

A Comparison of Individualized Family Service Plans Using the IFSP Rating Scale



Michelle Gatmaitan, M.Ed & Teresa Brown, M.Ed.

Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Teaching, Kent State University



Introduction

Significance

- The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is the legal documentation of early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and families under Part C of IDEA.
- The IFSP is also the vehicle for shared decision-making between families and professionals (Gallagher & Desimone, 1995)
- Research has shown that there has been minimal improvement in the quality of IFSPs since the late 1980s (Jung, 2010).
- If the IFSP is the written evidence of the family-professional partnership and collaboration in early intervention services, then it must reflect high quality (Jung & McWilliam, 2005).

Previous Research

- IFSP outcomes do not always correspond to family concerns and priorities (McWilliam et al., 1998; Ridgley & Hallam, 2006); outcomes tend to be focused on child development-related goals taken from an assessment instrument (Boone et al., 1998; Bruder et al., 1997; Jung & Baird, 2003; McWilliam et al., 1998; Polmanteer & Turbiville, 2000; Ridgley & Hallam, 2006; Sabatino et al., 2001). Outcomes are not always functional and relevant to the child and family's daily routines and activities.
- If IFSPs are to be reflective of family concerns and priorities, early intervention professionals should elicit this information through conversations with families.
- The Routines-Based Interview (RBI; McWilliam, Casey, & Simms, 2009) is one such approach to eliciting family concerns and priorities leading to functional outcomes on the IFSP.
- The IFSP Rating Scale is a tool that can be used to evaluate the quality of IFSPs (Jung & McWilliam, 2005; Jung, 2010; Jung & McWilliam, 2010)

Research Questions

- What is the overall quality of the current sample of IFSPs, according to the IFSP Rating Scale?
- Are IFSPs that are written based on the Routines-Based Interview in addition to the child-focused assessment higher in quality than IFSPs written based on the child-focused assessment alone?

IFSP Rating Scale Items	Item Definition (rated on a scale of 1-5)	Overall (N = 60)	Program A (N = 30)	Program B (N = 30)
Present Levels of Development				
Writing	Results, strengths, and needs are written in family-friendly language (absence of jargon and technical language)	4.50	4.47	4.53
Positiveness	Emphasis on strengths, with needs written in a positive manner; author describes both strengths and needs and used at least as many words to describe strengths as needs. Information is unbiased and supportive	4.70	4.73	4.67
Relevance	Information includes only functional information relevant to daily routines and activity settings, not nonfunctional tasks from the assessment instrument	3.38	2.93*	3.83*
Priorities and Concerns				
Relevance	The priority is relevant to daily routines and activity settings	1.65	1.53	1.77
Thoroughness	Number of priorities and concerns noted	1.07	1.13	1.00
Family Role	Priorities are clearly addressed in one or more outcomes	2.46	1.98*	2.93*
Outcomes Statements				
Language	All information is written in a manner that clearly articulates the outcome or the skill/behavior to be learned, and is free of jargon or undefined technical language	4.19	4.10	4.28
Relevance	The outcome is likely to be relevant to participation daily routines and activity settings	2.91	2.83	2.99
Specificity	The outcome includes a clear skill or behavior.	3.04	2.84	3.25
Measurability	The outcome includes measurable criteria for acquisition and completion of the skill	1.25	1.11	1.38
Family Role	Outcome is clearly addressed in one or more priority or concern	1.87	1.52*	2.21*
Action Steps				
Language	All information is free of jargon or technical language, and written in a manner that clearly articulates the procedures	3.38	3.37	3.40
Relevance	Strategies and procedures to address the outcome clearly support intervention within routines, without requiring a special person, place, or equipment that is not natural to the family	2.71	2.70	2.73
Family Role	Action steps clearly support intervention implemented by natural caregivers, not exclusively by the professional	2.70	2.68	2.72
Consistency	Action steps clearly support the outcome	3.59	3.58	3.60
Services				
Location	Services are provided in the child's home or natural environment (e.g. child care center, other community settings in which children without disabilities participate), not in segregated settings	4.65	4.47	4.83
Service Model	Services on the outcome pages are integrated across disciplines, with one primary service provider on each outcome, each of the other providers listed on some, but not all outcomes.	4.12	4.00	4.29

* Statistically significant differences, $p < .05$

Results

Overall Scores

- Scores of the overall sample demonstrate that most IFSPs are written in positive, family-friendly language that is free of jargon.
- Scores of the overall sample continue to reflect low quality IFSPs on many items, such as:
 - Family Priorities and Concerns - Relevance
 - Outcome Statements - Relevance
 - Outcome Statements - Measurability

Comparison Scores

- Comparison of county IFSPs demonstrate slightly higher quality in Program B (which uses the RBI) in the following items:
 - Present Levels of Development – Relevance
 - Family Concerns and Priorities – Family Role
 - Outcome Statements – Family Role

Implications

- Early intervention programs continue to struggle with developing high-quality IFSPs.
- Early intervention professionals would benefit from ongoing professional development and support to write high-quality IFSPs (Jung, 2010) and to conduct the RBI with increased fidelity for improved IFSP development.

Methods

Sample

- 60 IFSPs in Ohio, randomly selected from two county early intervention programs
- 30 IFSPs from a program that uses a child-focused assessment, the Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) only (Program A)
- 30 IFSPs from a program that uses the Routines-Based Interview in addition to the HELP (Program B)

Instrument

- IFSP Rating Scale (Jung & McWilliam, 2005; Jung, 2010; Jung & McWilliam, 2010)
- 17 items which rate the following sections of the IFSP:
 - Present levels of development
 - Family concerns and priorities
 - Outcome statements
 - Action steps or procedures
 - Service model
 - Location of services

Data Collection

- Training in the use of the IFSP Rating Scale
- Initial inter-rater agreement = 81%
- Inter-rater agreement with primary researcher on 30% of the sample (20 IFSPs): range = 80-98%, mean = 87%
- Rater was "blind" to the IFSP groups, scored all 60 IFSPs

Data Analysis

- independent samples t-test