

PARENT EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION
REGARDING COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

By

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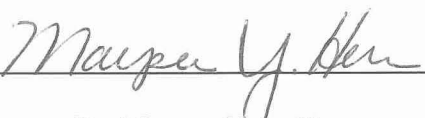
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Abstract

International adoption is life changing for those involved, but it can also be emotionally, mentally, and financially demanding. International adoption is a process that requires a tremendous amount of education. Children who are adopted from other countries face language acquisition challenges that are unlike any others. Children adopted at very young ages, are exposed to their native language and then experience an abrupt period of language termination at the time of adoption. The child is then placed in an environment where he or she must begin to acquire a second first language (Glennen, 2002), even though the child never developed mastery of their first language. Children who are adopted at older ages face further language challenges because they must become proficient with a new language while losing proficiency in their first, all while preparing for school. Internationally adopted children also face emotional and cultural adjustments when arriving in a new country with a new family. There are a significant amount of variables that can play a role in the success of acquiring a new language, and only by educating prospective parents will this process become easier. This project is a mixed methods study with responses from electronic surveys, and qualitative phone interviews investigating the education parents receive prior to and post international adoption regarding communication development. The research study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Findings from this study demonstrated the high importance of education regarding communication development prior to and post international adoption. The results of this study showed the lack of communication development education throughout the international adoption process. Further research is needed to identify specific topics within communication development that are most beneficial to international adoptions.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	4
Chapter II: Literature Review	5
Chapter III: Method	12
Participants: International Adoption Agencies.....	13
Participants: Parents of Internationally Adopted Children	14
Materials	15
Procedures	16
Chapter IV: Results.....	16
Adoption Agencies Survey.....	16
Adoptive Parents Survey	17
Adoptive Parents Phone Interview	20
Chapter V: Discussion	20
International Adoptive Parents are Highly Motivated	22
Adoptive Education Does Matter	23
Study Limitations	24
Chapter VI: Implications for Further Research	25
References.....	27
Appendix A.....	30
Appendix B	32
Appendix C.....	35
Appendix D.....	36

Parent Education in International Adoption Regarding Communication Development

International adoption brings together thousands of families every year. Since 1999, there have been over 249,000 children adopted from foreign countries by individuals and couples in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2013). International adoption, also known as intercountry adoption, unites children in need with loving families. Though this process brings families together, it can be overwhelming, stressful, and a very lengthy process. The education needed to navigate the adoption process in itself is enormous, but the education required to adequately care for the child post-adoption is an additional challenge faced by thousands of families each year.

For the past two decades, speech and language development in internationally adopted children has been an area of focus of many researchers. Wilson (2008) and Ladage (2008) reported that children who are internationally adopted are at a higher risk for social-emotional problems. Once these children are adopted, speech and language development may also be disrupted. Due to heightened risk factors, communication development in internationally adopted infants, toddlers, and older children has been closely examined (Ladage 2008; Wilson, 2009; Hwa-Froelich, 2009; Glennen, 2007; Glennen, 2009).

The past two decades of research has brought forth substantial evidence, along with many more questions, regarding the speech and language development of internationally adopted children. It is crucial that new parents of these internationally adopted children understand their child may be at-risk for speech and language delays and/or disorders, along with the developmental milestones that these parents should be monitoring post-adoption. Whether or not the information that is known about the speech and language development in internationally adopted children is being shared with parents prior and post-adoption is unknown. It is crucial

that prior to adoption new parents are provided with education regarding key topics, such as speech and language development, as well as having additional resources at hand if needed post-adoption. This study was designed to determine what information, if any, prospective parents are being educated with, prior to and after international adoption, regarding communication development (e.g. speech, language, attachment style, play skills).

Chapter II: Literature Review

The international adoption process can appear to be very overwhelming to a prospective parent or couple. International adoption is costly, ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000 per child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). It is also very time consuming, and a lengthy process; generally taking one to four years to complete (U.S. Department of State, 2013). The international adoption process varies in multiple aspects, but is always governed by the laws of the countries where the prospective parent/s and the child reside. In addition, in the United States, the adoption must not only abide by the federal government's laws, but also by the state's laws where the prospective parents reside (U.S. Department of State, 2013). Educating prospective parents on these laws and policies is only the first step in entering the lengthy international adoption process.

Once prospective parents have decided they wish to pursue international adoption, the first decision that must be made is to select an adoption service provider. If adopting into the United States, there are two routes that a parent can take in order to internationally adopt: a Convention adoption or a non-Convention adoption (U.S. Department of State, 2013). A Convention adoption follows the standards of practice put into place by The Hague Adoption Convention, which the United States began enforcing in 2008. According to the U.S. Department of State (2013), the Convention adoption process includes additional protections and

requirements compared to a non-Convention adoption. These additional requirements are to protect all of the individuals involved in the adoption process, as well as to facilitate communication with all parties involved. There are 90 countries worldwide who have joined The Hague Convention treaty, and in order to be considered a Convention adoption, the adoption agency must be accredited to conduct the intercountry adoption (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

In addition to requiring an accredited adoption agency, under Convention adoptions, adoptive parents are required to participate in ten hours (twelve hours if adopting from China) of pre-adoptive training and education courses (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). With non-Convention adoptions, there is no law requiring parental education. This decision is left up to each individual adoption agency. There may be additional training requirements in Convention adoptions in addition to the minimum ten hours, but this is determined by state law as well as the individual agency's preferences. These ten hours of education and training that are required in Convention adoptions, assist adoptive parents in preparing for what will be a life changing event for all of those involved. Hague Training Online (2014) provides adoptive parents with online educational courses to assist in preparing for the adoption. The courses available through Hague Training Online (2014) have been developed to highlight important issues surrounding international adoption. Some of the online classes offered include, *Health and Development of Orphaned Children*, *Promoting Healthy Attachments*, *the Waiting Child*, and other classes specifically designed around the adoptive country of origin (Hague Training Online, 2014). While these courses highlight important issues associated with international adoption, there are no clear guidelines as to what courses prospective parents must take. Prospective parents are required to complete ten hours of education, but these parents are free to

choose what courses fulfill those ten hours, or in some cases, follow their individual adoption agency's policies. Therefore, prospective parents may not be receiving all of the education needed prior to adoption, especially regarding communication development. Other agencies may provide basic parenting classes to assist in preparing parents, or send prospective parents to a local hospital for a parenting class. However, what is often lacking in these courses, is information regarding communication development for the internationally adopted child.

An educational course regarding attachment styles can provide important information for adoptive parents. As described by Wilson (2009), the majority of research in attachment development with internationally adopted children, is from studying children adopted from China or Eastern European nations; where most of these children have been cared for in high-risk orphanages. The current research indicated that attachment development patterns are related to the experience of orphanage care, as well as the child's age at the time of adoption (Wilson, 2009). Wilson (2009) reported that for most internationally adopted children coming into the United States, adjustment was successful, but early recognition of any deprivation experienced by the child is important for building a strong relationship. Prospective parents need to be educated regarding attachment style and how it is developed, especially if the child being adopted has experienced any degree of deprivation while in his or her home country.

Attachment between a child and his or her adoptive parents is crucial to forming a family. Attachment variations were first categorized by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). The researchers found variations in patterns of attachment that reflected the history of interactions between the parent and the child. At the most basic level, children develop attachment styles that are secure or insecure. A child who has a secure attachment style finds comfort in the parent or caregiver being present, and when an unfamiliar person enters the

child's environment, the child will look to the parent in order to confirm that the environment is safe (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). This attachment style is built from love, attention, mutual trust, and continuous interaction between the child and the caregiver. Children can also develop an insecure attachment style. This style of attachment lacks the consistent comfort of the parent or caregiver, and the child does not feel secure about their safety even if the parent is present in the environment (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Children who are securely attached feel more comfort and security, and are also more likely to explore their surrounding environment (Wilson, 2009). Attachment style formation is not solely based on the child, but by both the child and the adult's behavior (Wilson, 2009).

Attachment style formation and international adoption has been researched, mostly studying children who are from China, or nations from Eastern Europe, such as Romania. Most of the adopted children from these countries are raised in orphanages. Groark, Muhamedrahimov, Palmov, Nikiforova, and McCall (2005) noted that these children raised in orphanages often have frequent caregiver changes while growing up, experience high child-to-caregiver ratios, are exposed to very minimal verbal interactions and have low emotional investment with the caregiver. Tirelle, Chan, Cermak, Litvinova, Salas, and Miller (2008) found that children in a Russian orphanage spent about 50% of their time alone, with no interaction from a caregiver. This lack of interaction and lack of language stimulation can have a significant impact on a child's attachment formation. Children who lack prior positive relationships with a parent or caregiver are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that reject or avoid the new parent (Wilson, 2009). This can cause a significant problem when an internationally adopted child is placed into a new family. Without positive prior relationships, the child may dismiss the adult's effort to form an attachment between the two. This dismissal is due to the child's learned

expectation that adults do not provide comfort or safety (Wilson, 2009). Understanding the impact of the child's past experiences with caregivers is key to attachment formation with internationally adopted children.

Language development is another key area where prospective parents of internationally adopted children need to be educated, because children who are internationally adopted acquire language differently than the typical child. As described by Hwa-Froelich (2009), internationally adopted children face challenges in acquiring language because the child is forced to learn a new language when the first language may never have been firmly established. Soon after adoption, these children stop responding to his or her native language and eventually begin to respond to the language present in the new environment (Hwa-Froelich, 2009). There are many factors that can influence how successful the language acquisition process is for the internationally adopted child, but a key to predicting later language development is to understand prelinguistic and early linguistic behaviors. No information was found in regard to prelinguistic and early linguistic behaviors when reviewing literature regarding the pre-adoption education available to prospective adoptive parents.

Speech and language development for the internationally adopted child is unique. For example, children who are raised bilingually are exposed to two languages fairly equally, and can use the knowledge he or she has in one language to help learn the second language (Hwa-Froelich, 2009). However, this is not the case for the majority of internationally adopted children. This is due to the fact internationally adopted children are most often not adopted by a family who speaks his or her native language. Therefore, they are forced to acquire a second language. For children who are internationally adopted at a very young age, their native language is never completely established prior to learning a second language (Hwa-Froelich, 2009).

Though these children typically experience a year or more of exposure to their native language, they do not gain mastery of their native language. Therefore, these children must learn a second first language (Glennen, 2002). When learning this second first language, they are essentially starting from a foundational level once again. Glennen (2002) described an abrupt termination of language exposure when these children are adopted, and that they begin to learn a second language prior to the first one being firmly established. The effects of this abrupt language termination is not yet completely understood, although, Roberts, Pollock, Krakow, Fulmer, and Wang (2005) discussed this issue and indicated that some internationally adopted children lose their native language within a matter of months, and begin to acquire their new first language. More research is needed to understand this period of language disruption and how internationally adopted children acquire this second first language. Though there are still unanswered questions, a child adopted at a younger age can be expected to learn the new language relatively quickly, since there is less to learn (Glennen, 2009). Educating prospective parents about this period of language description is crucial to the international adoption process and to ensure success post-adoption.

Children who are internationally adopted at older ages also experience unique speech and language development. Glennen (2009) discussed that these children face significant challenges learning a new language after adoption. Unlike bilingual children, who grow and develop with input from two languages, most internationally adopted children do not have any exposure to their first language once adopted. Developing mastery in a first language does make second language learning easier. Therefore, internationally adopted children may not have a native language to support their second language learning, which creates issues that significantly impact a child's speech and language development. Prospective parents of internationally adopted

children must understand that successful academic learning may be impacted for these children, because schooling often begins for these children prior to gaining proficiency in the new language. These children lose proficiency in their birth language, but do not have proficiency in their adopted language, thus creating a challenge that makes schooling very difficult (Glennen, 2009). There can also be significant differences in the language used in the home compared to the school setting. For example, there are many academic related vocabulary words that parents may never use in the home environment (e.g., atlas, geography, and protractor). In addition, the language that is expected of children in the school setting may be more literate and complex (e.g., complex syntax) than what is used in the home. Parents of internationally adopted children need to be educated on these speech and language guidelines in order to prepare for potential schooling difficulties if the child is older at the time of adoption.

Education is necessary throughout the international adoption process. The process is life changing for those involved and can be demanding in many ways (i.e., emotionally, mentally, and financially). In a study completed by Smit (2010), parents of internationally adopted children were found to be experiencing two stressors simultaneously: the stress of parenthood, either first time parents or adding another child into the family, and the stress specifically related to international adoption. Many of the parents in Smit's study (2010) indicated the process was not easy and there was a lack of information; the study compared the situation to a lobster being thrown into a boiling pot. The parents involved in the study (Smit, 2010) also believed that their families had unique health care needs that were not addressed by healthcare providers. Parents in the study wanted healthcare providers to be more knowledgeable about screening the adopted child for infections and delays, especially because many internationally adopted children come to the United States with a very limited medical history (Smit, 2010). Parents and healthcare

professionals use whatever information that is provided regarding the child's medical history, but in order to be proactive, there must be education provided about screening and overall developmental milestones.

Education as a whole was a theme that continuously emerged throughout the review of literature regarding international adoption. Although, through Convention adoptions, parents are required to receive ten hours of pre-adoptive training and education, education specifically regarding communication development appears to be absent. Children who are internationally adopted face language acquisition challenges that are unlike any others. There are a significant number of variables that can play a role in the success of acquiring a new language, and the education of prospective adoptive parents may make this process easier. Educating parents about the heightened risks internationally adopted children face is key to being proactive in fostering successful communication development, and an overall prosperous life.

The purpose of this study was to determine what education, if any, parents of internationally adopted children are receiving prior to and post-adoption regarding communication development (i.e. speech, language, attachment style, play skills). The questions regarding pre and post-adoption education were asked not only to parents of internationally adopted children, but to international adoption agencies as well.

Chapter III: Method

This study used a mixed methods approach using results from surveys and interviews. Information was gathered using two internet surveys, along with qualitative interviews in the form of semi-structured telephone interviews. These techniques were used in order to obtain information about the type, quality, quantity, and satisfaction rating of education provided to prospective parents of internationally adopted children, prior to and post-adoption, in regard to

communication development (i.e., speech, language, attachment style, play skills). All of the procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Participants: International Adoption Agencies

An international adoption service provider search was conducted using the Bureau of Consular Affairs and U.S. Department of State Intercountry Adoption website (2015). At that time, a total of 193 adoption agencies were listed as having current accreditation in the United States under the Hague Convention. An attempt to contact all 193 service providers through electronic correspondence was made; however, due to issues such as, invalid or unlisted email addresses, only 181 services providers were contacted. The correspondence included a brief description of the researcher and the purpose of the study, along with an electronic link to the adoption agency survey. Once the electronic link was activated, a consent to participate form was provided to the agency. After an individual from the agency provided consent to participate in the study, a total of ten questions regarding the education that is provided to their adoptive parents prior to and post-adoption (see Appendix A) were asked. The agencies were required to be accredited or approved by the Council of Accreditation, and be able to provide adoption services for Hague Convention adoption cases at the time they were completing the survey. If an agency indicated they were not accredited or could not provide adoption services under the Hague Convention, the remainder of the survey questions were terminated. Forty-nine agencies completed the survey in its entirety; however, up to 58 agencies answered at least one question. The number of respondents in each question are noted in the results section.

Participants: Parents of Internationally Adopted Children

In order to solicit parents of internationally adopted children, an electronic correspondence was sent to the same 181 adoption agencies, which were previously mentioned. The correspondence inquired about whether or not the agency would be willing to forward the correspondence requesting participation in the study to the parents involved with their agency. It was unknown to the researcher whether agencies possessed email distribution lists of parents, and if so, whether soliciting for participation in a research study was appropriate under the agencies standards. Two weeks after the original electronic correspondence was sent, a second message was sent as a reminder to the agencies of the request. Approximately one month after the original correspondence, there had been minimal participation in the study (less than five parent participants). In order to solicit additional parent participants, internet adoption forums were sought. Two, public internet adoption forums (adoptivefamiliescircle.com & adoption.com) were selected, and a correspondence was posted within ten discussion threads between the two forums. The correspondence was posted in adoptivefamiliescircle.com, under the subheadings of China, Russia, Guatemala, and Ethiopia, along with adoption.com forums, under the subheadings of Eastern Europe general support, Asian adoption, Pacific Island general support, international success stories, and Hague compliance and training. Again, this correspondence included a brief description of the researcher and the purpose of the study, along with an electronic link to the adoptive parent survey. Once the electronic link was activated, a consent to participate form was provided to the parent completing the survey. After providing consent to participate in the study, the parents were asked a total of twenty-three questions regarding their international adoption process, and the education that was provided to them prior to and post-adoption (see Appendix B). All parents completing the survey were required to have adopted a child internationally

under the Hague Convention adoption policies, and at the time the parent was completing the survey, the adoption process must have been complete. If a parent indicated that their adoption did not follow Hague Convention policies, or their adoption was not complete at the time of the survey, the remainder of the survey questions were terminated. Fifteen parents completed the survey in its entirety.

The final question on the parent survey asked the parent if he or she would be interested in participating in an optional phone interview, lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The parent was informed that the interview would include questions regarding the education received prior to and post-adoption, as well as their child's speech and language development. Seven individuals provided his or her contact information in order to participate in the phone interview. After attempts to contact all seven individuals, the researcher scheduled interviews with three parents. The researcher made multiple attempts to schedule an interview with the other four parents over a three month period; however, the parents did not respond to correspondences and/or were not available at the scheduled interview time. Each of the three phone interviews that were conducted, were semi-structured and consisted of approximately seven questions (see Appendix C).

Materials

The electronic adoption agency and parent surveys were created using the internet based program Select Survey. The Select Survey program allowed the researcher to design the surveys, deploy the surveys, and analyze the results. The researcher also used a Marantz PMD620 digital recorder in order to record the phone interviews for later transcription.

Procedures

After the electronic correspondences were sent, the surveys were open for approximately three months, in order to allow sufficient time for adoption agencies and parents to complete the surveys. There was no time limit placed on survey completion. Once the surveys were closed to participation, the researcher used the internet based Survey Net program to analyze the results. Electronic correspondences were sent to each parent who offered his or her contact information on the survey to participate in a phone interview. The researcher phoned the parent at the previously scheduled date and time, and followed a semi-structured interview format. The phone interviews lasted approximately between 12 and 30 minutes and were recorded using a Marantz PMD620 digital recorder. The phone interviews were later transcribed verbatim and analyzed for common themes.

Chapter IV: Results

Adoption Agencies Survey

Forty-nine agencies completed the survey in its entirety; however, up to 58 agencies answered at least one question. International adoption agencies were questioned in regard to the modality in which they provide education to prospective adoptive parents prior to the adoption. Overwhelmingly, online training courses were used to provide education to parents, with in-person education at the agency being another favored option. Refer to Table D1 for a more detailed description of education modalities used by 58 different international adoption agencies. There were three online training courses that the 45 agencies who responded to the question used most frequently. These online educational courses included: Adoption Learning Partners, Heart of the Matter Education (Because They Waited) and NCFA-Intercountry Adoption Journey. Almost half (49%) of the agencies who responded to this question used Adoption Learning

Partners as their pre-adoptive education choice. International adoption agencies were also questioned about the educational topics that are provided to adoptive parents pre-adoption. Refer to Figure D1 for a detailed description of the educational topics that were required for adoptive parents to learn about, topics that are optional, and topics that agencies did not use to educate parents. Thirty-nine international adoption agencies provided input regarding additional educational topics provided to their adoptive parents that were not included on the survey. These topics included: grief/loss/abandonment, transracial adoption, family adjustment, cultural sensitivity, and medical issues.

In addition, international adoption agencies were questioned about the modality in which they provide education to prospective adoptive parents post adoption. In-person education was the most common modality for post-adoption education. Refer to Figure D2 for a detailed description of the modalities. The agencies were also asked if they provided support groups to their adoptive parents post-adoption, and if so, what type of support group. In-person support groups were only offered to adoptive parents by 37% of the agencies. Refer to Figure D3 for a detailed description of the support groups.

Adoptive Parents Survey

Fifteen adoptive parents completed the survey in its entirety. The majority (11/15) of the adoptive parents had only internationally adopted once. Three parents indicated they had adopted children from countries outside of the United States twice, and one parent had adopted more than three times. Five of these children came from Guatemala, four each from Russia and China, and one each from Colombia, Asia, and Latin America. At the time of adoption, the children ranged from six months to seven years of age; however, 60% of the children were one year old or younger at the time of the adoption. These adoptions had been completed as recently as 15

months prior to participation in this study, and ranged to being completed 18 years and 11 months prior to the study.

Prior to the international adoption, the 15 survey participants received various amounts of education ranging from none to more than 15 hours of education. Seventy-three percent of the participants received at least five hours, and 53% of the participants received ten or more hours. The education the parents received prior to the international adoption was provided via various modalities, with in-person education and online training being the most common modalities. Twenty-seven percent of the participants indicated they received education via other modalities than what were listed in the survey. The other modalities the participants described included: reading, visiting a wellness center, taking a CPR class, and enrolling in a course at a community college. Refer to Figure D4 for a detailed description of the education modalities. There were a variety of educational topics covered, some of which were required, while other topics were optional or not applicable. Refer to Figure D5 for a detailed description of which education topics were required, optional, or not applicable for the survey participants prior to adoption. Some other topics that parents received education about prior to the international adoption, that were not included in the survey, included: medical issues (sensory and feeding concerns), family preparation (transracial families, sibling rivalry, travel preparation, cultural adjustment, and talking with others about the adoption), and overcoming language barriers. The parents in the study also described how well they felt the pre-adoption education prepared them for the experience, as well as how prepared they felt in regard to their child's speech and language development. Refer to Figure D6 for a detailed description of how prepared the parents felt.

The participants were asked about the education they received post-adoption in order to make comparisons to the pre-adoption education. Refer to Figure D7 for a detailed description of

the different modalities of education received post-adoption. In addition, the parent participants were asked whether or not their adoption agency provided them with information about getting their child screened for speech and language delays/disorders post-adoption. Seventy-three percent of the participants answered no. Furthermore, six of the adopted children were diagnosed with a disability post-adoption, that were previously unknown to the parents. These diagnoses included: dysgraphia, dyslexia, ADD/ADHD, speech delay, language processing disorder, auditory processing disorder and mutism.

Support group information was also collected from the study's participants. Forty-seven percent of the parents indicated that community support groups, online groups, or agency specific groups were offered to them post-adoption; however 53% did not have any support group options provided. The participants were also asked to rank their confidence levels in regard to monitoring the adopted child's speech and language development post-adoption. The participants used a Likert scale with six options ranging from zero (not confident) to six (extremely confident). Only 27% of the participants felt extremely confident; however 80% of the participants rated their confidence level as a four or higher on the Likert scale. The parents were also asked to describe how concerned they were about their child's speech and language development within the first six to twelve months post-adoption. Again, a six point Likert scale was used, ranging from zero (not concerned) to six (extremely concerned). Only 33% of the parents rated their concern level a four or higher on the six point Likert scale; however 60% of the adopted children either received speech and language services and had been dismissed or were continuing to receive services at the time of the study. Refer to Figure D8 for a detailed description of the speech and language services.

Adoptive Parents Phone Interview

Three semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with females who had internationally adopted, and these were later analyzed for common themes. Two major themes emerged from these interviews; international adoptive parents are highly motivated to help their child succeed and the education provided throughout the process does matter.

Chapter V: Discussion

Findings from this study demonstrated the high importance of education regarding communication development prior to and post international adoption. Overwhelmingly, online training courses were used to provide pre-adoption education to parents. Although it appeared there were three favored programs, the quality and integrity of these programs were unknown to the researcher. In-depth information about the courses could not be located by the researcher without enrolling in the courses. Brief descriptions and overviews were located, but specific information regarding communication issues in international adoption was not found. Just over half (52%) of the adoption agencies used in-person training at their agency, which was surprising to the researcher. Technology is infused throughout today's society, however, when preparing to bring another person to a new country and into a new family, internet-based educational courses may be limiting. In-person education provides the educator with the opportunity to meet the adoptive parents and evaluate the parents' nonverbal language. For example, a parent may be showing nonverbal signs of nervousness or confusion, and the educator can address this when seen. International adoption is often a very emotional process, and an internet-based course alone will not be enough to lay down a solid educational foundation needed to face the challenges ahead.

The pre-adoption education offered to parents covered a variety of different topics. Forty-three of the forty-nine agencies indicated that education regarding attachment style was a requirement for their agency. Forming an attachment between a child and his or her adoptive parents is very crucial to creating a family, so education regarding attachment styles is extremely important. It was noteworthy though that no more than 12 of the 49 agencies required education in the following topics: typical speech and language developmental milestones, interrupted language learning, second language learning, strategies to stimulate speech and language development, and indicators that the child may need a speech and language screening. Children who are internationally adopted face many communication challenges, and not requiring education covering speech and language may be detrimental to the children and their adoptive families. Failing to provide education covering indicators that a child may need a speech and language screening may be one of the most detrimental factors. Sixty percent of the children in this study received speech and language services post-adoption, but only 27% of the participants were provided with information about getting their child screened for speech/language delays and/or disorders. In addition, many of the adopted children in this study were diagnosed with speech and language disorders including: speech delay, language processing disorder, and mutism, all post-adoption. This demonstrates a large disconnect between adoption agencies and parents in regard to speech and language education. It is clear that children who are internationally adopted face language challenges, and understanding there are speech and language services available if needed, is absolutely crucial to adoptive families. One adoption agency commented on the survey saying, "We encourage adoptive parents to take language classes for themselves." The researcher was pleased to hear this, however, parents may need more than just an encouragement to obtain speech and language education. At the time of this

study, the researcher could not locate any specific requirements for speech and language development education in the Hague education requirements. Without a specific requirement, adoption agencies may not perceive communication education as a key component of the educational requirements for a prospective adoptive family. Agencies who have members who are familiar with speech and language disorders may be more aware of the importance and require communication education. For example, one of the agencies who completed the survey commented, "...I have experience in early childhood development and because my daughter is a speech-language pathologist, so I am familiar with speech and language issues." This particular agency may benefit greatly from an individual with experience dealing with communicative disorders, however other agencies may be naive to this crucial component. Not all children who are internationally adopted will have speech and language delays and/or disorders; however, educating adoptive parents about communication development is critical in order to provide intervention as early as possible to the children who do need services.

International Adoptive Parents are Highly Motivated

The first major theme that emerged from the adoptive parent interviews is that international adoptive parents were highly motivated to become educated and help their child succeed. All three participants in the phone interviews turned to international adoption due to infertility. Prior to the international adoption process, the participants faced difficult emotional struggles, and international adoption gave the individuals the hope he or she needed to add a child to their family. Despite the international adoption process being extremely overwhelming, each of the participants described a highly-motivated, positive attitude during the process.

The participants stated many of the educational topics were minimally covered in the education provided by the agencies, but this did not stop these parents from seeking out

education from various other resources. In regard to pre and post-adoption education, Participant 1 stated, “A lot of it was kind of self- um ya know, self promoted.” These adoptive parents took it upon themselves to seek out any information he or she thought may be of use to them (e.g., internet searches, community events, enrolling in a parenting class). With the dismay of infertility remaining, these parents did everything in their power to become the most educated and prepared parents possible. Participant 3 stated, “I was determined to have as much of the experience as I could. I was always trying to look for something.” Whether it was reading, enrolling in a parenting course, or even enrolling in a course at the local community college, these parents were highly motivated to be as prepared as possible for the international adoption.

Adoptive Education Does Matter

The second major theme that emerged from the adoptive parent interviews was that the education provided throughout the process does matter. The information that is provided to adoptive parents prior to and post adoptive can shape an adoptive parents’ view of how to raise their internationally adopted child. Therefore, it is extremely crucial that the education provided to parents highlight key components, such as communication development. When information about communication development, for children who are internationally adopted, is not given to adoptive parents, they are truly at a disadvantage. Participant 1 made a comment about second language learning and seeking out speech and language services, saying, “We were not given that information... if we’d had kinda been aware, of some of the speech language stuff we might have maybe done Child Find to get her services as a preschooler.” This parent was simply not educated about speech and language services, and unfortunately, the child missed the opportunity to receive early intervention services.

Communication development education is extremely valuable for parents of internationally adopted children. Understanding the challenges of interrupted and second language learning can make the international adoption process much less complicated. For example, Participant 2 stated, “I’m really glad I had the exposure before the adoption to that particular issue of changing languages and the delay in expressive language... I think if I hadn’t known that it would have been a rough year.” Whether it be a child receiving services as early as possible, or simply putting a parent’s mind at ease, communication development education appeared significant when adopting internationally.

Study Limitations

When the parent survey was originally posted in the international adoption forums, there was an error with the survey link. The link that was originally posted in the forums connected participants to the adoption agency survey instead of the adoptive parent survey. This error was corrected in less than 30 minutes from the original posting; however, there may have been adoptive parent participants who completed the adoption agency survey in error. If parents completed the adoption agency survey, the results of the agency survey may have been affected slightly.

The study’s second limitation is that the researcher did not taken into account the fact the Hague Convention policies were not enforced prior to 2008 in the United States. Even though the United States signed the Convention in 1994, the Convention was not enforced until April 1, 2008 (Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 2016). Therefore, prior to April 1, 2008 international adoption agencies were not required to enforce education requirements. This impacted the study because the researcher only terminated participation for the subjects who did not participate in Hague Convention Adoptions. Although, all participants who adopted prior to

April 1, 2008 under the Hague Convention should have been terminated as well. This error impacted the adoptive parent results, because there were adoptive parents who were not required to take any formal education prior to their adoption. Their responses on the survey may have reflected poor education, when in reality, they simply were not required to have any education at the time of adoption.

The third limitation in this study is a small sample size for the adoptive parent interviews and the adoptive parent survey. There were only 15 participants in the adoptive parent survey and only three of those participants were interviewed. Due to a small sample size, the data may not be reflective of the population.

Chapter VI: Implications for Future Research

In order to gain a better understanding of the impact that communication development education has on international adoption, further research is needed. First, the online training courses that are used most frequently by adoption agencies must be carefully analyzed. The topics covered within the training courses must be examined for speech and language information related to international adoption. The overall quality and integrity of these sites must also be analyzed. In addition, there needs to be further research done on the demographics of the international adoption agencies. When surveying adoption agencies more detailed information should be collected, such as the location of the agency within the United States, what countries the agency completes adoptions with, and how many adoptions the agency completes a year from each of the partnering countries.

When collecting information from adoptive parents, it may be beneficial to collect rating scale information about the parent's internal motivation for obtaining education in future studies. It appeared that the parents in this study had a great internal drive to obtain education, regardless

of what the agency provided. It may also be beneficial to collect information about how and when parents learned about speech and language services. An additional component that could provide good insight may be to analyze the data based on the age of the child at the time of adoption. This could reveal findings about the importance of communication education in regard to the child's age at the time of international adoption, and allow for comparisons between younger and older children.

Overall, this study provided a foundation regarding the importance of overall communication education prior to and post-international adoption, as well as the current deficits in this educational area. Further research is needed to identify specific topics within communication development that are most beneficial to international adoptions.

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Appendix A

Adoption agency survey questions.

1. Yes, I consent to serve as a subject in this research. / No, I do not consent.
2. Your agency has been contacted because it is accredited or approved by the Council on Accreditation and can provide adoption services for Hague Convention adoption cases. Is this true?
 - a. Yes / No
3. Is pre-adoptive education required?
 - a. No / Yes / If so, how many hours? _____hours
4. Please select how the parents obtain the education.
 - a. Online Training Courses / In-person Training / At your agency / Other sites (If so, where?)
5. If applicable, please indicate the online training sites used and/or the in-person training sites.
6. Does your agency provide education on any of the following topics? Check all that apply, and indicate whether the education is optional or required.
 - a. Typical speech and language development/ milestones / Interrupted language learning / Second language learning / Attachment styles / Play Behavior / Strategies to stimulate speech and language development / Indicators that the child may need a speech/language screening / Other (please list)
7. Is the education given prior to adoption tailored to the country the child is being adopted from?
 - a. If yes, please comment on how the information is tailored / No

8. If the adopted child had a documented disability prior to adoption, is any additional education provided about that disability?
 - a. Yes /No
9. After adoption, is there any follow up education given to the parents? If yes, how? Check all that apply.
 - a. No / Online / In person / Handouts / Via the phone / Other (please list)
10. Does your agency provide group support to parents? If yes, check all that apply.
 - a. No / In person / Via the phone / Via agency-supported online forum / Via community based group / Other (please list)

Appendix B

Parents of internationally adopted children survey questions.

1. Yes, I consent to serve as a subject in this research. / No, I do not consent.
2. You have been contacted because you adopted a child internationally under the Hague Convention adoption policies. At this time, the adoption process is complete. Is this true?
 - a. Yes / No
3. What country was your child adopted from?
4. How many times have you internationally adopted?
 - a. Once / Twice / Three times or more
5. What is the sex of your internationally adopted child?
 - a. Male / Female
6. How old was your child at the time of adoption?
7. What is your child's current age?
8. How many hours of education did you receive prior to adopting your child?
 - a. 0 / 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / 15+
9. How did you receive the pre-adoption education? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Online training / In-person training at your agency / In-person training outside of your agency / Independent searches conducted on the internet / Community support groups
10. Prior to adoption, did you receive education in any of the following topics? Check all that apply, and indicate whether the education was optional or required.
 - a. Typical speech and language development milestones / Interrupted language learning / Second language learning / Attachment styles / Play Behavior / Strategies to stimulate

speech and language development / Indicators that the child may need a speech/language screening

11. If there was any other education provided not listed above please indicated that here.
12. Did you receive any education tailored to the country your child was adopted from?
 - a. Yes / No
13. If your child had a documented disability prior to adoption, did you receive any information tailored to that disability?
 - a. Yes / No
14. Was your child diagnosed with a disability post-adoption? If so, please indicate the diagnosis.
15. Indicate how you received education post adoption. Check all that apply.
 - a. Directly from the adoption agency / Community resources / Online courses / Independent internet searches / Support groups for adoptive parents / Not applicable
16. After adoption, did the agency provide any information about getting your child screened for speech and language delays and/or disorders?
 - a. Yes / No
17. Were you provided with support group information after adoption? If so, please choose which resources were available to you.
 - a. Community support groups / Online support groups / Groups directly through your adoption agency / Not applicable
18. How well do you feel your pre-adoption education prepared you?
 - a. Likert scale 1 – 6 (Not at all prepared to Extremely well prepared)

19. In regard to your child's speech and language development, how prepared did you feel prior to adoption?
- Likert scale 1 – 6 (Not at all prepared to Extremely well prepared)
20. After adoption, how confident did you feel in regard to monitoring your child's speech and language development?
- Likert scale 1 – 6 (Not confident to Extremely confident)
21. Within the first 6-12 months after adoption, how concerned were you about your child's speech and language development?
- Likert scale 1 – 6 (Not concerned to Extremely concerned)
22. Has your child received speech/language services?
- Yes and has since been dismissed / Yes and continues to receive services / No
23. If you are willing to participate in an optional phone interview (approximately 20-30 minutes) about the education you received prior to and post adoption, as well as your child's speech and language development, please list your contact information below. Please understand that by providing your contact information your survey answers will no longer be anonymous. You will be assigned a random ID number to ensure protected confidentiality.

Appendix C

Optional parent phone interview questions.

1. Can you tell me how you first got involved with the international adoption process and how you felt when it first began?
2. Please describe the education you received prior to adoption and how you obtained the information?
 - a. Explain the education you received that was focused on communication development topics, such as speech/language milestones, attachment styles, play behavior, or interrupted language learners?
3. Describe your level of satisfaction with the education you received prior to the adoption.
4. Can you tell me about your level of comfort in monitoring your child's speech and language development after adoption?
5. You indicated your child has a diagnosis of _____ (from survey). Can you tell me how you became educated about this topic?
6. In regard to communication development, what would have been helpful to know before and after adoption?

Appendix D

Table D1

How Adoption Agencies Provide Education to Parents Prior to Adoption

Format of Education	Agencies Who Used Method (n=58)	% of Respondents Who Used Format
Online Training Course	50	86%
In-Person at Agency	30	52%
In-Person (At Another Site)	10	17%
Other - Books/Book Reports	11	19%
Other-DVDs	3	5%

Note. The percent of respondents is above 100% due to agencies being allowed to choose more than one modality of education.

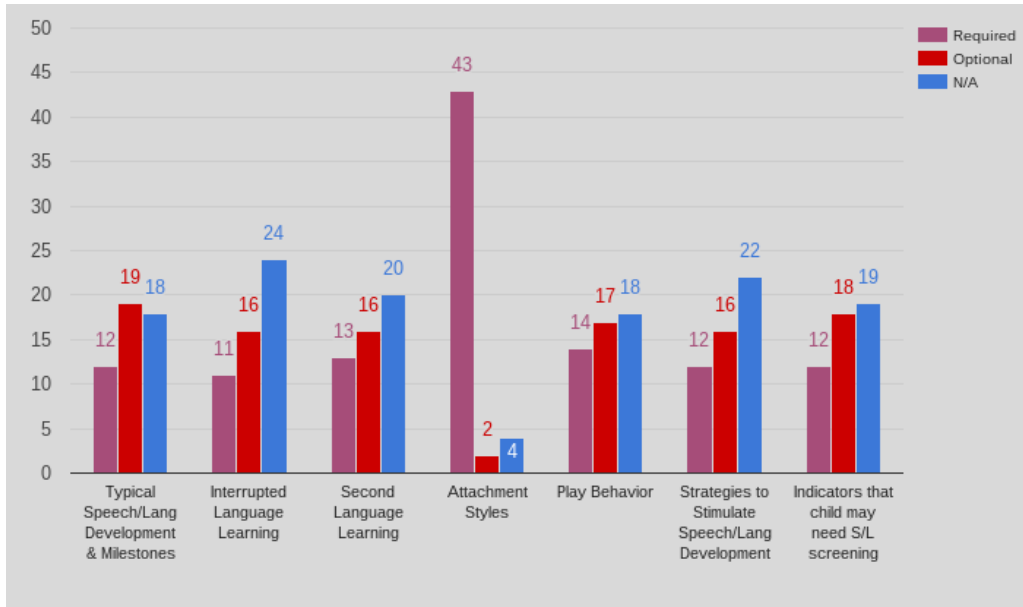


Figure D1. Education provided by agencies (n=49) to adoptive parents.

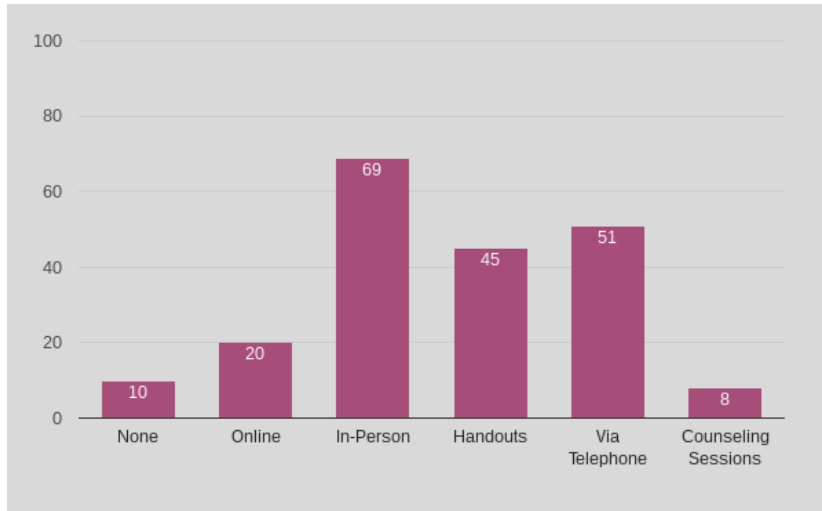


Figure D2. Percentage of agencies (n=49) that provide follow up education to parents via different modalities.

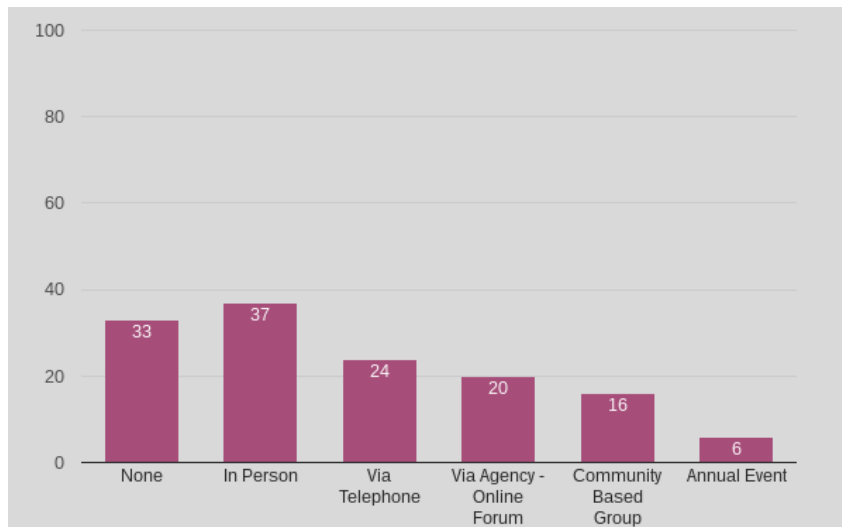


Figure D3. Percentage of agencies (n=49) that provide support groups for parents post-adoption via different modalities

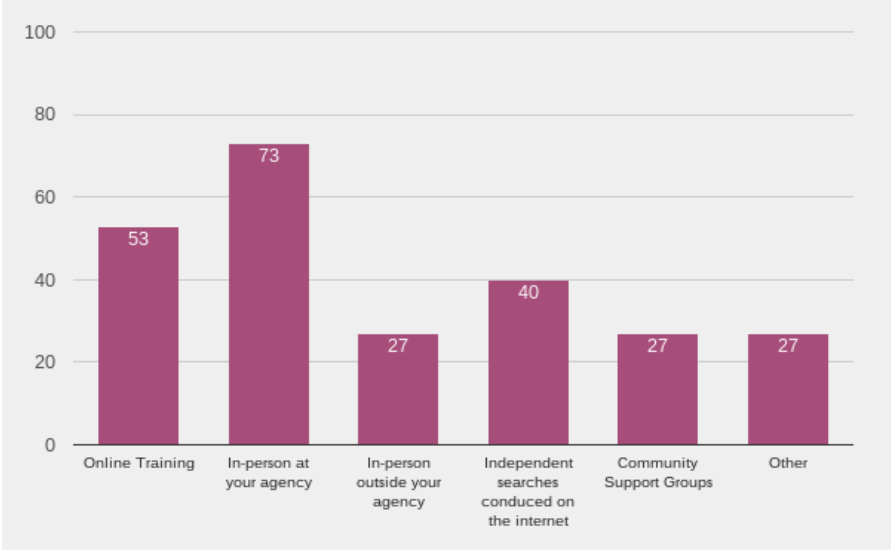


Figure D4. Percentage of parents (n=15) who received pre-adoption education via different modalities.

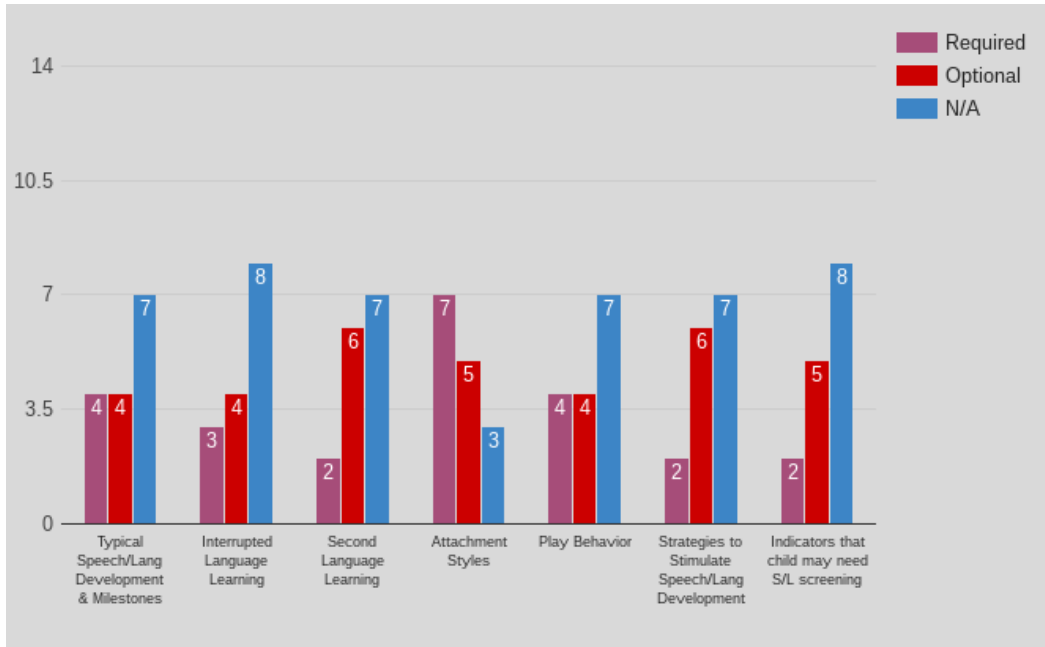


Figure D5. Types of pre-adoption education that were required, optional, or not applicable to adoptive parents (n=15).

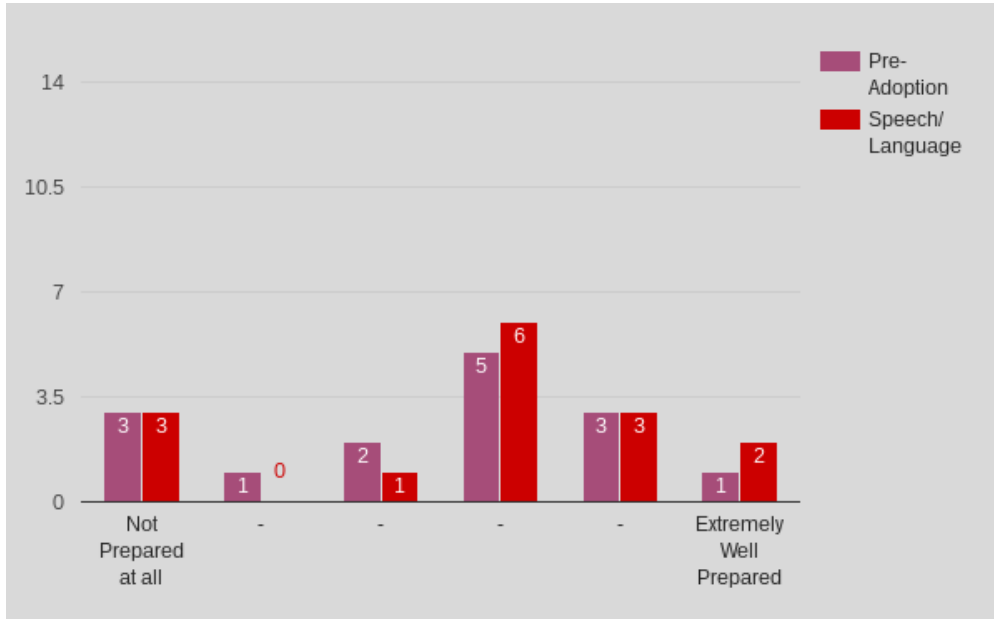


Figure D6. Overall, how prepared parents (n=15) felt due to the education provided pre-adoption, and how prepared parents felt in regard to speech and language development.

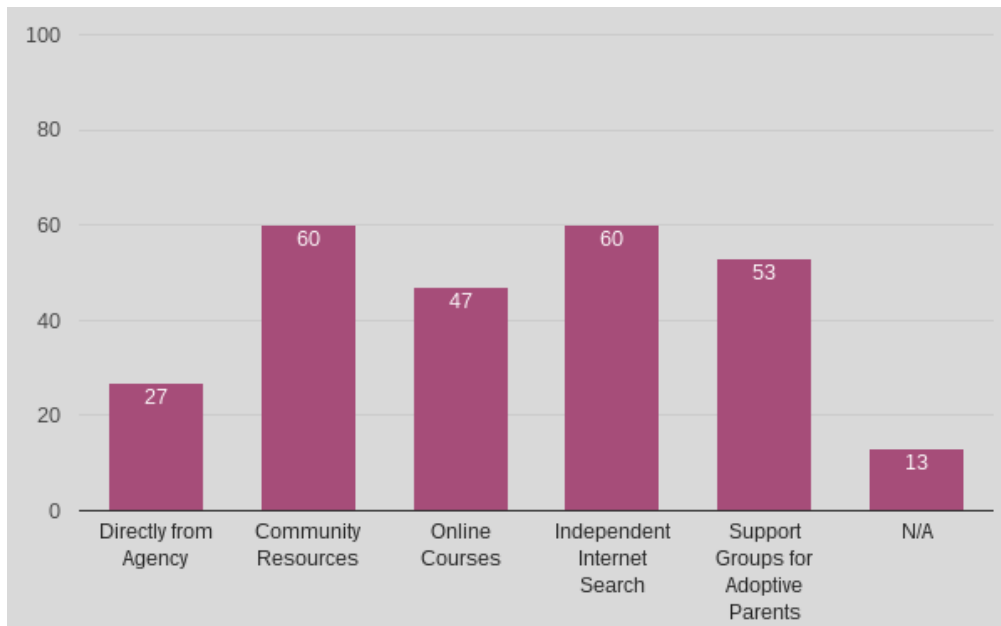


Figure D7. Percentage of parents who received post-adoption education via different modalities (n=15).

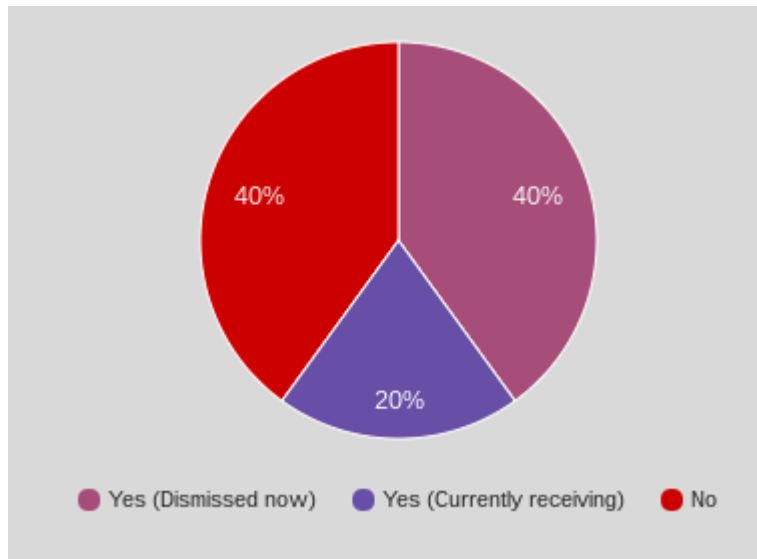


Figure D8. Percentage of adopted children who have received or are receiving speech and language services.