

Integración Familia–Escuela En La Educación Inicial Pública Colombiana Y Su Relación Con Barreras Estructurales Y Oportunidades Institucionales

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ABSTRACT. Introduction: Family–school partnership in early childhood education has consistently been linked to children's academic achievement and social-emotional development. However, in public educational settings characterized by socioeconomic vulnerability, there is often a discrepancy

between caregivers' stated willingness to participate and their actual involvement in school activities, suggesting the presence of structural and organizational barriers.
Objective: To describe family–school integration in Colombian public early childhood education and to examine its association with structural barriers and institutional opportunities in a public school setting.
Method: A quantitative study with a descriptive scope and cross-sectional design was conducted, grounded in the positivist paradigm. The sample consisted of 50 caregivers and 6 teachers from Transition Grades A and B at a public institution in Sincelejo, Colombia. Structured questionnaires validated by expert judgment were administered. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distributions and percentages, to characterize patterns of participation and perceived barriers.
Results: The findings indicate that 96% of caregivers expressed a willingness to increase their participation under flexible institutional arrangements. However, 56% reported work-related constraints and 52% identified financial constraints as barriers, while 60% cited inflexible school hours as an institutional obstacle. The results suggest that effective involvement is determined by the interaction between socioeconomic conditions and school organizational structures, rather than by purely attitudinal factors.
Conclusions: Family–school integration in public early childhood education is conditioned by structural and institutional variables. Organizational flexibility emerges as a strategic determinant for strengthening shared educational responsibility and promoting sustained caregiver participation.

INTRODUCTION

Through the influence of the family and guidance from the school, early childhood education closely links children's academic development with their social-emotional growth, making it one of the most important factors. Related research (López and Vesga, 2009; Valencia, Changoluisa, Castro, and Quinga, 2024) indicates that the active participation of parents and caregivers in educational activities can improve children's early academic performance, adaptability, and social-emotional development. In addition, other studies (Salinas, Silva, Cambón, & Fraga, 2017; Aboyte, 2025; Ramírez, 2025; Garcés & Canelón, 2025) also show that family-school integration depends not only on individual willingness but also, and more importantly, on structural factors and institutional models for participation strategies.

This is particularly evident in the context of Latin American public education, where the gap between families' stated willingness to get involved and their actual participation is a phenomenon widely documented in the specialized literature. Various studies have pointed out that socioeconomic

precariousness, job instability, and domestic overload act as structural constraints that limit the realization of parental involvement, even when there is explicit recognition of its educational importance (Gómez-Navas & Marín-Rivas, 2023; Ovalle-Parra & Amador-Baquiro, 2023). From the perspective of educational inequality, school participation cannot be analyzed as an exclusively attitudinal variable, but rather as a practice mediated by the differential availability of socioeconomic and cultural capital, which expands or limits the actual opportunities for family–school interaction (Lareau, 2011). Within this framework, the coexistence of a high symbolic value placed on participation and a low actual frequency of involvement creates a structural tension that transcends individual will and is embedded in organizational and institutional dynamics that indirectly reproduce inequalities in access to shared educational responsibility.

Based on this in-depth exploration of the Colombian context, it is clear that cooperation between families and schools has been explicitly promoted by national education policy, particularly in the guidelines for early childhood education and the strengthening of shared educational responsibility (Ministry of National Education [MEN], 2014, 2017). However, the academic literature shows that, despite the consolidation of a robust regulatory framework, there remains a limited body of empirical research that systematically examines the concrete implementation of these guidelines in public institutions, especially at the early childhood education level.

Most of the available studies focus on normative analyses or general impact assessments, without delving into the microstructural dynamics that mediate the relationship between stated willingness and actual participation. From a theoretical perspective, parental involvement does not depend solely on formal institutional frameworks, but on organizational and psychosocial mechanisms that shape the actual opportunities for family–school interaction (Epstein, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Consequently, the gap between educational policy and institutional practice suggests a need for studies that analyze the internal processes and organizational conditions that translate policy into sustained participation.

A structural approach to cooperation between families and schools requires moving beyond reductionist interpretations focused on so-called “parental indifference” and recognizing that educational involvement is shaped by economic, organizational, and institutional factors that limit actual opportunities for participation. The literature on educational inequality has shown that participation practices do not depend exclusively on individual motivation, but rather on the differential availability of socioeconomic and cultural capital, as well as on the relational architecture promoted by school institutions (Coleman, 1988; Lareau, 2011).

From this perspective, schools not only encourage participation but also shape the conditions under which it becomes feasible or restricted (Epstein, 2011). Consequently, a structural analysis of the phenomenon allows for the design of more flexible, context-specific, and technically sound organizational strategies aimed at strengthening sustainable mechanisms of shared educational responsibility and reducing participation gaps associated with social vulnerability (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Based on the foregoing, it can be argued that family–school integration in early childhood education is conceived as a relational and organizational process through which educational institutions and caregivers establish systematic mechanisms of shared responsibility aimed at children's academic and socio-emotional development. This process is not limited to participation in school activities but involves the establishment of effective channels of communication, pedagogical guidance, and sustained participation in educational activities. In the context of Latin American public education, such integration is shaped by socioeconomic conditions and organizational structures that can either facilitate or hinder its effective implementation.

Based on an analysis of educational practices at a public institution in Sincelejo, Colombia, this study examines the involvement of mothers, fathers, and caregivers in the early childhood education process from the perspective of both caregivers and teachers. This approach helps identify the main structural and institutional barriers that contribute to the gap between willingness to participate and actual participation, as well as organizational opportunities that could be strengthened.

In this context, the objective of this study is to describe family–school collaboration in Colombia's public early childhood education system and to analyze its association with structural barriers and institutional opportunities within a specific school setting.

METHOD

This study is grounded in positivism as its basic paradigm, employing quantitative descriptions of phenomena and comparisons across cross-sectional populations. Through comprehensive descriptive research on specific educational institutions, it avoids the uncertainties arising from human factors while deepening our understanding of the frequency with which family members are integrated into the educational system and the resulting perceptual patterns.

Similarly, through a structural analysis of the socioeconomic capital of family members, this was categorized into three dimensions: first, the economic capital of family members; second, the limitations of their social structure and

institutions; and third, the trends in effectiveness determined by the flexibility of their organizations. A school in Sincelejo is the primary focus of the study. To this end, surveys were conducted with 106 individuals, including the parents or primary guardians of 50 students in grades A and B, as well as six early childhood education teachers at the institution.

Through an in-depth sociodemographic analysis of caregivers, a scientific understanding of teachers' perceptions, and a comprehensive understanding of caregivers' comprehension of various factors involved, three specific structured questionnaires were administered: a sociodemographic questionnaire for caregivers, a questionnaire on teachers' perceptions, and a questionnaire on caregivers' comprehension of various factors involved.

The sociodemographic questionnaire for caregivers primarily included their age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and household income. The questionnaire on teachers' perceptions primarily used Likert-scale response questions to better understand teachers' views on family involvement, barriers to the adopted system, and factors related to training. The questionnaire on caregivers' understanding of various factors included their views on family integration, an analysis of the main structural barriers involved, and their willingness to participate in flexible organizational arrangements.

The instruments were administered in person on the educational institution's premises, following institutional authorization and the signing of informed consent forms by the participants. The participants completed the forms individually and voluntarily at a single point in time, during the second semester of the academic year. The collected data were organized into electronic matrices and processed using statistical software (SPSS and Excel) to then perform descriptive analyses of absolute and relative frequency (percentages) within each of the variables studied in order to reorganize them into the three structural dimensions defined for the interpretive analysis.

It should be noted that the research received institutional endorsement from the public institution in Sincelejo, ensuring the confidentiality of the information, the anonymity of the participants, and the exclusive use of the data for academic and scientific purposes, in accordance with the ethical principles of social science research.

RESULTS

By understanding the three relevant analytical dimensions—that is, by incorporating the family's socioeconomic capital and structural and institutional barriers into the analysis of their preparatory work—it is possible to better address their needs, mobilize their organizational

flexibility, and achieve the goal of leveraging their relative initiative while imposing relative constraints. Building on the family's socioeconomic capital, the sociodemographic characteristics of the PCPs (Consumer-Child Producers) provide deep structural insights for understanding their participation dynamics. The relatively mature group, represented by young adults in their early 30s, is very different from young people in their early 20s. It is evident that a considerable portion of the PCPs have formed long-term cohabiting relationships, and only a few are true "couples" or "parents." It is also evident that the highest level of education for most PCPs remains at the primary level, which coincides with their earning a minimum wage or even less through family employment (see Table 1).

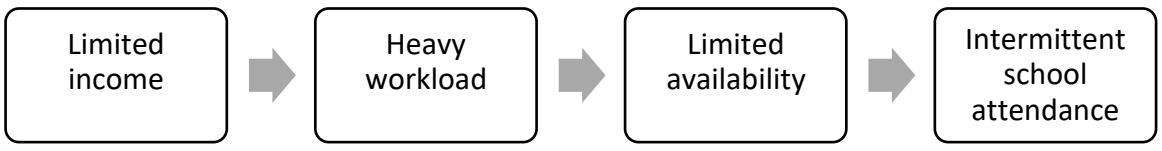
Table 1Sociodemographic characteristics of caregivers (n=50)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–25 years old	15	30%
	26–35 years old	22	44%
	Over 35 years old	13	26%
Marital status	Living with a partner	28	56%
	Married	14	28%
	Single	8	16%
Income	1 SMMLV	36	72%
	>1 SMMLV	14	28%

Note: Prepared by the author.

This shows that, in families with relatively stable finances and heavy workloads, it is difficult for each member to devote all their energy to their children's education, resulting in a lack of attention to the children's upbringing. These factors—such as long fixed workdays, the possibility of unemployment, and excessive flexibility in time management—can become significant weaknesses for the economy, which can significantly affect it. The main points of this section are illustrated in the diagram. The above is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Socioeconomic capital as a determinant of participation



Note: Prepared by the author.

Thus, various structural and institutional barriers can give rise to two diametrically opposed perspectives, creating a contradiction. From an educator's perspective, family involvement not only benefits children's academic success but also their overall growth and development. However, the greatest obstacle is considered to be a lack of understanding regarding the time that parents and their children spend away from home. Communication channels between schools and families have long suffered from various forms of inefficiency or disruption. In addition, there are also various cultural and environmental conflicts, all of which become significant obstacles to school-family integration (see Table 2).

Table 2 Structural and Institutional Barriers Identified By Teachers

Identified barriers	N	%
Lack of family time	5	83.3%
Limited school–home communication	4	66.7%
Cultural/contextual differences	4	66.7%
Perceived lack of commitment	2	33.3%

Note: Prepared by the author.

By challenging subjective perceptions of family integration and shifting the focus to factors outside of institutions—such as resource allocation and social and cultural dynamics—people tend to view the trend toward family integration more objectively rather than attributing it solely to institutional factors.

However, they often use the excuse of "time constraints" to force themselves into a state of "inaction," creating a clear contradiction between their intentions and reality. Their heavy work and family responsibilities, as well as financial constraints, make it difficult for them to participate consistently. It is concerning that they also provide relatively little guidance on how to continue learning at home (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3 Barriers reported by caregivers (n=50)

Reported barrier	N	%
Work/responsibilities	28	56%
Financial constraints	26	52%
Lack of pedagogical guidance	26	52%
Inflexible schedules	30	60%

Note: Prepared by the author.

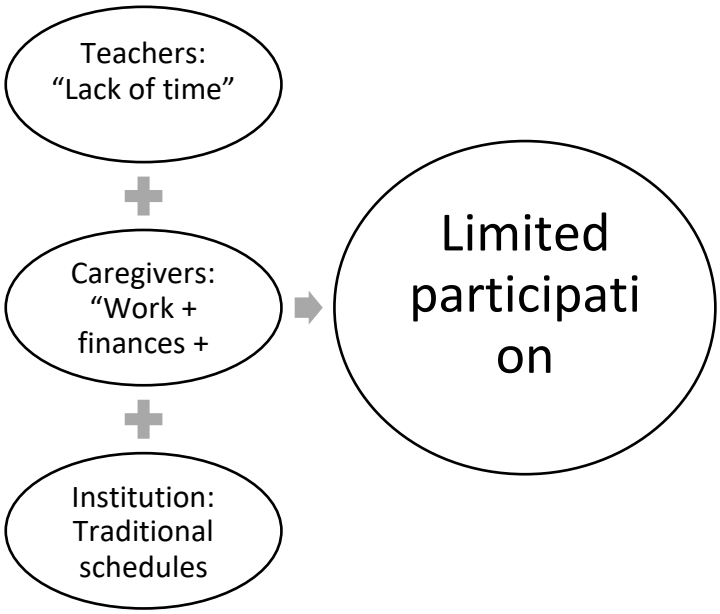
It is clear that what they are facing is not simply a matter of "falling behind," but rather a series of structural problems and a lack of adequate educational guidance. Unfortunately, there is a gap in understanding between teachers and parents regarding the integration of home and school. Regrettably, due to various constraints—such as heavy workloads, financial limitations, and the need for sufficient educational guidance for home learning—parents'

enthusiasm is relatively low. At the same time, their own time constraints also lead to relatively low teacher involvement in their children's home education.

It is therefore clear that structural problems in child development are not entirely determined by the temporal constraints of their era, but rather by the interaction between the social structure and the institutions within that society. This profoundly impacts the actual course of their family's actions, revealing an explanatory factor that significantly influences the effectiveness of social development strategies, as summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and parents' perceptions



Note: Prepared by the author.

The central theme of this study can be summarized broadly in the second section. Regardless of the conditions for participation, all factors have a profound impact on whether future social development initiatives for caregivers are willing to offer flexible schedules or adapt to their time constraints. Therefore, social cohesion does not stem from social neutrality, but rather from the absence of an organizational role in social development strategies, which allows for their relative deepening and development. This, in turn, significantly promotes social cohesion. Further deepening and development depend on effective institutional adjustments to address this problem, such as the elimination of unnecessary and harmful friction between family schedules and school schedules. (See Table 4).

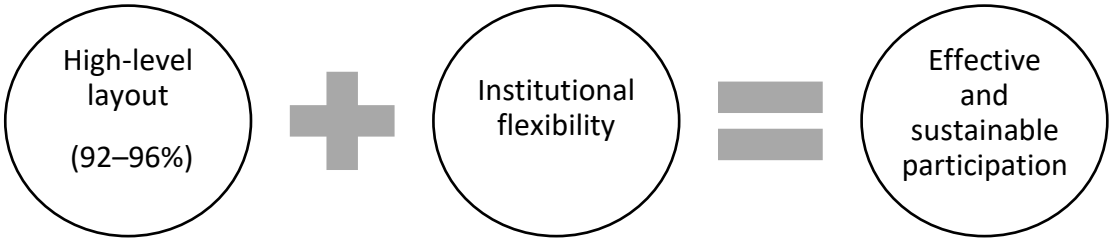
Table 4 Future Attitudes Toward Organizational Flexibility (n=50)

Scenario	N	%
I would participate more with flexible hours	48	96%
I would participate just as much	2	4%
I would not participate more	0	0%

Note: Prepared by the author.

In contrast to these findings, the current PCB report reveals a thought-provoking phenomenon: while public enthusiasm for integration persists, its ultimate implementation depends on the suitability of the institutional organizational models adopted. Not only are most people satisfied with flexible systems, but this satisfaction also clearly demonstrates that the structure of the system plays a moderating role in the level of positive social participation. Consequently, the stated commitment presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen shared educational responsibility through structural adjustments to school engagement mechanisms. This is illustrated in the following figure

Figure 3 Conditional participation model



Note: Prepared by the author.

Therefore, adjusting the allocation of educational responsibility through structural changes offers us a wide range of strategic opportunities for talent development. This is evident in the accompanying chart. From a structural perspective, compared to other regulatory measures, family-school integration has a more multidimensional regulatory effect, and its ultimate realization depends on the interaction of various factors, such as socioeconomic capital, institutional mediation, and families' intrinsic willingness. While nearly 90% of respondents expressed a willingness to participate, this does not necessarily mean they will actually participate due to inherent structural constraints, such as income, employment, and family responsibilities. It is evident that economic difficulties (most people barely make ends meet with incomes that barely cover the minimum wage), labor difficulties (a staggering 56% of businesses felt enormous pressure to create jobs), and a sense of organizational rigidity (60% of businesses expressed

dissatisfaction with their current rigid organizational structures) coexist. Therefore, the decline of small businesses is no longer due solely to a lack of motivation, but rather to a misalignment between families' material conditions and the traditional design of institutional engagement strategies.

It is clear that family integration is constrained by an educational system that is relatively well-developed but also highly flexible in institutional terms. This shifts the focus of our analysis from an understanding of individual responsibility to a comprehensive understanding of the school's organizational structure.

DISCUSSION

Various studies have interpreted consistently low family involvement as a result of a supposed lack of motivation or a neutral attitude on the part of caregivers. However, empirical evidence suggests that parental involvement cannot be explained solely by attitudinal variables but rather responds to a set of structural factors that shape actual opportunities for participation (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). In the present study, even though 96% of caregivers expressed a potential willingness to participate, their actual participation was mediated by economic, work-related, and institutional constraints, confirming that "participation" is not merely an individual decision but a situated social practice.

From an ecological perspective, family–school integration can be understood as the result of dynamic interactions between interrelated systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interaction between the family microsystem (marked by limited income and heavy workloads) and the school mesosystem (characterized by rigid schedules and traditional engagement strategies) creates conditions that can hinder effective participation. In this sense, subjective will cannot override the structural environment, as it requires organizational mediations to transform that disposition into viable social action.

These findings are consistent with recent Latin American studies that demonstrate how economic instability and job insecurity affect the frequency of educational participation, particularly in public settings (UNICEF, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; Solís, 2024). The tension between pressures for economic survival and shared responsibility for education constitutes an expression of structural inequality that reshapes family priorities, as documented in the literature on socioeconomic and cultural capital (Lareau, 2011).

In this context, organizational flexibility emerges as a key moderating variable. The evidence from this study (in which 91% of caregivers expressed

greater willingness under flexible arrangements) supports the view that parental involvement depends largely on the type of structured opportunities the institution offers (Epstein, 1995, 2011). When institutional frameworks do not take into account the actual conditions of families, shared educational responsibility loses its operational viability.

Furthermore, the high concentration of caregivers with incomes equivalent to the minimum wage highlights a critical link in the unequal access to educational social capital (Coleman, 1988). Faced with economic constraints, families prioritize immediate subsistence needs, which can result in a temporary reduction in school attendance. This dynamic should not be interpreted as a lack of interest, but rather as a rational reordering of priorities under structural pressure.

In addition to the points mentioned above, the low level of guidance reported by nearly half of the caregivers underscores the need to strengthen the teacher's mediating role. The literature has shown that schools that act as active mediators, offering clear strategies adapted to the context, achieve higher levels of sustainable engagement (Epstein, 2011). Consequently, family–school integration should not be conceived as a mere call for participation, but rather as an organizational construct based on shared interests and contextualized institutional design.

Given the above, the main contribution of this study lies in shifting the explanatory focus from individual parental responsibility toward a structural and institutional understanding of family integration. While much of the research in early childhood education emphasizes involvement as a predictor of academic performance, the results suggest that effective participation depends critically on (a) socioeconomic conditions, (b) institutional organizational design, and (c) contextualized pedagogical mediation strategies. This analytical shift is particularly relevant for the formulation of school policies in Latin American public contexts, where institutional flexibility can serve as a strategy for educational equity.

CONCLUSIONS

By shifting the focus of our analysis from the mother's individual responsibility to the deeper structural and institutional levels of the family, our research takes on a broader perspective and deeper significance. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of family involvement in children's academic performance, the empirical results of this study show that effective family integration depends primarily on the combined effects of multiple factors, such as the child's socioeconomic status, the organizational design of the education system, and proficiency in specific teaching strategies.

By combining this shift in educational analysis with the unique context of public education in the United States, we gain a deeper understanding of its important implications for educational policy-making, highlighting in particular how institutional flexibility offers a viable pathway to achieving educational equity. Through an in-depth analysis of early childhood education, a crucial link in the educational process, we can easily see that family-school integration in early childhood education—constituted by the combination of family initiative and school proactivity—is not merely a change in attitude, but a deeply structural phenomenon that can be shaped by the organization of education. Despite people's strong desire to integrate into the family, it remains difficult to do so effectively due to the economic conditions of society, excessive workloads, and institutional constraints. Therefore, this distressing phenomenon of family decline is not solely due to maternal indifference, but primarily to the mismatch between family economic development and traditional marital strategies.

Only organizational flexibility can determine whether potential intentions actually translate into effective participation. Therefore, from an educational policy perspective, structural adjustments are needed to the shared responsibilities of families and schools, such as curricular flexibility, the establishment of diversified communication channels, and corresponding mediation strategies based on families' socioeconomic capital. Through these subtle adjustments to the system, we can shift the focus of education away from traditional, singular institutions and organically integrate it into the family's material environment, thereby playing an important role in strengthening early childhood education.

However, it must be acknowledged that this study also has certain limitations, and the interpretation of its results should be considered accordingly. (a) Through a descriptive cross-sectional study, one can only identify a phenomenon, but it is difficult to accurately explain its origins and causal relationship with other factors. Based on this, it is redefined as: a deeper exploration and further development of the existing basic understanding. Although the research focuses on a single public educational institution, this limitation meant that the results were not representative of phenomena in other public educational institutions. (b) Relying on self-reported experiences can easily introduce significant information bias into the data. (c) With continuous technological advances, life is undergoing unprecedented changes and evolving trends every day, such as the rapid development of artificial intelligence. By comparing the "black box" of unincorporated indicators of children's academic performance, one can better appreciate the gap and the invaluable value of the education received.

Although the results supported the above observations, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the research. First, given the study's descriptive and cross-sectional design, the analysis allows us to identify patterns of participation and associated structural factors, but it does not enable us to establish causal relationships or precisely determine the origin of these dynamics. Consequently, the results contribute to deepening the descriptive understanding of family–school integration, rather than to formulating explanatory or predictive models.

Second, the research was conducted at a single public institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. While the study offers valuable insights into the organizational and institutional dynamics observed, extending these patterns to other public institutions requires comparative studies and multicenter designs that broaden the empirical scope.

Third, the data were based on self-reported perceptions by caregivers and teachers. While this approach is useful for understanding subjective interpretations of participation and barriers, it may introduce information biases or social desirability effects. Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs, larger samples, and additional variables related to academic performance or educational trajectories, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the structural mechanisms that influence family–school integration.

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