relationships or administrative power over participants. This allowed for unbiased and genuine interaction. The research site was an early childhood center that has children who are enrolled from birth to 5. The center had

two directors, 37 teachers (14 lead teachers, seven assistant teachers, and 16 teacher aides), and 137 families.

As the researcher, I ensured the interview protocol had questions that were developed using Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem to address home and school communication from perspectives of teachers and parents. I avoided any possible ethical issues and biases by not conducting the study in the center in which I worked in order to maintain trustworthiness. I used the qualitative design to be cognizant of participants' beliefs and translate data results effectively.

Methodology

In this section, I identify participant selection, instrumentation, and procedures to complete the study. Number of potential participants who were necessary for recruitment and how they were recruited and contacted to participate in the study are addressed in this section. Participants were asked semi-structured and open-ended questions during interviews to gain their perspectives on home-school communication and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners.

Participant Selection and Logic

Participants in this study were parents and teachers of children in an ECE center in a northern state. The sample consisted of 10 participants who met criteria to address the purpose of this study. Five teacher participants taught students who were 3 and younger. Five parent participants had children who were age 3 and younger and attended the research site. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure participants are able to provide in-depth data in response to the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

A basic qualitative approach with in-depth interviews was used. I identified participant selection, instrumentation, and procedures.

Purposeful sampling was used for this study to collect and analyze data from participants who had similar knowledge and experiences.

Instrumentation

I developed an interview protocol for teachers and parents related to the research question for this basic qualitative study. Interviews, a reflective journal, transcripts of interviews, and audio recordings were the data collection methods I used for the study. Ten interview questions were designed to encourage participants to provide personal descriptions of their experiences with home-school communication. The questions were open-ended to gain the perspectives and experiences of the preschool teachers and parents. Interview questions were created by the researcher to establish the sufficiency of data and to focus on the perspectives of parent-teacher on parent-teacher communication to determine ways to support home-school communication to support early learners. At the start of each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of my research study, the confidentiality, and the importance of their responses. Before beginning the interview, I asked each participant if there were any questions. Questions 1-5 of the interview protocol were designed for teacher participants, and questions 6- 10 of the interview protocol were designed for parent participants. To further answer the research question, follow-up questions were asked when appropriate. Interview questions were reviewed and approved by the dissertation committee and Walden University's

Institutional Review Board (IRB) to establish the sufficiency and content validity to answer the research question.

Participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had after each interview. They were reminded of their opportunity to review their responses from the interview via email for any discrepancies as part of the research process procedures. In the event participants had any follow-up questions once the interview was complete, I provided my contact information again. The participants were thanked for their participation in my research study and were assured that a copy of the results would be shared once my study was complete. Data saturation occurs in the research process when no further new information is discovered. I reached data saturation by interviewing the participant pool of 10 participants (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2018). A data analysis plan was implemented once the interviews were completed.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once my proposal was approved and I gained Walden University's IRB approval, # 02-23-22-0743568, to conduct my interviews, an email was sent to the center director requesting a phone meeting to introduce myself and my study for the purpose of gaining permission to invite participants from the early childhood education setting to participate in the study. To recruit participants from the research site I met via phone with the director of the childcare center to discuss my research study in detail. I introduced myself as a doctoral student studying early childhood leadership and advocacy at Walden University. I explained the purpose of my study and the criteria for participation. Participant criteria included early childhood teachers who have worked at the center for a

minimum of 3 years with a degree in education and parents of children under the age of 3attending the center. Once the director was informed of the purpose of the study and agreed to my study, I requested assistance from the director to forward invitations to teachers via email and have classroom teachers place invitations into students' cubbies to gain parent participants. The director agreed to send an email blast from her database to all teachers and parents and have teachers place the flyers in the students' cubbies. The purpose of the study, confidentiality, and privacy methods, along with my name and contact information were included on the flyer invitations to participate in the study. Interested participants were requested to submit an email informing me of their interest in participating in my study. Teachers who volunteered to participate were asked to respond via email to include their years of teaching at the research site. Parent participants who volunteered were asked to respond via email including their child's classroom and the age of the child. A letter of consent was emailed to the participants before scheduling their ZOOM or phone interview. Responses gained via email were followed by an email for participants to consent to the study by indicating an "I consent" response in their email. Email follow-ups occurred to schedule initial contact and arrange times for interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the participants.

The interview questions consisted of open-ended questions developed using Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem theory to answer the research question seeking to gather the perspectives of teachers and parents in the infant-toddler setting on successful communication strategies. Interviews were hosted in a way participants were comfortable and able to speak freely and without hesitation. A date and a time were established to

conduct the interview along with times that were suitable for the participants. I informed the participants that they would receive a summary of their interview transcript to ensure effective transcription and to clear up any questions they may have had.

The interviews were scheduled for a maximum of 45 minutes. Audio recordings and reflective notes were used to collect responses. I collected data over a period of 6 weeks. I interviewed 10 people who agreed to participate in the study. Participants received letters of consent and a summary of what the study would entail. I informed all participants that their identities would be protected with the use of pseudonyms.

At the end of each interview, I thanked the participants and asked if there were any questions before fully ending the interview. There were none and participants were thanked for their time and informed that all information would be kept confidential in a secure safe, under lock and key, in my home and on my password-protected computer. Participants were assured that they would be able to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

As the researcher, I used my laptop with the ZOOM app to interview, record, and transcribe data with the transcription app NVivo. I also made notes in a reflective journal during each interview. After conducting each interview, I played the recording several times taking my time to read through NVivo transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of all responses. I compared the responses of the participants in order to identify similar themes or codes within their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

My study's data analysis procedure started with audio-recorded interviews that were later transcribed. Digital recordings of the interview data were transcribed, and their findings were analyzed for validity and credibility. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), a key step in the analysis process for qualitative researchers is to understand the coding of their data as it is a major piece of the analysis process. I created and saved the transcriptions on my password-protected laptop. After each transcription had been examined thoroughly, I read and re-read the transcriptions at least three times as I carefully analyzed the participant's responses.

I started by analyzing the data using open coding. According to Saldana (2016), key terms and phrases that stood out when read are coded. To distinguish open codes, I used highlighters of various colors (Saldana, 2016). I focused on coding information that was associated with explicit parts of the research question (see Ravitch and Carl, 2016). To assist me in discovering ideas, concepts, and theories, open codes were used to organize the data into manageable units for analysis (Saldana, 2016). According to Ravitch & Carl (2016), the analysis and the emergence of themes supported addressing my study's research question. I continued collecting and analyzing data until saturation was reached, at which point no new themes or patterns emerged (see Burkholder et al., 2016).

Themes connected to the viewpoints of early childhood teachers were discovered through data analysis. Understanding how to handle disputed cases is a component of the qualitative researcher's data analysis plan. Data that the researcher did not expect to

emerge during analysis and may perceive runs counter to the emerging patterns and themes are referred to as discrepant data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To represent all viewpoints and maintain the study's credibility, this information must be included in the findings of the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2018). I employed member checking to verify validity, credibility and trustworthiness and included all data including discrepant data in this study so that subsequent researchers might benefit from every new perspective.

Data analysis occurred in phases which was the breaking down of data into identifiable themes using NVivo to categorize and code the data. NVivo assists with building codes, categories, and themes within the research by organizing the responses of the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Looking for codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data and grouping those themes was the next step in data analysis. Connections were made from the responses from the interview. The final stage was to review the themes to ensure they were aligned with one another to validate and confirm the results of my analysis of the data.

The data analysis process for this qualitative study allowed for categories to emerge among codes. According to Ravitch and Carl (2020), categories of common data allow for emergent themes. I color-coded emergent codes and categories for further analysis and identification of similar outcomes. Analysis of the data provided four themes related to early childhood teachers' and parents' perspectives on ways to improve home-school communication. Member-checking was used and included significant data to

ensure credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability in this study. No discrepant cases emerged in this study.

Issue of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect data from a human experience (Azungah, 2018). The process to obtain a small sample size of 5 to 25 participants ensures validity and credibility in research. To maintain trustworthiness, I ensured that as the researcher, I was open to identifying any biases I may have had or discovered. I also used a journal to collect my own thoughts to prevent further researcher bias.

Credibility refers to how believable the results of the research are or have been established (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). A qualitative study is credible when its results are presented with clear descriptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As the researcher, it was my duty and responsibility to gather all the data necessary to answer the research question in my study. Data included audio recordings of the responses from teacher and parent interviews. Member checking was used which allows participants to review their interview responses, peer reviewers and the use of notes were strategies used to maintain credibility.

Transferability refers to the generalizability of research findings and determines if the study may be transferred to a different setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). It was my responsibility as the researcher to support transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the data to allow readers to use the data in related areas. Transferability in

qualitative studies allows the results of the research to be applied beyond the bounds of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability refers to the consistency of methods and procedures used in a research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As the researcher, I achieved dependability in the study by ensuring I remained on target and focused during the interview process. Any bias I may have had was minimized by ensuring that each interview was consistently implemented without my personal opinions or body language (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used a journal to collect my thoughts to prevent any researcher bias. The journal held a record of audit trail on any issues or ideas that may have come up in the study and included the data-collecting process (see Merriam and Tisdell, 2018). All participants were asked the same questions in a comprehensive manner and without leading their responses.

Confirmability is the researcher's objectivity which indicates whether the findings in a study are based on the collection of data rather than the researcher's bias or assumption (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Confirmability was gained by assuring the participants of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt it was necessary and without any penalty. Data collected during the study corroborated and supported the findings of the study (Saldana et al., 2014). Strategies of incorporating detailed data descriptions, member checking, and peer review increased the confirmability of the study (see Merriam and Tisdell, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

I awaited approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning the study. I reached out to an Early Childhood Center in a Northeastern state for my study. My approval number is 02-23-22-0743568 and expires on February 23, 2023. I was able to meet via phone with the assistant director to provide paperwork via email consenting to the use of their center as well as reaching out to parents and teachers via email on my behalf. I informed the assistant director of the use of pseudonyms being used in the study to ensure the anonymity of the participants' identities. The consent form included the nature of the study, the rights of the participants, and their ability to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants who volunteered to be a part of the study responded via email by indicating, "I consent," in their email response, and pseudonyms were used in lieu of participant identity to ensure anonymity.

There were no ethical concerns related to the recruitment or interview process. As the researcher, I did not have any ethical concerns related to the collection of data. Participants were informed that their participation was purely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any moment.

I ensured participants that all documents would be kept securely on my password-secured laptop and in a locked cabinet in my home office for 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. Only the researcher has access to the password-protected laptop or files.

Participants were informed that their responses would be confidential and identified by pseudonyms of "Tchr V 1" and "PV 1" with the number increasing by

participants. To ensure confidentiality and any other possible ethical issues, I requested the participants to secure a location for the interview which provided them the opportunity to freely respond to the interview questions. The researcher assured the same procedures would be followed for receiving data from the participants.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research methodology, design and rationale, data collection tools, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to explore parent and teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communications to determine ways to improve home-school communications and support early learners. Interviews were conducted with 10 participants. With interview transcripts, I was able to interpret data to construct patterns and themes that assisted with creating a better understanding of the topic. Research findings are reported in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

In this basic qualitative study, I explored parent and teacher perspectives regarding ways to improve home-school communications and support early learners in infant and toddler programs for meeting developmental milestones. The following research question guided this study:

RQ: What are perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers regarding home-school communications and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners?

In this chapter, I describe the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and research results.

Setting and Demographics

The ECE center for this study was in an urban school district located in the northeast United States. It is in a community where people are diverse in terms of culture, education level, language, and socioeconomic status. Participants in this study were early childhood educators who taught students who were 3 and younger and parents of students attending the center of the same age. At the time of this study, I had no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants' responses or affected my interpretations of study results.

Participants in this study included five parents of children enrolled in the ECE center and five teachers. Four teachers were African American females, and one was a Caucasian female. Three parents were Caucasian females, and two were African American females. All teachers were identified as lead teachers among their respective

age groups. They worked with children between 2 and 3. All teachers taught for at least 3 years in ECE. All parents had students between four months and 2 years attending the center. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants, nor were there any experiences that affected interpretations of study results.

To protect identities of participants, they were assigned pseudonyms. Teacher participants were abbreviated as Tchr V on. Parents were given the abbreviation of PV. All participants were required to have a degree in education, at least 3 years of experience teaching children and younger, and presently working in education. Teachers had a range of experience from 4 to 20 years. No teachers had the same number of years of experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Participant ID	Years of Experience	Highest Level of Education	Race	Gender
Teacher Volunteer 1 (Tchr V1)	10 years	Master's Degree	African - American	Female
Teacher Volunteer 2 (Tchr V2)	20 years	Master's Degree	African – American	Female
Teacher Volunteer 3 (Tchr V3)	4 years	Bachelor's Degree	African - American	Female
Teacher Volunteer 4 (Tchr V4)	16 years	Master's Degree	Caucasian	Female
Teacher Volunteer 5 (Tchr V5)	6 years	Bachelor's Degree	African – American	Female

All parent participants had children who were at least 3 or younger and attended the ECE center. Ages of parent participants' children ranged from 4 to 18 months old. No two parents who participated in my study had children of the same age enrolled in the ECE center where my research took place (see Table 2).

Table 2

Parent Demographics

Participant ID	Age of Child	Highest Level of Education	Race	Gender
Parent Volunteer 1 (PV1)	16 months	Bachelor's degree	Caucasian	Female
Parent Volunteer 2 (PV 2)	9 ½ months	Bachelor's degree	Caucasian	Female
Parent Volunteer 3 (PV 3)	18 months	Master's degree	Caucasian	Female
Parent Volunteer 4 (PV 4)	4 months	High School	African American	Female
Parent Volunteer 5 (PV 5)	11 months	High School	African American	Female

Data Collection

I began my recruitment process after receiving Walden's IRB approval by meeting with the ECE center's assistant director via phone due to COVID-19. I introduced myself as a doctoral student and discussed my study. She agreed my flyer could be shared with her via email and she would distribute it to her staff and parents via email and post it on the bulletin board on my behalf. A total of 10 participants, five of whom were early childhood teachers, and five parents agreed to participate in my study. All participants' identities were kept confidential and were not identified by the director or anyone else in the center. Participants were able to contact me directly through email as indicated on the flyer. Responses were slow initially, but after waiting about 2 to 3 weeks and reaching back out to the center's assistant director to redistribute my flyer, I

received the required total of 10 responses. All parent participants had children currently enrolled at the center and all teacher participants were employed at the center for more than 3 years. Once participants volunteered for the study, introduction emails were sent with consent forms attached. Participants were instructed to reply via email with the words “I consent.” A follow-up email was sent requesting times that were convenient for participants. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, my data collection options were Zoom and phone interviews. I was able to schedule interviews for approximately 45 minutes with participants with their choice to interview via Zoom or by phone.

I collected data from 10 participants using interview questions (see Appendix A). Seven participants were interviewed by phone and three participants were interviewed using Zoom. I reintroduced myself at the beginning of interviews and thanked participants for taking the time to participate in my study. I informed participants interviews were audio-recorded, pseudonyms would be used, and no one but myself would know who provided which responses and interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. Participants were informed copies of transcripts would be provided to them to review and make changes to clarify their responses if necessary, and they were able to withdraw at any time without being penalized. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions before I started. No participants had any questions. No compensation for participating in my study was provided.

After all the interviews were completed, I uploaded each interview into NVivo software to assist me with the transcribing process. I purchased the service and was able to upload the audio recordings to NVivo for a faster-transcribing experience. After the

NVivo transcription of the interview audio, I went back and replayed the audio to crosscheck with NVivo transcription. I then submitted a copy of the interview transcript to each participant for their review of accuracy and to make changes if necessary. The participants thanked me and shared that their responses were accurate as given during our interview. No changes were made. Participants were informed to contact me at any time if they had questions or answers they may not have thought of during their interview. No participants contacted me. Interview transcripts and audio interviews were saved on my password-protected computer and will remain in a locked safe in my home for five years upon the completion of my study. At that time, I will shred the documents and delete the files from my password-protected computer. Participants were not compensated for their participation in this study.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was collected the data were analyzed using qualitative methodologies and results were interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and design. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory guided the study by supporting the understanding of how the school environment and the home environment function as important systems promoting children's outcomes. The importance of building reciprocal relationships between teachers and parents for children's academic success was explored in addition to the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory. Participant responses were reviewed line by line and notes were obtained from the transcripts notating key phrases and similar responses. The key phrases and similar responses were noted and grouped in a separate Word document. The data were

assigned to categories within the coding process. I discovered a few of the following sample terms: *Proximity availability, safety, location, recommendations, feedback, convenient to walk, distance, affordable, communication, well-being, parent-teacher conferences, scheduling, face-to-face meetings, COVID, parent engagement, email, phone, mobile apps, pick-up, drop-off, naps, diapering, feeding, parent-parent communication, speech and language, fine and gross motor development, autism and developmentally appropriate.* By reading my data several times and finding repeated words and phrases, the themes developed and were organized from the phrases and responses that were directly in response to the research question. I made notes of key phrases that appeared similar (see Table 3).

Table 3

Identified Codes and Excerpts from Parent Responses

Theme	Open Codes	Participant Identifiers	Excerpts
Lifestyle Convenience	Availability Food Proximity Affordable	Parent Volunteer 1 (PV1)	"Wanted a convenient location, affordable and in the neighborhood."
		Parent Volunteer 2 (PV2)	"Food provided" "You know proximity, availability, safety, affordability, food, and formula provided."
Classroom Engagement Activity Barriers	No face-to-face Scheduling COVID-19 Parent-to-Parent Communication	Parent Volunteer 2 (PV2)	"No face-to-face parent-teacher conferences to get to know the parents better."
		Teacher Volunteer 3 (Tchr V 3)	"Unable to build a rapport with parents due to no face-to-face meetings."

The key phrases were color-coded in my notes and four themes emerged: parent-teacher communication opportunities, classroom engagement activity barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience (see Table 4).

Table 4

Thematic Map of Codes and Themes Associated with the Research Question

Themes	Codes
Parent-teacher communication opportunities	Face-to-face communication, parent-teacher conferences, emails, phone calls, mobile apps
Engagement activity barriers	COVID, scheduling due to work, no in-person, no classroom visits, unable to enter the building for pick-up and drop-offs, parent-parent communication
Lifestyle convenience	Proximity, availability, safety, affordability, well-being, food, and formula provided
Developmental milestone	Autism, speech & language, fine motor (OT), gross motor (PT)

There were no discrepancies identified in the data once the data analysis was completed. No corrections were necessary after the themes and codes were identified.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I ensured credibility by following my interview protocol. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using NVivo software and my personal laptop. Accuracy of the data was ensured by reviewing the transcripts from the interviews. Member checking occurred via email by sharing individual participants their responses to check the accuracy of their transcribed responses (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In my

study, to establish credibility of my findings, I interviewed a total of 10 participants. Five participants were early childhood teachers who teach students ages 3 years old and younger with a minimum of 3 years of experience. The other five participants were parents of students under the age of 3 years old attending the early childhood center research site. I used semi-structured interviews to collect the data and a reflection journal to identify any biases during the interview. Prior to the interview, I met with the center director to share my study and gain permission to utilize the center to gain participants for the study. The center director agreed to share the flyer both via email, and classroom bulletins. The wait for participants to volunteer was longer than I anticipated. Initially, no one reached out via email to participate in my study. I then reached back out to the center director via email asking to have my flyer re-sent to the teachers and families. After a two week-three week wait, I began to receive emails from participants. After the interviews were completed, participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcripts and a draft of their findings for accuracy. Accuracy was confirmed as I used member checking and shared the interview transcripts with the participants via email. No changes were necessary to the interview transcripts. According to Merriam and Tisdell, (2018), internal validity in all research hinges on the meaning of reality.

Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2018) stated that the investigator needs to provide "sufficient descriptive data" to make transferability possible "with the use of rich, thick descriptions." I provided clear descriptions of the population, sample size, and methods used in the study so that potential researchers reading my study results would be able to

determine the transferability of the research. Participants in the study were parents of children under the age of 3 years old and early childhood teachers of students from 3 years old and under with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience. Five parents volunteered to participate in the study; two were African American females and three were Caucasian females. Their children ranged from 4 months old to 18 months old. Their level of education ranged from high school to a master's degree. Five early childhood teachers volunteered to participate in the study; one was a Caucasian female and four were African American females. Two teachers held bachelor's degrees, and three teachers held master's degrees. Their experience in teaching students ages 3 years old and younger ranged from 4 years to 20 years.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2020), to achieve transferability, researchers can give detailed descriptions of the information provided in the collected data. This basic qualitative study allows future readers to establish possible experiences of their own determining their perspectives on parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting.

Dependability

To ensure dependability was maintained, a reflective journal was used to document detailed notes from the interview. Participant interview responses were recorded and saved on my password-protected laptop. NVivo software was used to transcribe each participant's interview. Participants were emailed a copy of their transcript, once completed, for accuracy. Accuracy was confirmed via email by participants and met with recorded interviews ensuring transparency during the interview

and research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2018). I used a reflective journal to collect my thoughts as I interviewed the participants. Tomaszewski et al., (2020) indicated researchers should document research design and implementation, not limited to the data collection methods and appraisal of the project.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established through critical reflection. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data to ensure that the findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' perspectives on parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting on milestone development. Data collected from the study supported the findings (Tomaszewski et al., 2020) which were based on participant responses to specific interview questions. The findings were categorized into four themes: parent-teacher communication opportunities, classroom engagement barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience. My reflective journal supported my understanding of the findings and that the findings were accurately reflective of the perspectives of parents and teachers on their communication in the infant-toddler setting. Confirmability alludes to the level of bias in the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Confirmability was ensured as there were no biases purposely disclosed, and the findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' perspectives to improve home-school communication. Interactions with the participants during data collection were met by ZOOM audio recordings, phone, and by email for member checking.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore parent-teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communication to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication to support early learners. Vance (2020) indicated that parents are more involved in their children's education when they communicate with the school and understand the importance of learning at home which is dependent on the relationship between teachers and parents. The research question that guided my study was: What are the perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers on home-school communication and the strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners? Each participant chose their interview time according to their schedule. Each participant had an option to interview via a ZOOM meeting or phone call. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's knowledge and approval. The coded data were created and identified from the themes associated with the research question. Frequently used words were color-coded with high lighters to show patterns and categories as they were discovered. Coding consisted of a list of terms and phrases from the interviews. The data analysis from the coded data produced the following themes: parent-teacher communication opportunities, classroom engagement barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience.

Theme 1: Parent-Teacher Communication Opportunities

The first theme I identified was how parents and teachers were willing to communicate in multiple ways. Parents and teachers all stated that they would like more opportunities to speak with one another to share and discuss how the children are doing

in class. Currently, the use of emails, texts, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and face-to-face (merely during pick-up and drop-offs) are some of the categories within this first theme. Interview question #1 (for parents) asked: "What are the ways in which you communicate the student's progress on a daily or weekly manner to parents?" The results indicated the use of mobile apps was the main use of communication between teachers and parents, due to the COVID pandemic, whereas most parent participants preferred face-to-face communication and hoped that things were returning to some sort of normalcy with in-school visits. Parents would like to be well-informed about events, activities, and things going on in their children's classrooms and at the center. Parent participants responded with their preferred communication method with their child's teacher. Three out of the five parents indicated they would prefer face-to-face communication. However, with the current state of the nation with COVID-19, mobile apps have been the most efficient form of communication as they can receive updates on their child in the event diapers are needed, naps were taken, or additional change of clothes were needed (Chen & Lin, 2021). Yet, most parents would rather have face-to-face communication opportunities to gain a connection with their child's teacher. PV 1 shared.

> I like using the portal, I think that, you know, it's a good and easy way to communicate and, you know it feels safe as well, you know, it's a kind of enclosed system……in my dream I would be able to go into the classroom.

PV 3 shared, “I mean the in-person stuff, but that’s what I wanted, also don’t because I just want to make sure to be as safe as possible in an environment where these children are not vaccinated.” PV 4 shared,

“Maybe back in person, not so much over the social media platforms and zoom.”

Nevertheless, the participants alluded to the fact that all the communication methods are beneficial and necessary, however, they would rather some sort of normalcy return to the center with communication styles. Due to work schedules, two of the five parent participants prefer email communication, as “it can detail longer messages that they could go back to.”

PV 5 shared, “E-mails is more communicative for me.

Interview question #2 (for teachers) asked: Are there other ways in which you would prefer to communicate with your child’s teacher and how would that look?” Both teachers and parents shared that the use of technology has been the preferred option of communication at present used to share information between one another keeping informed of the home-school environment. The teachers shared they primarily use a mobile app to communicate with the parents. Four out of the 5 teachers use a mobile app called, “Class Dojo.” With Class Dojo, teachers can message parents as well as share pictures and videos of the students during the day. For example, Tchr V 5 shared, “We have this app that we use called Class Dojo, and we will post information for the families if it’s like specific resources that we feel like would benefit a specific child, of course we would send them a private message.” At the same time, Tchr V 4 shared, “We share links and video tape a lesson or two in the classroom and share in Class Dojo along with what

is happening in the classroom. Tchr V 3 shared, “Along with the mobile apps, we send home papers that give an up-to-date or day-to-day idea of what occurred.”

Parents and teachers were quite knowledgeable in understanding the current forms of communication due to the pandemic of COVID 19, however, overall, their preferred method of communication was having face-to-face communication to build a more effective means of communication.

Theme 2: Classroom Engagement Barriers

Parent participants shared the responsibilities necessary to ensure the safety of the classroom and their children and the barriers they experienced in seeking engagement activities. The categories associated with this theme were: COVID, work schedules, parent-parent communication, Mommy/Daddy & Me, unable to enter the center for pick-up or drop-off, and no classroom visits. The second theme developed from the parent interview question, “What were the qualities you looked for when seeking a center-based setting for your child?” Participants discussed parent-teacher conferences, engagement activities pre-COVID, and having the ability to sign their child in and out of school in their classroom as opposed to the front or side door of the center. For example, PV 4 shared, “And there’s an actual person sitting face-to-face I get to actually be more inside of the environment that he’s in every day.” Follow up question was, “When you say inside of his environment, what are you describing? What, his classroom?” PV 4, “Yes! Where they have him every day.” PV 3 shared, “And so I would pick him up every day and have a little interaction with the teacher everyday…more formal interaction is a bit driven by the fact that I don’t get to go into the classroom ever.” Similarly, PV 1 shared,

> And I know obviously in my, you know, in terms of parent engagement, my dream would be to be able to go into the classroom and, you know, to do, you know, drop them off in the classroom and do you know… every now and then, be able to do some in-class activities like I, you know, like I have fond memories of my older two when they went to kind of, you know, early preschool settings.

Teacher participants expressed their views on parent-teacher conferences as they do not always result in parent participation. Interview question #4 (for teachers) asked, "What are the ways in which you are able to communicate the student's progress in a daily or weekly manner to parents"? Tchr V 2 shared, "Not all the time parents are available for parent-teacher conference and some time we get to speak to these parents…most of the time it is during pick-up and drop-off." This led me to my next question for teachers, interview question #3 "How often does your center provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to communicate outside of pick-up and drop-off times, and what are the topics based on milestone development. Tchr V 3 shared, "Every day." However other teachers shared different experiences. Tchr V 4 stated, "Monthly…and it's optional, we're glad to see many parents participate, so they do it twice a day... a morning session and an afternoon session with parents who cannot attend in the morning." Tchr V 5 shared, "It would be weekly, I say weekly because sometimes it kind of gets little. The days kind of get a little bit, let's say… they become a lot."

I noticed inconsistencies among the center's structured-time that teachers are utilizing to ensure parent-teacher communication. It remains to be answered across the board on what the agency has in place for parent-teacher communication. Parents and

teachers expressed how COVID has disrupted the experience of having face-to-face parent-teacher activities that included opportunities for parents to participate in classroom activities, meetings, and social gatherings. The implications of the national pandemic on teachers' and parents' ability to effectively communicate was an important result of my findings.

Theme 3: Developmental Milestones

Teachers acknowledged their lack of knowledge and lack of overall ability to provide parents correct knowledge of developmental milestone to assist at home. The categories associated with this theme were speech/language development, Autism, gross motor (PT), and fine motor (OT). The questions asked to teachers were, "Can you think of alternate ways in which you could share developmental milestone information to parents to assist them with their child at home?" and "Tell me how much you know about developmental milestones." Tchr V 2 noted that their ability to provide information on developmental milestones to parents to assist in the home would be primarily through "phone calls, workshops or brochures." Similarly, when answering the question, "What are the ways in which you are able to communicate the students' progress on a daily or weekly manner to parents?" Tchr V 5 shared, "We will put it in the newsletter, it's all in a weekly newsletter……. like it's a constant communication with them." Two of the teachers shared they would make calls to the home detailing things they have worked on in the classroom as well giving updates to the parents on student progress. For example, Tchr V 2 shared, "We would call Mom or Dad on the phone and we'll say…. Mom, we tried this and that in the class and we'll see what works with the child…. Have you ever

tried it at home? Tchr V 2's response shows that she sees the benefit of having multiple ways to connect with the parents to ensure the home-school connection is being met. Similarly, Tchr V 1 stated,

> Phone calls or use Teams, we set up a Teams meeting with the parents so that we can have face-to-face communications of course, due to COVID, which we can't have the in-person that we would like….so our alternative is Teams, so we can see the parents, see the kids at home and discuss any milestones that we need to discuss.

Parents eagerly shared their knowledge of developmental milestones yet, 2 out of the 5 had very minimal to no knowledge of developmental milestones. Their understanding of the assessment of development was met with the idea that it is a child being a child. PV 5 shared, "I'm not too familiar with it, but I do know that, depending on the child that there are, you know, developmental milestones they need to, you know, reach as they're you know, reach a certain age point." PV 4 shared, "Oh, I think I'm getting to know more because I now have a child of my own…. So, prior to this, not so much, but now more." I followed this up with a question asking, "Ok, so when you say prior to this, what are you responding to?" PV 4 indicated, "Prior to me having my child, I didn't know much about developmental milestones, but now I do because I have to look out for certain things now that I have a child." I went a little deeper to understand the "things" PV 4 indicated that they know now and asked to explain. PV 4 went on to share, "Ok, so for instance, my son who's four months now, I am expecting him to, you know babble he's about to be five months I should expect for him to be sitting up. So, you

know, lifting his head and things of that nature." This parent was able to provide her growing knowledge once she became a parent. The three parents who had prior knowledge about developmental milestones learned through the development of an older child or if their child attending the center has had an ongoing assessment of development.

The results of my study showed that parents want to learn more about their child's development and daily activities, like things that may be the first to have happened in the center. Early childhood centers can be conducive to not only to the learning for the children in attendance, but for the teachers and parents as well. Early childhood centers can assist in growing parents' knowledge of developmental milestones and teachers' communication in expressing in detail those activities conducted in the school that too can be utilized within the home environment. Parents may become more confident when communicating how learning takes place in the home with teachers.

Theme 4: Lifestyle Convenience

Parents felt that having a center relatively close to home, safe, and providing food and formula was a necessity when seeking a center-based setting for their child and identified some of the categories for this theme as essential. The following interview question (for parents) was asked, "What were the qualities you looked for when seeking a center-based setting for your child?" All five of the parents shared similar responses of what they were looking for when searching for a center-based setting. For example, PV 1 shared, "Location, recommendations from other local parents, cost." PV 2 shared, "Proximity was key…. looking for a place that fit into our lifestyle just in terms of not needing to commute for a long period of time in order to drop them off every day." PV 3

shared, “So initially the priority was proximity and affordability and availability, and I think I just got very lucky that I found basically across the street from our house at “XXX” center.” PV 4 shared, “Somewhere that I’m able to reach to quickly and somewhere appropriate and safe for his age, as in, you know, reading to him and stuff like that.” PV 5 shared, “Communication. Atmosphere. The teachers like just to see you, the communication was built upon the time students were entering and parents saw some of the activities set for the kids.” Parents identified which factors they considered most important when seeking an early childhood center for their children. Those factors included the cost, safety, proximity, and availability to meet their needs and the needs of their child. Overall, the themes that emerged from the study, parent-teacher communication opportunities, classroom engagement barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience expressed the importance of parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting. I was able to gain insight into things parents and teachers look forward to in an infant-toddler setting overall. However, the current need expressed by both teachers and parents was having the ability to be flexible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

In Chapter 4, results of the study were presented. I shared the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Twenty-four codes were identified, and four themes emerged. Themes that emerged from the study were parent-teacher communication opportunities, engagement activity barriers, developmental milestones, and lifestyle convenience. Results indicated face-to-face meetings are

preferred after COVID-19, yet educators and parents are using other methods of communication such as mobile apps, texts, and emails, and they intend to continue to use these. Phone calls were welcomed for longer conversations and clearer communication the needs of students. All parent participants wanted to be able to go inside the ECE center to observe their children's classrooms, specifically in terms of provision of food, formula, and napping environments. Teachers used pamphlets and newsletters to share developmental milestones with parents, but some parents had no knowledge of developmental milestones and could benefit from more communication about specific age-related developmental milestones. Findings indicated although home-school communications are important in early childhood programs, there is still a lack of consistent communication practices for supportive developmental milestone strategies for early learners. I addressed evidence of trustworthiness in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In Chapter 5, interpretations of findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions of the study are provided.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this basic qualitative study, I explored parent and teacher perspectives on ways to improve home-school communications and support early learners in infant toddler programs in terms of meeting developmental milestones. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory guided the study. The importance of building reciprocal relationships between teachers and parents for children's academic success was explored. I addressed the research question: What are perspectives of parents and early childhood teachers

regarding home-school communications and strategies that support developmental milestones of early learners? According to Ravitch and Carl (2020), when conducting qualitative research, interviews are most appropriate. The research design I employed in my study was a qualitative design with interviews. My participants were early childhood teachers of students who were 3 and under and parents of these students. Semi-structured interviews were used to record and transcribe participant perspectives on improving home-school communications and meeting developmental milestones. I included literature from Chapter 2 that supported themes in the study. This study was developed and implemented because little is known about how parents and teachers communicate developmental milestones in infant toddler settings. Wang (2020) stated educators need to focus on motivation and parent connections while parents should communicate their experiences and knowledge of child development with teachers.

Participants shared how verbal face-to-face communications was most. However, educators and parents are using other methods of communication such as mobile apps, texts, and emails for face-to-face communications and intend to continue to use these in the future. Findings revealed parents and teachers share roles to ensure effective communication. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated viable connections between children and a parent leads to dynamic energy supporting authentic learning in the home.

Results of my study indicated parents and teachers do not have a standard method to communicate developmental milestones in a comprehensive manner. Overall, participants shared face-to-face communications would be the preferred method; however, with the world still adjusting to COVID-19 protocols, mobile apps, text

messages, and emails have been used. Pick-up and drop-off communication times have halted due to COVID-19 procedures and protocols.

Interpretations of Findings

Research findings were supported by the literature review in Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, I explored research regarding how parent-teacher communications were essential to student achievement. Research was conducted on ways to improve these communications regarding learning and understanding developmental milestones. Although home-school communications are important in early childhood programs, there is still a lack of communication practices to effectively provide parents with supportive developmental milestone strategies for early learners. Parents and teachers still lack adequate communication strategies to incorporate effective home-school communications and support children to reach appropriate developmental milestones. Participants stated there needs to be a main tool that is reliable and accessible for communicating with each other.

Participants acknowledged the importance of face-to-face communications that builds a better understanding of developmental milestones and leads to establishing parent-teacher relationships. Parents shared hearing about their children's daily experiences in classrooms was helpful as they were able to implement some strategies in the home. Due to the pandemic, communication procedures were changed. To keep parents informed, educators and parents used other methods of communication such as mobile apps, texts, and emails. However, mobile apps were often misinterpreted or

lacked necessary information for effective communication. Teachers, however, continued to use mobile apps, texts, emails, and phone calls to communicate with parents. OBJ

Teachers indicated establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with parents was supported by effective communications. Teachers shared they were diligent in terms of working to keep parents informed throughout the school year during COVID-19. They shared communication tools to keep parents informed and engaged with their children's learning and development. Participants experienced challenges and being overwhelmed. Parent participants shared they preferred talking to teachers to learn more about child development. Themes that emerged from data during interviews were parent-teacher communication opportunities, Engagement activity barriers, lifestyle convenience, and developmental milestones.

Theme 1

Most of the parents and all the teachers shared that face-to-face communication was the preferred method of communication. There was one parent who preferred email as her method of communication solely due to her work schedule. However, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, each of the parent participants accepted the use of emails, texts, and mobile apps to communicate their concerns and to be informed of milestone development. Two-way communication is important for improved parent-teacher communication (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). Four out of the five teachers identified "Class Dojo" as the mobile app of choice to communicate with their parents. For example, one teacher shared how she would upload video instructions for parents to work with their children at home. All the parents shared how they wanted to know more about

how their child was doing and this mostly had taken place at school during child pick-up or drop-off times with teachers. However, the window of opportunity to do so is small as the center's strategy is to whisk the students in or out, and have parents sign-in or sign-out quickly to get to the next classroom scheduled. According to Kelty and Wakabayashi, (2020) regardless of the environment it can be in the home or in the school, the families' engagement in their children's lives is a precursor to their success in school and in life.

Theme 2

COVID has been a significant barrier to all types of classroom engagement. Classroom engagement has been interrupted in not only the infant-toddler setting but in schools at every level, nationwide. A vast majority of teachers and parents vocalized their need to resume classroom engagement activities as they have done previously with their older children. The bulk of concern has been geared toward parent-teacher conferences. Epstein (2018) shared how educators will need to develop and maintain partnerships in their programs to continue to inform and involve families. Both parent and teacher participants expressed having the ability to meet face-to-face allowed for greater interaction to discuss home-school activities and developmental milestones. Some of the parents shared how they were happy to assist with in-class activities and work alongside teachers in a collaborative manner pre-covid. Technology has become the new norm in present-day communication. Parents and teachers expressed the use of mobile apps, texts, emails, phone calls, ZOOM and Teams have been the more successful platforms used during COVID to communicate with one another even though these platforms do not provide many genuine interactions. Findings in my study confirmed that personal

classroom engagement activities provided a more positive understanding between parents and teachers as they were better informed as to the day-to-day classroom operations with their children and offered more insight into to parents on what to do to support children in the home.

Theme 3

Three of the five parent participants shared they have a lack of knowledge of developmental milestones and two shared they knew more about developmental milestones due to having previous children in school. The concerns of these parents varied from not knowing what to look for as their child developed to whether their child would crawl, talk, or run as their previous child or children around the same age of their child. Teachers indicated their method of informing parents about the importance of developmental milestones were through pamphlets provided by the Department of Education or monthly newsletters where they identified classroom activities geared towards students' developmental milestones.

Theme 4

Finally, the parents expressed what factors and resources they learned and used to choose the appropriate early childhood setting for their child. All parents shared proximity, affordability, word of mouth, and overall safety as the key factors that supported their decisions. The parents identified safety precautions and location played the biggest factor in placing their child at the early childhood center. All parents stated that they were determined to ask questions about the early childhood center protocols such as pick-up and drop-off methods, feeding practices, and level of cleaning procedures

used daily. Parents wanted to be sure they would be able to reach their child in the event of an emergency as well as hope the COVID virus was fought with specific disinfecting practices, and other viruses that are communicable in areas of high traffic and children exposed areas.

The teacher participants shared how having students residing near the center benefited their abilities to have students attend class on a regular basis. All teachers expressed that their ability to effectively communicate with parents supported their ability to encourage regular attendance as it assists with continuity of care, classroom routine, and student achievement. Having access to a conveniently located early childhood program was seen as a positive factor as it assists both teachers and parents in the event of an emergency. These findings are supported by the literature discussed in chapter 2 and indicate that a more unified and effective method of communication will need to be put in place in which all the teachers share information with parents effectively and with purpose. Arca (2019) shared that the key to building or establishing a relationship with parents is to have effective communication. Despite the lack of developmental milestone knowledge, parent participants recognized their need to gain appropriate knowledge on their child's developmental milestones in a comprehensive matter and to improve home-school communication.

Limitations of the Study

In this study, I explored the perspectives of five early childhood teachers and five parents of children in an infant-toddler education center in a northeastern early childhood education center. Ten participants volunteered and were included in my study from the

early childhood setting located in a northeastern state in the United States. Five teachers and five parents met the criteria for the study and shared their perspectives on parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting. A limitation of the study was the use of purposeful sampling as the findings represented the perspectives of preschool teachers from one early childhood center. Another recognized limitation of the study was the age of the students (3 years old and under). Having broadened the age of the students may have given representation to teachers and parents in the center used for the research study.

Recommendations

The findings from this study revealed key strategies, barriers, and opportunities for improving parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting. Effective communication is critical to ensuring that parents and teachers can work together to support early learners in meeting developmental milestones. Based on the perspectives shared by both parents and early childhood teachers, the following recommendations are provided to strengthen communication practices and build stronger home-school connections.

Consistent and Structured Communication Practices

One of the main findings of this study was that communication often occurs informally during drop-off and pick-up times, which parents and teachers identified as insufficient for addressing critical developmental concerns. While these exchanges are valuable, they lack the depth required to foster meaningful collaboration (Baroncelli et al., 2018). I recommend that infant-toddler programs establish structured communication

opportunities, such as scheduled parent-teacher meetings or weekly updates, to create consistent and intentional dialogue. These practices will allow teachers to share developmental milestones, classroom activities, and specific observations while providing opportunities for both the teacher and the parents to discuss any concerns and/or growth within the child's developmental milestones.

Using Technology as a Supplement and Not a Replacement for Face-to-Face Communications

While mobile communication tools, such as text messaging apps and classroom platforms were found to improve accessibility and convenience for busy parents, participants expressed a clear preference for face-to-face communication when addressing developmental milestones (Lin, 2019; Snell et al., 2018). Technology should be used as a supplementary tool to enhance communication, such as sharing reminders, photos, and updates. However, schools must prioritize opportunities for in-person conversations that build trust and strengthen relationships (Chen & Lin, 2021). By balancing digital communication with personal interactions, teachers can foster deeper connections with parents while ensuring that critical information is conveyed effectively.

Providing Training for Teachers on Effective Communication Strategies

The findings highlighted that some of the teachers felt unprepared to engage parents in meaningful conversations about their child's development, particularly when discussing challenges or concerns. This aligns with the research by Mutton et al. (2018), which noted a lack of training for teachers on fostering parent engagement. I recommend that professional development opportunities be provided to help teachers build skills in

effective communication, active listening, and cultural sensitivity. These trainings should include strategies for starting dialogue with families, sharing developmental information in clear and supportive ways, and addressing barriers such as language differences or busy schedules.

Creating Opportunities for Family Engagement Beyond Drop-Off and Pick-Up

A recurring theme from the study was the limited time available for teachers and parents to connect meaningfully. To address this challenge, programs should create additional opportunities for family engagement beyond brief conversations during drop-off and pick-up times (Oakes et al., 2020) Examples include hosting family workshops, developmental milestone nights, or informal classroom visits where parents can observe and participate in their child's learning environment. These events can help parents better understand the classroom setting teacher expectations, and the developmental milestones their child is working toward (Vuorinen, 2018)

Fostering Collaborative and Two-Way Communication Approaches

The study revealed that communication is often teacher-led, with limited opportunities for parents to share insights about their child. Both parents and teachers emphasized the importance of two-way communication, where both parties are viewed as equal partners in the child's development. Teachers should be encouraged to invite parents to share observations from the home environment, such as routines, behaviors, and emerging skills, which can provide valuable context for classroom planning (Vuorinen, 2018; Legg & Walker, 2018). By fostering two-way communication, teachers

can develop stronger relationships with parents and create more personalized strategies to support the child's growth.

Addressing Language and Socioeconomic Barriers to Communication

The findings also highlighted that language differences and socioeconomic challenges can limit communication opportunities, particularly for families from diverse backgrounds. To overcome these barriers, schools should consider providing translation services, offering oriented printed materials in families' preferred languages, and leveraging technology tools with built-in translation features (Surrain, 2021; Arca et al., 2019). Additionally, programs should ensure that communication practices are accessible to all families, regardless of their work schedules or access to technology. By addressing these barriers, programs can create more inclusive communication practices that support all families in partnering with teachers to meet their child's developmental needs.

Recommendations for further research regarding parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting are based on the limitations provided in my study. I recommend that this study be reproduced on a broader scale in other childcare centers in the same Northeastern location. This could provide a larger participant pool for further analysis to confirm or refute the findings.

Another recommendation would be to seek and include early childhood centers that have a larger enrollment of students under the age of 3 years old. Seeking a larger number of early childhood teachers' perspectives may offer more effective ways in which they communicate with parents on the home-school connection and milestone development information. Parent perspectives may reveal additional information needed

to solidify effective parent-teacher communication as it relates to the home-school connection and milestone development.

Overall, participants in this study overall stated that they would want to see an increase in effective communication, improvement of the home-school connection and improved milestone development knowledge in the infant-toddler setting. However, there is a lack of consistency in the methods by which teachers provide information to the parents and the length of time allotted is undetermined. Understanding the outcomes of my study results, I recommend future research to identify what additional support and methods are available and necessary for teachers and parents to effectively communicate developmental milestones to support student success.

Implications

In this basic qualitative study, I explored parent-teacher perspectives on parent-teacher communication to determine ways to improve and support home-school communication to support early learners. The results of this study provided a variety of perspectives from early childhood teachers of students ages 3 years old and under and parents of students ages 3 years old and under. The results of the study showed that early childhood teachers need to provide a primary yet effective method of communication to inform parents of milestone development activities occurring in the classroom in a manner most effective and thorough to support parents in supporting early learners. Due to the impact of COVID, early childhood centers have utilized an array of techniques to communicate with their parents, yet parent participants in my study felt the greatest

impact would be restoring face-to-face communication which goes far beyond mobile apps, texts, emails, and limited phone calls.

The early childhood center where I completed my research study is licensed in a Northeastern state in which teachers hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree in education and ongoing training hours are pursued to continue to meet the requirements necessary by the state licensing department. All the early childhood teachers shared their challenges in communication due to COVID and indicated they are doing their best in keeping parents informed on daily occurrences. They overwhelmingly agreed that hosting parent-teacher conferences twice a year for 10 minutes does not provide them with enough time to personally share milestone development information with parents. The literature showed that effective parent-teacher communication beginning in the early years supports student success (Jeynes, 2018).

This study presented implications for positive social change. The research outcomes imply that parent-teacher communication can occur effectively in the infant-toddler setting once a primary method of communication is identified and utilized by both teacher and parent. The study results showed that parents prefer face-to-face, live communication, providing information on milestone development and improving the home-school connection. The results stated that nine of the 10 participants preferred face-to-face communication as it tended to be more effective when communicating milestone development as it allows for greater talk and understanding of where improvements could be made at home. Previous literature indicated that infants and toddlers were the least focused on compared to older children in the school setting (Wang, 2020).

The early childhood teachers who participated in my study agreed on the need to implement a fool-proof method to communicate effectively with parents. Even having several mobile apps, the use of texts, emails, and phone calls did not give them a secure sense that parents were able to receive the information shared and that having face-to-face communication was the most effective pre-COVID. The results from the study showed an implication for positive social change. Early childhood teachers used a variety of ways to communicate with parents, however, none were able to provide parents with information as effective as face-to-face communication to share milestone development information improving the home-school connection,

For future research, there is an obvious need to utilize and identify an effective method of communication between parents and teachers to communicate milestone development in the infant-toddler setting. The global COVID pandemic has abruptly impacted face-to-face communication and although the parents who participated in the study preferred face-to-face communication, educators and parents are utilizing other methods of communication such as mobile apps, texts, and emails. There was a concern identified regarding the effectiveness of media communication and there remains a determination to return to face-to-face in-person meetings in the infant-toddler setting.

Conclusion

This study focused on parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting. The major challenges that both parents and teachers face are the protocols set forth nationally regarding COVID, ensuring safety for all which ended parent-teacher and classroom engagement activities instantly. The study results were supported by the

literature stating that effective communication between parents and teachers provides a positive impact on understanding children's developmental milestones and allows for a deeper connection to support the home-school environment (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Due to the ongoing pandemic, teachers need a primary method outside of the much-demanded face-to-face communication method parents deemed effective to ensure milestone development is provided. Parent-teacher communication in the infant-toddler setting must be a priority and effective methods must continue to develop to provide parents with the knowledge to support milestone development for continued school success.

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Appendix A: Participant Interview Protocol

Participants: Early Childhood Education Teachers for Students 3 years old and younger & Parents of Students 3 years old and younger

Introduction: Hello, once again my name is ShaQuonna Alston and thank you for consenting to participate in my study on Parent-Teacher Communication in the Infant-Toddler setting. Before we start, please know that you are able to withdraw at any time, you have the right to ask questions at any time, our interview will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy, and you will receive a copy of the interview to check for accuracy, and your responses will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Length of Interview: 30-45 minutes

Demographics: Participants from one Urban Early Childhood Education Center

Date:

Time:

Interview Code: (Ten-participants identified with abbreviated coding i.e. Tchr V & PV)

<u>Pre-Interview</u>

1. Thank participants for volunteering to participate
2. Describe the purpose and the interview process
3. Review the informed consent and obtain the interviewee's verbal consent supported by email on "I consent."
    - Researcher's background

- Risks and benefits of participating
- Privacy
- Maintenance of confidentiality
- Treatment of data
- Right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time without penalty

4. Opportunity for questions
5. Begin the interview and remember to record
6. End the interview and stop recording after questioning the participants

Interview questions for teachers:

1. How long have you been a teacher in the infant-toddler setting?
2. Can you share your perspectives on how teachers can communicate developmental milestone to parents?
3. How often does your center provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to communicate outside of pick-up and drop-off times and what are the topics based on milestone development?
4. What are the ways in which you are able to communicate the student's progress on a daily or weekly manner to parents?
5. Can you think of alternate ways in which you could share developmental milestone information to parents to assist them with their child at home?

Interview questions for parents:

1. What were the qualities you looked for when seeking a center-based setting for your child?
2. What are your perspectives on teacher-parent communication?
3. Tell me how much you know about developmental milestones?
4. What are the best times to communicate with your child's teacher and what topics would you discuss?
5. Are there other ways in which you would prefer to communicate with your child's teacher and how would that look?

Follow-up questions:

Possible follow-up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by….

Tell me more about….

You mentioned…. Tell me more

What do you mean by….?

Please give me an example of when that… worked/didn't work

Post-Interview

Thank the interviewee for participating

Remind the interviewee of the treatment of data and confidentiality

Inform participants that you will contact them to provide a summary of the findings for them to review for accuracy.

Interview

RQ: What are the perspectives of parents and teachers on home-school communication?

Interview questions for teachers:

1. How long have you been a teacher in the infant-toddler setting?
2. Can you share your perspectives on how teachers can communicate developmental milestone to parents?
3. How often does your center provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to communicate outside of pick-up and drop-off times and what are the topics based on milestone development?
4. What are the ways in which you are able to communicate the student's progress on a daily or weekly manner to parents?
5. Can you think of alternate ways in which you could share developmental milestone information to parents to assist them with their child at home?

Interview questions for parents:

6. What were the qualities you looked for when seeking a center-based setting for your child?
7. What are your perspectives on teacher-parent communication?
8. Tell me how much you know about developmental milestones?
9. What are the best times to communicate with your child's teacher and what topics would you discuss?

10. Are there other ways in which you would prefer to communicate with your child's teacher and how would that look?

Follow up questions:

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by….

Tell me more about….

You mentioned…. Tell me more

What do you mean by….?

Please give me an example when that… worked/did not work