

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN ECE THROUGH THE FIQ (FAMILY INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE) IN SPAIN

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### Abstract

Family-school involvement in the education of children under 6 years of age is a complex and multidimensional area of study. In this regard, there is a great deal of research that examines the extent to which such involvement affects the development and learning of their children. The research consulted indicates that high levels of involvement and family-school collaboration in children are associated with better academic performance and socio-emotional functioning at school among other outcomes, but also with benefits for families and teachers. In the case of the present study, the Spanish adaptation of the FIQ (Family Involvement Questionnaire) (Fantuzzo et al., 2000) was applied to a sample of 659 parents of children who have attended ECE between 0 and 3 years of age in different autonomous communities of Spain during the 2020-2021 academic year. The FIQ is a specific questionnaire to study the Early Childhood stage, and collects information from parents on the ways in which they participate in their children's educational experiences, in order to establish different degrees of involvement in the three subscales that comprise it; Home-Based Involvement, School-Based Involvement and Home-School Conferencing. It is a 42-item self-report Likert scale, scored from 1 to 4, with 1 being rarely and 4 being always. The results of this study show that the subscale with the highest scores is "home-school communication", with a score of 60, which is rated as high, with item 1 (I attend meetings with my child's teacher to discuss my child's teaching or behaviour) and item 3 (I talk to my child's teacher about my child's daily routine) receiving the highest scores. The other two subscales show average scores, with items 16 (I participate in planning school trips for my child) and 26 (I go on class trips with my child) scoring the lowest. It can be concluded that, given the importance of family school involvement, it is important to know what actions can be implemented by Early Childhood schools to achieve greater and better family participation.

**Keywords:** *ECE, education quality, family engagement, family involvement questionnaire, home-school conferencing.*

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### 1. Introduction

In order to understand what involvement is and the different ways in which it can be carried out in Early Childhood Education (ECE), the first step is to define both concepts.

ECE is the first stage of the education system. In most countries it runs from shortly after birth until the start of compulsory schooling at around 6 years of age.

Family involvement is a relevant concept in the educational field, since it is considered an indicator of quality in children's education (European Commission, 2000; Hong et al., 2018), being in Spain a right of families, given that the Spanish Constitution, in Article 27, paragraphs 5 and 7 states that it is a constitutional right. The regulation allows families to be involved in both the Parents Association, and the School Council. Recent research in Spain indicates that families have a positive attitude towards establishing and improving relationships with teachers and the school (García, 2015), but what is meant by family involvement? Trying to specify what we mean by family involvement is not a simple task, as it is a complex and multidimensional concept (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Lara & Naval, 2012; Livingstone & Markham, 2008). Many authors talk about proactive involvement, but focus on family involvement in school and its influence on children's academic performance (Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Gadsden, 2013). Other authors have a broader conception (Fan & Chen, 2001; Epstein, 2001 and 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2007) as they understand that involvement has to take place both at school and at home, and what they observe are improvements in the cognitive and socioemotional domains. The study by Waanders et al. (2007) includes the concept of educational co-responsibility, referring to the role played

by both families and teachers for this involvement to take place. This article takes the definition provided by Castro et al. (2015), who define family involvement as the active involvement of parents, in collaboration with the school institution, in all aspects concerning the social, emotional and academic development of their children. In addition, various studies point to the implication that this participation has, not only on children, but also on teachers and families (García-Bacete, 2003; Garreta-Bochaca, 2015).

Over the last 20 years, there has been a great deal of research on the implications of school-family involvement. Meta-analytic studies by Castro et al. (2015), Fan and Chen (2001) and Ma et al. (2016), affirm the idea that high levels of family involvement in their children's education are associated with achievement and social and emotional functioning. Moreover, when parents are involved in school life, positive effects are achieved for the child, for the teachers, for the parents and also for the school (Martínez González, 1996). In Spain, we can observe that family-school collaboration has been measured through this FIQ questionnaire (Dueñas et al., 2021) adapted to the university population.

Given the involvement that family-school involvement has on pupils and their families, the aim of this paper is to analyse through the FIQ the type of involvement that is established between families and schools in the first cycle of Pre-school Education in a sample of schools in Spain.

## 2. Methods

In order to carry out this research, a non-experimental quantitative study was carried out, using a descriptive approach to the data. Statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS27, including descriptive techniques (central tendency and dispersion) for the analysis of results, and inferential techniques for the contrast of hypotheses.

### 2.1. Sample

A non-probabilistic incidental sampling has been carried out. For a previous study, for the 20/21 school year (Otero-Mayer et al., 2021), a database of ECE schools in 5 autonomous communities in Spain was created. The centres that were involved in this research were asked to send the FIQ questionnaire (Family Involvement Questionnaire, Fantuzzo et al., 2000) to the families. As a preliminary step, we contacted the first author of the questionnaire and asked for permission to use it. The sample obtained is 659 families with children in the first cycle -0 to 3 years- of ECE. It is made up of 84% of mothers and 15% of fathers. Almost half of the families answering the questionnaire have two children (48.2%). The average age of the parents is 36 years old, 100% of whom have at least primary education, 67.5% of whom have university studies, 19.7% have post-compulsory non-university studies and 12.7% have primary or compulsory secondary education. In terms of employment, 2.5% of the sample were unemployed at the time, 9% were engaged in domestic work at home, while at the other extreme, 35.1% of the sample were technicians, professionals, scientists or 27.8% were small businessmen or administrative employees. With regard to working hours, it was found that only 19.5% finished their working day before 15:00h, being in Spain the usual timetable for schools from 9:00h to 16:00h. 21.2% of the families surveyed finish work after 18:00h. With regard to ICT access at home, 99.1% have an Internet connection at home, 95.1% of households have a computer at home, 84.6% have a digital TV and 65.9% use ICT as reference material or school support. With regard to the number of books in the home, the majority (41.8%) have between 26 and 100 books. Most of the children whose families responded to this questionnaire were born in 2018, which means that they were between 2 and 3 years old and were in the last year of this cycle.

### 2.2. FIQ -family involvement questionnaire - (Fantuzzo et al., 2000)

The FIQ is a specific questionnaire for the Early Childhood stage, which collects information from parents or caregivers about the ways in which the family is involved in the educational experiences of their children and thus establishes varying degrees of involvement in the three subscales that comprise it; "(1) Home-Based Involvement. This dimension includes behaviors describing the active promotion of a learning environment at home for children, such as providing a place in the home for learning materials and creating learning experiences for children in the community. (2) School-Based Involvement. This dimension is defined by activities and behaviors parents engage in at school with their children, such as volunteering in the classroom, going on class trips, and meeting with other parents in or out of school to plan events or fundraisers. (3) Home-School Conferencing. This dimension describes communication between parents and school personnel about a child's educational experience and progress, including talking with the teacher about a child's difficulties or accomplishments at school and educational activities to practice at home" (FIQ, pp. 2). It consists of a 42-item self-report Likert scale, scored from 1 to 4, with 1 being almost never and 4 being always.

The reliability and validity of the instrument have been studied by the authors among others (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2021), with the reliability of the questionnaire being analysed through its internal consistency - Cronbach's alpha - with values of .85, .85 and .81 for each dimension respectively. With respect to validity, the authors analysed both concurrent validity and predictive validity, obtaining high values in both cases.

### 2.3. Results

The results of this study show that in the Home-Based Involvement subscale the items in which parents have answered "rarely" have obtained scores above 10% in 5 of the 13 items that make up the subscale, with the following being the least to the most: (25) I bring home learning materials for my child - tapes, videos, books, (31) I spend time with my child working on reading/writing skills, (24) I talk to my child about how much I enjoy learning new things, (13) I share stories with my child about when I was at school, with item 42 I spend time with my child working on numeracy skills being the only item whose rating "rarely" is above 30%.

With respect to the School-Based Involvement subscale, we see that the majority of parents in the sample, over 60%, responded "rarely" to 5 of the 12 items. These are: (19) I volunteer in my child's classroom, (20) I get involved in fundraising activities at my child's school, (26) I go on field trips with my child, (35) I talk to people at my child's school about training or professional development opportunities for me and (38) I meet with other parents in my child's classroom outside of school. In this subscale, item 16, I get involved in planning school trips for my child, stands out, with 72% of the sample answering "rarely".

Finally, in the subscale Home-School Conferencing, it can be observed that 13% and 33% of the families responded "rarely" to 3 of the 11 items that make up the subscale, from least to most, (21) The teacher and I write notes to each other about my child or school activities, (37) I talk to my child's teacher about our personal and family matters, (36) I talk to my child's teacher about our personal and family matters and finally the item to which the highest percentage of families responded "rarely" (15) I talk to my child's teacher on the phone.

The overall scores for each of the three subscales show that it is in this last subscale that the highest scores were obtained, with 60 points, which is understood as high, with item 1 (I attend conferences with the teacher to talk about my child's learning or behaviour) and item 3 (I talk to my child's teacher about my child's daily school routine) receiving the highest scores. The other two subscales show average scores, with items 16 (I talk to my child's teacher about my child's daily school routine) and 26 (I go on outings with my child) scoring the lowest.

### 3. Discussion and conclusions

The implications of family involvement in their children's Early Childhood stage, as well as the effects that this involvement has on the different agents -children, families and teachers- shows the need to know and understand the degree of family involvement. The results obtained in the sample analysed, made up of 659 parents of children who have attended the first cycle of Infant Education (0-3) in Spanish public, private and subsidised ECE schools in the 2020/2021 academic year, show that there is room for improvement, although the results are generally good. It is interesting to note that it is in the subscale Home-School Conferencing, which deals with the communication established between schools and families, where the best scores are obtained. These results show that there is good involvement in a period (0-3 years) in which the role of families is so important for the optimal development of children.

A limitation of the study is the application of the observation subscales in a school year marked by the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may have influenced the way and degree of collaboration between families and teachers, so it would be interesting to re-apply this questionnaire when the situation has been reversed, and to analyse possible variations.

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