

ABSTRACT

PAREDES RANGEL, MARIA ROSA. A Qualitative Exploration of Southeast U.S. Mexican Immigrant Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement. (Under the direction of Dr. Lisa Bass).

Since the 1990s, there has been a great deal of growth in the immigrant population, much of which has been outside of traditional gateway cities and states and in places with little to no recent history of migration; these places are called "new destinations" (Massey, 2007). The 11th largest state in the nation, North Carolina, is one such new destination, with a rapidly increasing Latino immigrant population that is changing the landscape of the communities (Pew Research Center, 2011). This has led to an influx in the state's public schools of students and parents whose first language is not English. As this student population continues to grow, so do the associated needs of parents and school districts. However, parents and school officials have little training, experience, or resources to meet the challenges of these growing demands (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Moreover, Mexican immigrant parents' expectations of their own roles can remain a mystery to them, causing feelings of isolation, confusion, and marginalization that can arguably be remedied by more intentional, strategic efforts of a school district.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover common themes and patterns relating to Mexican immigrant parents' experiences with involvement in their child's education. Interviews were conducted with seven Mexican immigrant parents who had children across Grades K-5 in a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina. Parents were asked about their experiences being involved in school activities, supporting their children's homework, and communicating with school personnel. Since schools can help encourage and enhance the involvement of Latino

immigrant parents in their children's education, this study focused on understanding parents' perceptions of the strategies implemented by the school to strengthen their involvement in their children's education—with the aim of ultimately fostering student academic growth.

Data were collected through interviews with parents and one school event observation, and a review of school artifacts to identify common themes. Several emerging themes were identified and explored. One prominent theme related to how the Mexican immigrant parents defined parental involvement. Findings indicated that these parents' limited involvement could be related to their perception of the school and the teacher as the "experts" in education, while they viewed their role as being to provide *consejos* (advice). Other factors identified that challenge Mexican immigrant parents' involvement are limitations in the English language, their own lack of education, and a general unfamiliarity with the United States educational system.

The Mexican immigrant parents interviewed in the current study agreed the school works to facilitate their participation in their children's education. Participants cited specific efforts by the school to keep them involved, which included interpretation services, bilingual personnel, educational parent workshops, and written communication sent home in Spanish. Data from this study support the importance of fostering the involvement of Latino parents in their children's education, and shed light on some of the ways this can be accomplished. Suggestions for future studies that may provide added insight are also provided. In addition, this study's findings can help educators, administrators, and policymakers develop and implement strategies and approaches to improve parental involvement in similar communities across the nation.

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A Qualitative Exploration of Southeast U.S. Mexican Immigrant Parents' Perceptions of
Parental Involvement

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation would certainly not have been possible without the support of my lifelong partner, my husband Kenneth Rangel. You have encouraged me to push myself to the limit, and you have always been there for me. When I succeed, you celebrate with me, and when I fall apart, you lift me up. I love you so very much, and with you “I can fly higher than an eagle, for you are the wind beneath my wings.” Thank you for your unconditional support and love—with you by my side, this project was possible.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the Latino immigrant parents who made the journey to come to the United States to provide a better life for your children; you are brave and driven. Thank you for all you do to support your children’s education.

BIOGRAPHY

Maria Rosa Paredes Rangel was born in Salvatierra Guanajuato, Mexico, and immigrated to the United States in 1979, at the age of nine. She grew up in Chicago, Illinois, where she maintained close relationships with Mexican-American immigrants and non-immigrant families. In 1993, she received a Bachelor's degree in Education from Northeastern University in Chicago. She soon went on to earn her Master's Degree in Education Administration from North Carolina State University in 2001.

Her professional career history includes both teaching and administrative assignments at the school and district level. She began her career teaching third-grade bilingual education in Chicago before moving to North Carolina, where she spent two years teaching Spanish and three years teaching English as a Second Language. Throughout her teaching years, most of her students were Limited English Proficiency students. Her administrative assignments in North Carolina have included serving as Assistant Principal of Joyner Elementary School in Raleigh and Coordinator of Programs for English as Second Language and Dual Language in Chapel Hill. Since 2014, she has worked for the Wake County Public School System in Raleigh in the role of Senior Administrator for Equity Affairs.

Maria Rosa has been married for 20 years, and has one son.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	11
Significance of the Study	11
Overview of Research Design	14
Definitions of Key Terms	15
Limitations of the Study	17
Delimitations of the Study	19
Chapter Summary	20
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
Latinos in the United States	21
<i>Defining Latino Populations.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Latino Demographics in the United States</i>	<i>22</i>
New Destinations for Latino Immigrant Families	24
<i>New Destination – Latinos in the South.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>New Destination – Latinos in North Carolina.....</i>	<i>27</i>
Latino Students in the United States.....	28
<i>Latino Students in North Carolina.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Academic Achievement of Latino Students</i>	<i>30</i>
Parental Involvement	32
<i>Defining Parental Involvement</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Benefits of Parental Involvement</i>	<i>37</i>
Barriers to Effective Parental Involvement.....	40
<i>Language.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Long Work Hours.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Different Views of Education</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Homework.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Parents’ Negative School Experiences</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Transportation and Other Obstacles</i>	<i>43</i>

Latino Immigrant Parents' Perspective on Parental Involvement	43
Latino Immigrant Parents' Understanding of Educación	46
Chapter Summary	48
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	50
Rationale for a Phenomenological, Qualitative Research Design	50
Phenomenological Qualitative Study Design.....	51
Research Questions.....	53
Site Selection and Sampling Criteria	56
<i>Research Setting: Southern School District.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Site Selection: Southern Elementary School.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Purposeful Sampling.....</i>	<i>58</i>
Participants and Informed Consent.....	58
Data Collection	60
<i>Interview Data</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Observational Data.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Review of Documents and Artifacts</i>	<i>63</i>
Overview of Data Analysis	63
Research Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness.....	65
<i>Triangulation</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Limitations of the Study</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Statement of Bias.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Ethical Issues</i>	<i>70</i>
Chapter Summary	71
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	73
Introduction.....	73
Interview Analysis.....	74
<i>Participant Felicita Garcia.....</i>	<i>76</i>
Research Question 1	76
Research Question 2	77
Research Question 3	78
Research Question 4	80
Research Question 5	80

<i>Participant Cindy Perez</i>	80
Research Question 1	81
Research Question 2	82
Research Question 3	83
Research Question 4	84
Research Question 5	85
<i>Participant Alejandra Guzman</i>	86
Research Question 1	86
Research Question 2	87
Research Question 3	88
Research Question 4	89
Research Question 5	90
<i>Participant Martina Dolores</i>	91
Research Question 1	92
Research Question 2	93
Research Question 3	94
Research Question 4	95
Research Question 5	96
<i>Participant Juana Lopez</i>	96
Research Question 1	97
Research Question 2	98
Research Question 3	98
Research Question 4	99
Research Question 5	100
<i>Participant Susana Martinez</i>	101
Research Question 1	101
Research Question 2	102
Research Question 3	103
Research Question 4	104
Research Question 5	105
<i>Participant Teresa Flores</i>	105
Research Question 1	106

Research Question 2	106
Research Question 3	107
Research Question 4	108
Research Question 5	109
Emergent Themes	109
<i>RQ1A – Parent Perceptions of the School’s Role</i>	110
Responsible for school attendance	110
Experts in education	110
Hiring qualified teachers	111
Teacher supervision	111
School communication	112
ESL resources	112
<i>RQ1B – Parent Perceptions of the Teacher’s Role</i>	113
Teaching	113
Teacher communication	114
<i>RQ2A – Parent Perceptions of the School’s Expectations for their Involvement</i>	116
Attending school events	116
Helping with homework	116
Encouraging school attendance	116
Supporting student’s learning	117
Volunteering at school	117
<i>RQ2B – Parent Perceptions of their Involvement in their Children’s Education</i>	117
Provides consejos (advice)	117
Ensuring a well-behaved child	118
Encouraging school attendance	118
Having backpack and school supplies ready	118
Helping with homework	118
Reading books	119
Supporting native language learning	119
Attending school events	119
Attending parent workshops	119
Attending parent-teacher conferences	119

Attending fieldtrips.....	120
Communicating with child’s teacher	120
Checking school report cards	120
Sending snacks to the classroom.....	120
<i>RQ3A – School Factors Facilitating Parent Efforts to Support Children’s Education</i>	<i>121</i>
Welcoming environment	121
School communication.....	122
Bilingual personnel	122
Interpretation services.....	123
<i>RQ3B – Parent Perceptions of Challenges to Supporting their Child’s Education</i>	<i>123</i>
Homework	123
School and teacher communication.....	124
Shyness/embarrassment	124
Written school/home communication	125
Lack of education.....	125
Complex school system.....	126
Lack of.....	127
Transportation	127
Legal status	127
<i>RQ4 – Resources Needed to Enhance Parents’ Involvement in Children’s Education</i>	<i>128</i>
Varied times for school functions	128
Childcare.....	128
Transportation	129
Bilingual personnel	129
Classroom observation	129
Homework program	129
Parent workshops.....	130
Parent and teacher communication	130
School and home communication	131
Volunteer opportunities.....	131
English classes	131
Tutoring program	131

<i>RQ5 – Parent Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them</i>	133
School cares	133
Bilingual personnel	134
Welcoming environment	134
School and parent communication	134
School resources	135
Educational parent workshops	135
Interpretation services	135
Childcare/dinner	136
<i>School Event Observation</i>	136
<i>School Artifacts Analysis</i>	137
Summary of Findings	138
<i>Study Overview</i>	138
<i>Parent Perceptions of the Role of the School and Teacher (RQ1)</i>	138
<i>Parent Perceptions on their Involvement in their Children’s Education (RQ2)</i>	139
<i>Factors Challenging Parent Efforts at Involvement in Children’s Education (RQ3A)</i>	140
<i>Factors Facilitating Parent Efforts at Involvement in Children’s Education (RQ3B)</i>	141
<i>Resources Parents Need to Enhance Involvement in Children’s Education (RQ4)</i>	142
<i>Parent Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them (RQ5)</i>	143
<i>Family Academy (Parent Workshop) Observation</i>	144
<i>School Artifacts Analysis</i>	145
Chapter Summary	145
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	147
Overview of the Study	147
Discussion of Emergent Themes	149
<i>Latino Parents’ View of the Role of the School, Teacher, and Themselves</i>	149
<i>Facilitation of Latino Parental Involvement by the School</i>	150
<i>Challenges/Barriers to Latino Parents’ Effective Involvement</i>	151
<i>Factors Needed to Enhance Latino Parental Involvement</i>	153
<i>Parents’ Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them</i>	154
Limitations of the Study	154
Statement of Bias	155

Implications for Policy	157
Implications for Educational Practice	159
<i>Recommendations for School Districts</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>Recommendations for Schools</i>	<i>160</i>
Recommendation for Future Research	161
Conclusion	162
REFERENCES	164
APPENDICES	187
Appendix A: General Interview Guide (Spanish)	188
Appendix B: General Interview Guide (English)	189
Appendix C: Participant Invitation Letter (Spanish)	190
Appendix D: Participant Invitation Letter (English)	191

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Overview of Interview Participants	75
Table 4.2: Emergent Themes for Research Question 1	110
Table 4.3: Emergent Themes for Research Question 2	115
Table 4.4: Emergent Themes for Research Questions 3	121
Table 4.5: Parent Responses on Information Needed to Enhance their Involvement..	128
Table 4.6: Emergent Themes from Research Question 5.....	132
Table 4.7: Emergent Themes from the School Event Observation	136
Table 4.8: Overview of School Artifacts Analysis.....	137

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The population of children living in immigrant families are the fastest growing group of American children (Hernandez, Denton, & McCartney, 2008). The United States Department of Education's (2014) statistics show the percentage of English Language Learners public school students in 2012-2013 was 9.2%, or an estimated 4.4 million. Overall, between 1994 and 2014, the percent of immigrant children increased by from 18% to 25%, more than any other group of children in the United States. Many of these children are categorized as English Language Learners (ELL) (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015). ELL have traditionally been defined as children whose English has not yet developed to the point where they can take full advantage of academic instruction in English (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009). While not all ELL children are from immigrant families with parents who were born outside the country, there tends to be high overlap between Latino students and immigrant parents. ELLs are more likely to have parents with lower formal education levels than their non-ELL counterparts, and to come from low-income families (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Hewantoro, 2005, Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). These factors, in combination with low levels of parental education, low income, and immigrant status, often lead to lower levels of academic achievement in ELLs (Jensen & Flanagan, 2008; Schneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006).

A great deal of recent growth in the immigrant population during the 1990s and beyond has occurred outside of traditional gateway cities and states, in places that have had little to no recent history of migration, so called "new destinations" (Massey, 2007). One such new destination for immigrants is the state of North Carolina, the 11th largest state in

the nation, and its rapidly growing Latino immigrant population is changing the landscape of its communities (Pew Research Center, 2011). Public schools, thus, are experiencing an influx of students and parents whose first language is not English. As this student population increases, the needs of parents and school districts grow as well, yet parents and school officials have little training, experience, or resources to meet the challenges they face (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). This has made searching for ways to provide Latino students with the necessary resources and teaching strategies to succeed overwhelming tasks for school districts to achieve (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

There is a noted correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. Thus, schools must strive to include Latino immigrant parents in school activities and encourage the parents' involvement in their children's education, (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Trumbull et al., 2001). Literature maintains that other factors such as ethnicity, cultural and parenting beliefs and experiences, child-rearing practices, parental education, and socioeconomic status also influence the academic achievement of Latino immigrant children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Trumbull et al., 2001). The key to the educational success of Latino immigrant children is the impact of family, school, and community partnerships and parents' ability to navigate these interconnected systems (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Ramirez, 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Consequently, for immigrant parents, such systems can be particularly challenging to engage, and thus they would seem to withdraw from or participate less in school activities. This may be wrongly interpreted by the schools as a sign of lack of parental interest and involvement (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014).

This study took place in one elementary school with an increasing population of Latino immigrant students. The school is in a suburban area in the Southern School District (a pseudonym) in North Carolina, one of the leading school districts in school innovation and academic growth. Of note, the Southern School District is a proponent of parental involvement and has adopted the Parent and Family Involvement Policy (PFIP). The PFIP in this school district dictates that parents and schools have a shared responsibility to educate the child. The Southern School District's School Board also supports the implementation and evaluation of parent programs to ensure schools are reaching out to parents at all grade levels, as well as to the larger community.

There are also governmental policies in place that direct the effort for parental involvement. *Parental involvement* is defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) as:

...the participation of parents in regular, two way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including assisting their child's learning; being actively involved in their child's education at school; serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and the carrying out of other activities such as those described in Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). (Cowan & Edwards, 2005, p. A-54)

Here, the federal legislation puts forth specific requirements and several guidelines and requirements for schools regarding parental involvement. It includes a section that mandates

district support, defines coordination of activities for parental involvement, and stipulates schools' responsibility for building parent capacity for involvement; this includes methods of communicating with parents and evaluating the success of those efforts. Another section addresses methods of parent notification, but such policies alone do not necessitate parental involvement (NCLB, 2002).

Many schools that have low academic achievement report minimal parental involvement, and at the same time struggle to achieve high-quality, effective collaboration between the school and the parents (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). This is true for the school in the current study, Southern Elementary. In addition to implementing the PFIP, the Southern School District where Southern Elementary is located also follows the above federal mandates regarding parental involvement.

This study reviewed the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents of students in a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina, exploring how often and in what ways the parents were involved in their children's education. Strategies and practices implemented by the school to strengthen the involvement of Latino immigrant parents and ultimately support student academic growth were also examined.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past two decades, the United States has experienced a substantial increase in its Latino population. Numbering an estimated 55.3 million in 2014, Latinos now constitute approximately 17.3% of the country's total population, making them the nation's largest minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In addition, the Latino youth population represents one of the largest and fastest growing segments of the total American youth

population (Murphey, Guzman, & Torres, 2014).

Latinos are now becoming increasingly dispersed across the country, with many relocating to states that previously had very few Latino residents (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004; Singer, 2004). Although established Latino states remain home to the considerable majority of the country's Latino population, these states' overall share of Latinos has decreased since the 1990s (Guzmán & McConnell, 2002). In contrast, the proportion of Latino immigrants in several "new growth" states, mainly in the Southeast, Midwest, and Northwest, has increased dramatically (Pew Research Center, 2005). Recent settlement patterns also point to a shift away from traditional urban centers and toward rural, small town, and suburban areas around the country. In fact, Latinos immigrants now represent the fastest growing population in rural and small-town America (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004; Lichter, 2012).

North Carolina has become one of the new destinations for Latino immigrants, and these people are now playing a pivotal role in reshaping the state's demographic and economic landscape. For the past three decades, hundreds of thousands of people from Mexico and other Latin American countries have moved to North Carolina as economic, political, and environmental refugees, attempting to find jobs and a better life for their families (Gill, 2010, 2012). Latino immigrants are drawn to North Carolina by reasons that include a promising labor market, the prospect of earning a better living, the opportunity of educational advancement, and the chance to reunite with family (Pew Research Center, 2011).

North Carolina, now the 11th largest state in the nation, contains a high Latino immigrant population, most of whom (64.5%) identify as Mexican, Mexican American, or

Chicano (Pew Research Center, 2017). The state has contributed significantly to the quickly growing national population of 50 million Latinos, who are now the largest minority group in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2011). Specifically, North Carolina is home to 828,000 Latinos, which comprises 8.4% of the total state population. Latino children make up the fastest growing segment of the state's student population. In the fall of 2015-2016, 16.5% (206,400 students) of the student population in North Carolina public schools was of Latino origin. Of these Latino students, 75,647 classified as English Language Learners; 51,610 were in elementary school; 10,984 were in middle school; and 13,052 were in high school (Public Schools of NC, 2016).

This dramatic population growth of immigrants has reshaped the landscape in new destination communities, and hence carries many individual and community-level implications that deserve research attention. Education represents an area of particularly special interest in which the implications of this population change are likely to be especially critical to these new communities (Dondero & Muller, 2012; Singer, 2004). For example, although most Latino students in public schools are native-born, approximately two-thirds of them have at least one foreign-born parent (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), and many other Latinos in new destinations are foreign-born (Lichter & Johnson, 2009; Singer, 2004). This suggests that many Latino students and parents may be unfamiliar with the United States education system (López, 2001). Such a lack of a clear perspective on how to understand the educational system may arguable lead some parents to exhibit little involvement in their children's education.

Parental educational involvement has been widely studied as one of the most

important predictors of school success, regardless of ethnicity (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). Moreover, if educators are to be successful in establishing and maintaining communication, thereby encouraging parental involvement, they must know and understand any barriers that may be inhibiting their involvement. Several studies have shown that Latino parents care very much about their children's education (Trumbull et al., 2001), but there are notable individual barriers such as a lack of dominant language proficiency, as well as school-based barriers that often include a negative climate toward Latino immigrant parents (Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005; Quezada, Díaz, & Sánchez, 2003). There are also logistical barriers to consider, such as work responsibilities and lack of childcare that often make it difficult for parents to attend school functions (Valdés, 1996). Still, despite the existence of such barriers, there are many ways parents can be involved in and supportive of the educational experiences of their children (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). One of the most influential scholars in her field, Joyce Epstein (1995), created a conceptualization of parental involvement that has had a major impact on research in this area. Her multidimensional framework of parental involvement includes the following six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community:

1. *Parenting*: Providing a home environment that is conducive to a student's learning, such as having a reasonable bedtime or monitoring media consumption.
2. *Communicating*: Establishing regular, two-way avenues of dialogue between teachers and other relevant school staff and parents.
3. *Volunteering*: Assisting at and supporting school functions or classroom activities.

4. *Learning at home*: Providing opportunities to enhance learning outside of school, such as by monitoring homework, providing books or computers, or talking to one's child about school.
5. *Decision-making*: Including parents in school decisions.
6. *Collaborating with the community*: Identifying and integrating resources and services within the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families.
(Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002)

Based on this framework, it is possible to argue that, despite one's level of formal education or linguistic proficiency, a parent can be significantly involved in supporting a child's educational success in a variety of ways. For instance, parents can monitor their children's bedtimes, access to television, and video games, and they can structure their child's homework schedule. They can also provide opportunities for visiting the library or accessing homework assistance in the community. Regardless, however, it must be emphasized that parental involvement is not singularly defined. Even more, parents, teachers, and school administrators may have very different views of what it means to be an involved parent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents with respect to their integration into their child's school, understanding of the school's expectations with respect to parental involvement, obstacles to their involvement, and the ways in which they become and are involved in their children's education. The study was conducted within a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina.

During the last few years, there has been a high increase in the immigrant student population, with Latino students being the largest group (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Capps et al., 2005; Gibson, 2002; Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005; Wortham, 2001). This issue of Latino immigrant parental involvement therefore deserves attention, especially for Mexican immigrants who make up the largest segment of Latinos due to geographical proximity to the United States (Garcia, 2001; Stewart, 1993; Suárez-Orozco, 1987). However, the low academic performance of Latino students has caused some educators to place the blame on their parents (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Zarate & Meyer, 2007), rather than on the disconnection between the school and the parents. These educators express a misguided view by interpreting Latino immigrant parents' lack of involvement in many mainstream activities as apathy toward their children's education (López, 2001; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Zarate & Meyer, 2007).

The incorrect assumption that Latino immigrant parents are not interested or involved in their children's education stems from a discrepancy between the cultural models of schooling in the U.S. and those operating in Latino immigrant home countries (Valdés, 1996). Latino immigrant parents are also faced with challenges as they struggle to adapt to the U.S. culture to function in society. In addition, most Latino immigrant parents do not have the information to provide the type of assistance needed in U.S. schools. Immigrant parents can view their expectations, access, and roles in their child's education as a mystery, causing feelings of isolation, confusion, and marginalization (Karsada & Johnson, 2006). Some of these issues can be remedied by a school's more intentional and strategic efforts to tell Mexican immigrant parents what is expected of them, so that they can better support and

advocate for their children as well as being able to express their aspirations (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Indeed, research demonstrates that both destination and school factors matter for the educational outcomes of Latino immigrant and minority children (Pong & Hao, 2007; Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993). However, not many researchers have examined school contexts in new Latino destinations, and even fewer studies have systematically compared school contexts in new and established Latino destinations (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). Rather, the current literature on this topic is based almost entirely on the experiences of Latinos in already established destinations, in part because their wide geographic distribution is a relatively recent phenomenon (Marrow, 2005). We therefore know little about the schools attended by Latino immigrant students in new destinations, nor do we have a good understanding of how these schools compare with those in established destinations.

Thus, more research is needed to assess how schools in new Latino destinations are accommodating the academic, social, and linguistic needs of this group of students, as well as to determine the nature and perceptions of immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education. The current research on Mexican immigrant parents' experiences with integrating into American schools may also help to identify the ways that these Latino parents negotiate the cultural differences at school, as well as the perceived roles they play in their children's education. The information gathered from this study, moreover, can offer school districts and educators a foundation on which to build the further exploration of parental involvement strategies and approaches designed to make a difference in the academic success of Latino students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the current study:

1. What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?
2. What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?
3. What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?
4. What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?
5. Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?

Sub-questions will follow in Chapter Three's elaboration on the study methodology.

Significance of the Study

In exploring the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents within a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina, and how they get involved in their children's education, this study may provide guidance on best practices for schools to welcome Latino immigrant parents as partners in their children's education. The current research aims to show that, by learning about the experiences of Latino immigrant parents, teachers and schools will gain new insight on what strategies to use for effectively reaching out to these parents.

The results of this study are especially important because of the increase in the Latino immigration within North Carolina. These growing numbers of Latino students create greater

demand on classrooms, schools, and teachers, which, moreover, may or may not have been sufficiently prepared by universities to work with culturally diverse children and their parents. The educational profession also faces the issue of how to boost the involvement of Latino immigrant parents who face numerous challenges in United States educational settings. These include cultural discontinuities between parents and teachers as described above, indifferent or unresponsive school officials, language barriers, and work demands that prevent parents from complying with schools' expectations and fully participating in their children's education (Pérez Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Tinkler, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009). Hence, this study brings attention to the fact that school districts must identify the best methods to reach out to this inevitably ever-changing population.

Parental involvement in schooling is necessary if parents are to exercise their voice and gain full entry into their child's education (Noguera, 2004). In many instances, however, the literature does not capture the types of activities that Latino immigrant parents engage in to support their children's *educación y estudio*. For example, schools do not see the ways that Latino immigrant parents are involved in their children's education. These families provide their children with general *buenos consejos* (good advice), such as telling them to do their best in school, advising them to get their homework completed, making sure they attend school every day, reminding them to have their *mochila* (school backpack) ready, contributing to the school's needs such as donating school supplies and materials, and making sure their children are *bien educados* (well behaved). What many schools do see, on the other hand, is the physical absence of Latino immigrant parents at Open Houses, Parent-

Teacher Association (PTA) events, parent-teacher conferences, fieldtrips, classroom events, and other school-based activities. These physical absences, though, are more likely due to the barriers these immigrant parents face in understanding and navigating the American education system. Issues like assigned meeting times, not feeling welcome, and language differences often prevent Latino immigrant families from becoming involved in these activities (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Yet even with these differences in understanding the reasons for parental involvement, a parent's involvement is a critical contributor to a student's overall academic success. Research over the past decade has also found that, regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to pass their classes, earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted, attend school regularly, have better social skills and behavior, and adapt well to school overall; they also tend to graduate and move on to postsecondary education. Furthermore, while some research suggests that parental involvement has the greatest impact on the academic success of younger children, most literature supports the contention that children of all ages with involved parents tend to have higher attendance, achievement levels, and more positive attitudes toward school than those whose parents are less involved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

The current study is important because the ever-growing Latino immigrant student population in North Carolina schools has created a need for educators and parents to learn how to work together for the good of the Latino children. There is much common ground between educators and parents; that is, both care about the education of the children and have

high aspirations for them. Thus, as they learn about school programs and resources that can help their children achieve their educational and career goals, parents become more active participants with greater attention focused on the school. Research has found that relationships exist between parental involvement and students' academic achievement, sense of well-being, attendance, attitudes toward school, homework readiness, time spent on homework, motivation, and educational aspirations (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). Conversely, once the schools learn about the Latino immigrant parents' aspirations and commitments, they too become more responsive in how they engage parents in children's education.

Overview of Research Design

The qualitative research design was appropriate for addressing the research questions and the purpose of the current study, as it seeks to describe how people view things and reason behind their beliefs, and allows the researcher to focus on the experiences and interpretations of individuals. Whereas quantitative research deals with measuring and accounting facts and exploring relationships between variables, a qualitative study looks at the relationship between subjects, experiences, and issues. The research questions for this study, then, suit the qualitative design because the answers can be more appropriately discovered within beliefs, attitudes, and behavior.

Reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam 1998), and it is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 1998). The current study sought to understand the experiences related to involvement in their children's education through the eyes of Mexican immigrant parents in North Carolina. A phenomenological approach to

research looks for the underlying meaning of an experience, and uses data reduction to analyze statements and themes from participants (Creswell, 2009). Moustakas (1994) noted that phenomenological research offers a critical narrative of a conscious experience. Van Manen (1990) added that the goal of phenomenological research is to gain a multifaceted and comprehensive description of an event or happening phenomenology, calling it the “systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures” (p. 11) of a lived occurrence. Therefore, in this study, a phenomenological approach was suitable for discovering the lived experiences of the parent participants, and how they make sense of these experiences (Simons, 2006).

This study used a phenomenological qualitative design to explore the educational experiences of Latino immigrant parents within a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina. The researcher obtained descriptions of the parents’ experiences through first-person accounts in formal and informal interviews and dialogue (Moustakas, 1994), and used these to identify the essence of the parents’ experiences with their children’s education. This method involved studying a small number of subjects via extensive interactions to forge patterns and relationship meanings.

Definitions of Key Terms

Communication: It is a two-way substantial communication between families and schools involving academic achievement and other school activities (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2004, p. 3)

EL Student: A student whose English has not yet developed to the point where they can take full advantage of instruction in English (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009). The

literature also refers to these children as English Language Learners (ELL), English as Second Language (ESL) students, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, and English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL) students.

Immigrants: Someone born in another country, regardless of parental citizenship (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Latino/Hispanic: Individuals with an ethnic background related to Spanish culture and origin. In this study, the term *Latino* is used except when reporting from sources using the term *Hispanic*. For further discussion on this, see the review of the literature in the following chapter (COSSMHO, 1986).

Low-Income: Refers to individuals or families earning less than twice the federal poverty level, with family size and the total yearly income of all working household members being used to assess eligibility (Low Income, 2017, n.p.).

New destination: A recent growth in immigrant population during the 1990s and beyond, which has occurred outside of traditional gateway cities and states towards places that have had little to no recent history of migration (Massey, 2007).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB): Legislation signed into law President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, mandating the education system to develop effective systems and increase student achievement over time. This act required schools to have 100% proficiency among students in math and reading by the academic school year ending 2014.

Parent: The mother, father, or legal guardian of a child, who has the most contact with the school about the student (Epstein & Salinas, 1993).

Parental involvement: The “participation of parents in regular, two-way, and

meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (Cowan & Edwards, 2005, p. A-54).

School-related activities: Include Open School events, Title I events, school committees, parent-teacher nights, and parent-teacher conferences (Cowan & Edwards, 2005, p. A-54).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined as threats to the internal and external validity of a study (Merriam, 1998). The following limitations were identified in the current study: (a) researcher-developed instrument and (b) researcher bias. First, the researcher developed the instruments (parents’ questions) used in this study. These questions have not been used in any other study, and therefore presented a limitation.

While every effort was made to minimize bias or subjectivity and assume a neutral stance, neutrality does not necessarily mean detachment (Patton, 2002). Thus, it is possible that my perceptions as researcher may have presented a certain bias in this study. To address this, I used a phenomenological approach to make systematic efforts to set aside my own prejudgments of the phenomenon being investigated, so that I could maintain a nonbiased approach (Moustakas, 1994). As alluded to before, this is better known as the *Epoché process*, in which the researcher remains free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon obtained from prior experiences or studies (Moustakas, 1994), taken from the Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, abstain from, or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. In this process, the researcher leaves behind their own experience so they can better understand the experience of the participants in the

study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

To uphold the Epoché process, I guarded against preconceived notions and expectations, and remained open to new ideas since phenomenological research does not try to distill phenomena to a convenient number of identifiable variables or control the content in which the phenomena are studied. Instead, phenomenology is situated in a paradigm that is nonhierarchical, holistic, and nonjudgmental (Moustakas, 1994). For example, what most research methods would call “subjects,” phenomenology considers as “participants” since they are taking part in the process and participate actively in the results. Phenomenological research does not attempt to artificially separate the participants into components of mind, body, and spirit, but rather, views that “self and world are inseparable components of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). Participants share their experiences as they happened, and the researcher’s role is to discern the essence of the experience within the context in which it takes place. This means that the researcher must take his or her biases out of the research to fully and completely focus on understanding the phenomenon through the participants’ eyes and voices (Moustakas, 1994). Due to my professional and personal experience working with parents and providing Parent Academies, I have personal insight of what parental involvement looks like within this community, and how they need to be involved in their child’s education. However, I was aware while conducting this study that I needed to focus on the experiences that were expressed by informants through their eyes, rather than mine.

The research methodologies assisted considerably in helping me maintain non-bias in conducting this study. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992, 1998) propose, I spent considerable time

collecting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical data. In manipulating the data, I admit being confronted with my own opinions and prejudice constantly; however, the barrage of empirical data in this study served to confirm and/or change my previously held notions. Also, Bogdan and Biklen (1992, 1998) maintain that the researcher's primary goal is to add knowledge and generate theory rather than to pass judgment or blame. I therefore attempted to describe as many dimensions as were visible from the findings, instead of only confirming my own initial ideas. Finally, I recorded field notes from my own responses and reactions to interviews and observations, and regularly questioned and kept my own biases in check (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 1998).

Yin (2003) claimed that the findings from a study like this are generalizable only to theory and not to the larger population. That is, the current research was based on interviews with seven Mexican immigrant parents, as well as document analysis and personal observations made during a school event, but the sample was too small to extend to a broader community. While it was not my intent to generalize the outcomes to settings other than the one studied, it was predicted that aspects of this school setting are like those of other priority school districts, and thus, these findings may be useful to educators in similar environments.

Delimitations of the Study

The sample population for this study was limited to Mexican immigrant parents who participate in the ESL program located at one of the suburban elementary schools in North Carolina's Southern School District. The sample represents the growing number of Mexican immigrant families in large school districts of North Carolina, but the ability to generalize to the entire Latino immigrant parent population in the school district is limited.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents of children in a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District, specifically about their involvement in their children's education. As the research stated, parental involvement has a large effect on student achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Green, Walker, & Sandler, 2007; Jeynes, 2005, 2007). Exploring Mexican immigrant parents' educational experiences and involvement will hopefully provide guidance on how best to welcome Latino immigrant parents as partners in their children's education. This study aimed to show that, by learning about the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents, teachers and schools will gain new insight on what strategies to use in reaching out in more meaningful ways to increase Latino parental involvement, which directly relates to higher student achievement for Latino students.

Chapter One included an introductory section, a statement of the research problem, purpose of study, research questions, definitions of terms, limitations and parameters of the study, significance of the study, and the structure for the remainder of the dissertation. It began by describing Latinos in the United States, Latino student academic achievement, and Latino immigrants in new destination. It then moved to parental involvement in the United States, covering how Latino immigrant parents view parental involvements. Chapter Two follows with a literature review on Latinos in the United States and the topic of parental involvement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review on parental involvement. The chapter begins with a discussion of the current state of Latinos in the United States, as well as new destinations for Latino immigrant families. The discussion then moved to highlight the academic achievement of Latino student, before concluding by shedding light on how Latino immigrant parents view parental involvement. The chapter finishes with a discussion of why American schools must invest in establishing stronger, more effective relationships with Latino parents.

Latinos in the United States

Defining Latino Populations

The generic term *Hispanic* was officially created by the United States Census Bureau to designate people who identified themselves in the 1970 Census as being of Spanish origin from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America, or other Hispanic cultures (COSSMHO, 1986). Instead of this term, though, many view and prefer the term *Latino* as more culturally appropriate. Acting as a superset of many nationalities, the term Latino is often preferred over the term Hispanic because it excludes Europeans such as Spaniards from being identified as ethnic minorities in the United States; it also includes Brazilians, who do not qualify as Hispanics since their mother tongue is Portuguese. Additionally, the term *Latino* for males (or *Latina* for females) is often the preferred way to refer to people originating from or having a heritage in Latin America (COSSMHO, 1986).

For this study, the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* are used interchangeably. It should be noted that the term *Latino* is used to denote both males and females together, while *Latina* refers specifically to females.

Latino Demographics in the United States

As of July 2015, there were 324,118,787 people living in the United States. Of those, 56.6 million were Latinos, an increase of 1.2 million (2.1%) from the year before. Strikingly, this number of new Latinos in the United States is nearly half of the overall population increase of approximately 2.5 million people during the period. Moreover, 1.15 million Latinos were added to the nation's population in just the year from July 2014 to July 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The Latino population represents approximately 17.6% of the total American population, which makes people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnicity or racial minority. Moreover, not only do Latinos represent the fastest-growing demographic group in the nation, the population is estimated to continue increasing, reaching 119 million by 2060 to constitute approximately 28.6% of the United States population by then (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

The overall Latino population in the country has a median age of 29 years old, making it younger than most other racial or ethnic groups such as non-Hispanic Blacks (34 years old), Asians (36 years old), and non-Hispanic whites (43 years old) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). These Latino families come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Latino families in California and parts of the Southwest were among the first European settlers in America, arriving in the 1500s. Other Hispanic families have come to the United

States more recently from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America to find work, education, and opportunities. Still others have come seeking refuge and asylum (Gonzalez, 2000). Overall, the nation's Latino population is diverse, as the 56 million Latinos in the United States trace their heritage to more than 20 Spanish-speaking nations worldwide. However, one nation, Mexico dominates the nation's Latino population, as nearly two-thirds, or 33.5 million (64%) of the total Latino population can trace their family origins there (United States Census Bureau, 2014). By comparison, Puerto Ricans are the nation's second largest Hispanic-origin group, numbering about 5 million (9.5%) nationwide. Following Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are Salvadorans (3.8%), Cubans (3.7%), Dominicans (3.1%), Guatemalans (2.3%) and Other (13.7%) of origins in places such as Colombia, Spain, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Argentina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Geographically, most Latinos still live in nine states that have large, long-standing Latino communities, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. However, other states have been growing in their Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In 2015, California, the state with the largest Hispanic population, had 15.2 million Latinos, and 55% of Latinos lived in just California, Florida, and Texas alone. The states with the largest percent growth in their Hispanic populations include nine states where the Latino population more than doubled, including a swath in the Southeastern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and South Carolina. The Latino population also more than doubled during this time in Maryland and South Dakota. However, national projections show the Latino population is still expected to grow by 86% between 2015 and 2050. New projections

state that the Latino population in America is projected to reach 119 million by 2060, which will make up approximately 28.6% of the total nation's population by that date.

New Destinations for Latino Immigrant Families

The growth of the immigrant populations in the last year has been due to Mexican immigrants, the numbers of which increased by 740,000 individuals from 2014 to 2015 to reach 12.1 million, 44% of the year's rise in the total immigrant population. Mexican immigrants are primarily concentrated in the West and Southwest, and more than half reside in California or Texas. In 2013, the top five states with the largest proportion of the total Mexican immigrant population were California (37%), Texas (22%), Illinois (6%), Arizona (4%), and Georgia (2%) (Zeigler & Camarota, 2015).

Many immigrant families are arriving to new communities, many of which are in rural communities and regions. These nontraditional immigration destination states have come to be called "New Destination" states (Dalla, DeLeon, Stuhmer, & Carreno, 2010). This increase in population growth in these new destination communities carries several individual and community-level implications that warrant more research attention. For instance, education is one area in which the implications of this population change are likely to be particularly acute. Schools in areas that previously had very few Latinos now provide the primary source of education for these students, many of whom exhibit risk factors that may place them at a disadvantage in the American public education system. Although the majority of Latino students in public schools are native-born, approximately two-thirds of them have at least one foreign-born parent (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), and many Latinos in new destinations are foreign-born (Lichter & Johnson, 2009). Thus, it is likely that Latino

students and parents, especially those in new destinations, may be unfamiliar with the American education system (López, 2001). Latino public school students are also disproportionately more likely than their non-Latino counterparts to live in poverty and, of all the major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, are the least likely to have college-educated parents (Koball, Chau, & Douglas-Hall, 2006). Furthermore, many Latino public school students identify or are perceived as non-White, placing them at increased risk of racial discrimination (Fry & Gonzales, 2008).

Research is needed to assess how schools in new Latino destinations are accommodating the academic, social, and linguistic needs of this group of students, and how are they involving the parents in the students' education. While research shows that both destination and school factors matter for the educational outcomes of immigrant and minority children (Pong & Hao, 2007), the current literature on Latino education is based almost entirely on the experiences of Latinos in established destinations, in part because this group's geographic diversification is a relatively recent phenomenon (Marrow, 2005). Therefore, little is known about the schools that Latinos in new destinations attend, nor is much understood about how these schools are incorporating the parents in their children's education.

New Destination – Latinos in the South

Since the 1980s, the Latino population in the Southeast has been growing faster than in any other region of the country, emerging suddenly in communities where Latinos were a sparse presence just a decade or two before. Instead of moving to traditional destinations in

California and Southwestern states like Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico as their ancestors had for two centuries, Latinos began moving to new immigrant destinations in Southeastern states (Pew Research Center, 2005). Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population grew rapidly and significantly for the first time in many Southern states, including South Carolina (148%), Alabama (145%), Tennessee (134%), Kentucky (122%), Arkansas (114%), and North Carolina (111%) (Pew Research Center, 2011). These non-traditional immigrant-receiving communities began to indicate the Latinization of the Southeastern United States. These new immigrant destinations in the South typically have not included Florida or Texas, both of which already have long histories of Latino settlement (Nissen & Grenier, 2001; Stepick, Grenier, Castro, & Dunn, 2003). Notably, the Latino population in South Carolina is the 29th largest in the nation, with 0.5% of the entire United States Latino population (approximately 232,000 individuals). More than half (59%) of the Latino population in South Carolina originates from Mexico, followed by Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Colombia (Motel & Patten, 2012).

The increase in Latino movement to the South is in part attributed to the United States-driven free-trade policies and economic crises across Latin America, as well as environmental disasters and political unrest in Central America. Latinos' own desires to "start over" in places with smaller ethnic communities and less resistance to Latino settlement has also been noted as a reason for their immigration to these new destinations (Odem, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2005; Winders, 2008).

New Destination – Latinos in North Carolina

North Carolina has become one of the new destinations for Latino immigrants (Fyler, 2016), who are now playing a pivotal role in reshaping the state's demographic and economic landscape. For more than thirty years, hundreds of thousands of people from Mexico and other Latino American countries have moved to North Carolina as economic, political, and environmental refugees, attempting to find jobs and a better life for their families (Gill, 2010, 2012).

During the 1990s, North Carolina's Latino population increased by 394%, more than any other state in the nation. Still, in 2000, Hispanic/Latinos accounted for only 4.71% of the North Carolina population (Pew Research Center, 2011). In just a decade, however, this number nearly doubled. There were 800,120 Latinos living in North Carolina in 2010, which was 8.4% of the state's total population and the sixth fastest rate of Hispanic growth in the nation that year (Hildreth, 2011). In 2012, there were 845,420 Hispanic individuals living in North Carolina, representing 9% of the state's population (Pew Research Center, 2011).

North Carolina has contributed greatly to the quickly growing national population of 55 million Latinos, now the largest minority group in the country. It has become the 11th largest state in the nation, and most (64.5%) of its high Latino population identify as Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Mexicans are drawn to North Carolina by a promising labor market, the prospect of earning a better living, the opportunity of educational advancement, and the chance to reunite with family (Motel & Patten, 2012).

Immigrants and their children are growing in their shares of North Carolina's population. In 2013, North Carolina was home to 749,426 immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), the foreign-born share of the state's population having risen from 1.7% in 1990, to 5.3% in 2000, to 7.6% in 2013. Children ages 5 to 9 comprised the largest age group among the Latino population (nearly 106,000 individuals), with those ages 0 to 4 being the second largest group (99,920 individuals). Together, nearly 1 of every 4 Latino residents in North Carolina was under the age of 10 in 2012. Just over half (53%) of North Carolina Latinos were born in the United States or one of its territories, and 47% were foreign-born. Examining the top birth places reveals two main locations: Mexico and North Carolina. Nearly 270,000 (32%) of North Carolina's Hispanics were born in Mexico, while another 260,000 (31%) were born in the state (Tippett, 2014).

Latino Students in the United States

Today, there are 74 million students in the United States, 17.5 million of which are Latinos—the largest racial and ethnic minority group of children, and the fastest-growing. The number of Hispanic public school students is projected to increase to 15.5 million in 2024 to represent 29% of the total enrollment that year (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015). Notably, though, more than 90% of Latino children were born in the United States, and much of the recent growth in the Latino population has been the result of births to families already living here rather than immigration. While the great majority of Latino children are, therefore, American citizens, many have family members who immigrated to the United States. This includes parents who are legal permanent residents or naturalized citizens, as well as those who lack legal status. As of 2013, more than half of Latino children had at least

one parent who was born outside the United States. Thus, while most Latino children today are not themselves an immigrant, the immigrant experience is nonetheless a recent reality for many of their families.

Among Latino children in the United States, 7 in 10 have Mexican heritage. The next-largest group is Puerto Rican, followed by Salvadoran, Dominican, Cuban, and then those with heritage in other countries in Central and South America. Far from homogeneous, the experiences of Latino children often reflect their specific national origins; for example, children from Central America typically come from families who have fled from violence and poverty in rural areas, while Cubans and South Americans, on average, are among the economically better off. Most Hispanic children (62%) are part of low-income families, conventionally defined as those with incomes less than twice the federal poverty level, where many experts believe families can just meet basic needs. Roughly 1 in 3 Hispanic children lives in poverty, while 1 in 8 lives in what is considered deep poverty with a family income of less than half the poverty line (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). Additionally, many Latino students are concentrated in schools with high degrees of overall poverty (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that, in 2011-2012, 37% of Hispanic students were enrolled in elementary schools where most students were eligible for the free or reduced-price school lunch program. In comparison, 50% of African Americans, 38% of American Indian/Alaskan Natives, and 9% of White students were in schools where the majority were low-income (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2014).

Latino students are also often enrolled in highly segregated schools. In 2011, approximately 60% of Hispanic students attended schools where the majority was minorities.

In comparison, 55% of African American, 38% of Asian, and 4% of White students were enrolled in segregated schools (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2014).

Latino Students in North Carolina

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that Latino children made up the fastest-growing segment of the state's student population in 2014. In the fall of 2014, 14.3% (206,400 students) of North Carolina's public school population was of Latino origin. Of those, 62,207 were in elementary school; 15,797 were in middle school; and 12,044 were in high school. A large number (90,048 individuals) of those students were classified as English Language Learners (Public Schools of NC, 2014).

Academic Achievement of Latino Students

Per the United States Department of Education (2003, 2014), Latino students have accelerated their progress in math and reading in the last decade or more. Between 2003 and 2013, the average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores among Hispanic fourth graders increased nine points (from 222 to 231) for math and seven points (from 200 to 207) for reading, and scores among eighth graders increased 11 points (from 252 to 263) for math and 11 points (from 245 to 256) for reading. High school seniors have also improved their average math scores by eight points (from 133 to 141) and their reading score by four points (from 272 to 276). Of note, the average math and reading scores for Latino students were lower than that of other groups, but higher than African Americans (NCES, 2013a).

In 2013, Latinos were the second largest group enrolled in secondary education, representing 22% of high school students compared to Whites (53%), African Americans (16%), and Asians (5%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The large Latino representation in high schools is projected to increase in the coming years. Estimates suggest that, between 2008 and 2019, the number of Hispanic public high school graduates will increase to 41%, compared to Asians (30%), African Americans (9%), and American Indian/Alaska Natives (2%) (WICHE, 2012). The number of White high school graduates is projected to decline by 12% (Prescott & Bransberger, 2012).

During the 2011 to 2012 school year, 21% of all special education students were Hispanic, compared to Whites (54%), African Americans (19%), and Asians (2%) (NCES, 2013a). In 2013, there were 25.1 million students in Grades K-12 who were not fully proficient in English, commonly known as English Language Learners (ELL). Latino students make up a majority at 64% (16.2 million) of the total ELL population (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). These students face unique challenges in mastering academic content while simultaneously developing proficiency in English (Passel & Cohn, 2008; WICHE, 2012).

Latino high-school dropout rates have decreased, but they remain higher than other groups. Between 2003 and 2012, the Latino student dropout rate decreased nearly by half (from 24% to 13%), yet was still higher than that of African Americans (8%) and Whites (4%) (NCES, 2013a). Latinos were less likely to graduate high school on time than other groups, except for African Americans. In 2010, 71% of Latino high school students

graduated within four years of enrolling in high school, compared to Asians (94%), Whites (83%), and African Americans (66%) (NCES, 2013b).

As previously stated, the Latino student population is growing faster than that of any other group. Latinos made up 25% of the nation's public school student population in 2013, and this number is projected to increase to 30% by 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). It is encouraging that the achievement for Latino students has risen over time, but they still fall behind their White peers on many measures of achievement and attainment as they struggle academically and drop out of school in high numbers. As Latinos make up an increasingly large and prominent part of our diverse population, the success of Latino students is critical to the success of our nation. Thus, measures must be employed to close the achievement gap between Latino students and their White peers. Parental involvement is one such strategy that has been proven to increase student achievement, and the involvement of Latino parents in their children's education was the current study's topic of exploration.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in education has changed considerably over the last 200 years. From home tutors of the wealthy, to the one-room schoolhouses of the 1800s, parental involvement has looked and meant different things over time. In the 1960s, federal legislation mandating parental involvement in school was implemented (Berger, 1991). The first federally-funded legislation program was Project Head Start in 1964, which provided free preschool education to disadvantaged inner-city children, and mandated parental involvement activities for participating families (Office of Head Start, 2015). Additionally, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was one of the first legislative

acts requiring parental involvement plans in schools (ESEA, 1965). These programs flourished in the 1970s, along with the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for families with special needs children. At the same time, the federal government started officially supporting afterschool parent education models and programming to help parents navigate the educational system (Berger, 1991). Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, school leaders and policymakers realized the importance of parental involvement for student's school success, and thus, federal, state, and local policies became more and more common (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2004).

Along with Goals 2000 Educate, ESEA was instrumental in furthering educational progress in its inclusion of parental involvement policies. Launched by President Lyndon B. Johnson, it was viewed as the most important educational component of the “War on Poverty” (McLaughlin, 1975). Goals 2000 Educate was signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton; it required all schools to promote partnerships to increase parental involvement, and endorsed the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Austin, n.d.). ESEA was later reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) that reauthorized ESEA was signed into effect by President George W. Bush, and provided a structure for families, educators, and communities to work together to improve teaching and learning. Like the parental involvement provisions in ESEA, NCLB stresses a shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement as it expanded public school choice and supplemental educational services for eligible children in low-performing schools, local development of parental involvement plans, and the building of parents' capacity to use

effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement. NCLB recognizes that parents are their children's first and most important teachers, thus, for students to succeed in school, parents must participate actively in the children's academic lives as they enter school (Berger, 1995; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; NCLB, 2002).

In sum, due to the importance of parental participation in raising the educational standards in this country, the federal government and national agencies have mandated that teachers be trained to work with parents and school develop partnerships with parents (Stone, 2000). To this end, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Standards for Educational Leaders have developed mandates that require pre-service teachers to be trained to collaborate with parents (Canole & Young, 2013; Stone, 2000).

Defining Parental Involvement

Arriving at a clear and simple definition of parental involvement has been a major challenge for researchers, as there are inconsistencies in the literature about the operational definition about the term (Fan, 2001). Furthermore, parental involvement has historically been described in many ways. Examples of ways parents partner with schools include working in schools to assist teachers as volunteers or tutors, checking homework, monitoring how children spend time after school, attending school events and teacher/parent conferences, participating in decision- and policy-making, serving as volunteers or tutors, and establishing educational expectations (Bloom, 1992; Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jowett & Baginsky, 1988; Wolfendale, 1983).

In its 2006 reauthorization of NCLB, *parental involvement* is defined in detail as being related directly to communication between families and schools:

...the two-way substantial communication between families and schools involving academic achievement and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; [and] that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2004, p. 3)

Despite the lack of a clear definition of the term, most researchers would agree that parental involvement should center on increasing the communication between the home and school as well as parents' support of learning at home (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Most researchers would also agree with the widely-adopted typology for viewing different levels of parental involvement suggested by Epstein (1995) (Christenson & Hurley, 1992; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Georgiou, 1997; Hong & Ho, 2005, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Trotman, 2001). Epstein, who directs the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnership Schools at John's Hopkins University, proposes a six-part framework that has been adopted by the National PTA, the National School Boards Association, and the departments of education in several states (Epstein, 2001). She identified six ways for schools to involve parents:

1. **Parenting:** Schools assist families with parenting skills and provide family support.

2. **Communicating:** Schools communicate with families about programs, curricula, and student progress, and create two-way communication channels with the home.
3. **Volunteering:** Schools actively recruit parents as volunteers in a range of activities.
4. **Learning at home:** Schools help involve parents in their child's learning at home, including doing homework, helping their children set goals, and other activities related to the school curriculum.
5. **Decision-making:** Schools include families as participants in school decisions, governance matters, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.
6. **Collaborating with the community:** Schools help coordinate their own resources and services for families, students, and the school with community, business, and cultural organizations. (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002)

After two decades of research, the general conclusion regarding parental involvement is that it benefits the parent, the teacher, and especially the child (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

While knowing that parental involvement is beneficial is important, we should also know how such involvement benefits children so that they can garner the most significant benefits.

Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) understand the complexity of parental involvement, and notes:

Simply stating that parental involvement benefits children does not explain how involvement becomes such a positive force. As with any human action, parental involvement is not a fixed event but a dynamic and ever changing practice that varies depending on the context in which it occurs, the resources parents and schools bring to their actions, and the students' particular needs. (p. 467)

Traditionally, schools have put in place activities focusing on parent participation in organized activities at school, such as joining the PTA, attending parent teacher conferences and school events, volunteering for classroom activities, or giving parents “specific guidelines, materials, and/or training to carry out school-like activities in the home” (López, 2001, p. 256). For many teachers and school administrators, parental involvement is centered on those parents who can attend these events and activities, versus those who do not. Those who do not are viewed as “uncaring” and unengaged in their children’s education (Peña, 2000). Hence, for schools to be more effective with parental involvement, they need to understand the benefits of parental involvement as well as the barriers that prevent parents from participating in their children’s education, especially Latino immigrants (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Epstein (1992) argues that “students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have families who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved” (p. 1141). The general emphasis and desire for parental involvement has spawned decades of research that point to the benefits of parents’ involvement in their child’s education. Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed and analyzed 85 studies that documented the comprehensive benefits of parental involvement in children's education. They found benefits for students that included “higher grades and test scores; better attendance and more homework done; fewer placements in special education; more positive attitudes and behavior; higher graduation

rates; and greater enrollment in postsecondary education" (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1).

Henderson and Berla (1994) also argued that, when families are involved, the school benefits along with the student, noting an increase in teacher morale, greater support from the families, higher evaluations of teachers by parents, more student success, and improved reputations in the community. Moreover, their findings revealed that parents, too, benefit when families are involved in their child's education, writing:

Parents develop more confidence in the school. The teachers they work with have higher opinions of them as parents and higher expectations of their children, too. As a result, parents develop more confidence not only about helping their children learn at home, but about themselves as parents. Furthermore, when parents become involved in their children's education, they often enroll in continuing education to advance their own schooling. (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1)

A meta-analysis study was conducted by Fan and Chen (2001) to synthesize the quantitative literature about the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement. Findings indicated that parental involvement factors have a longitudinal effect on student's academic growth. Specifically, families' aspirations regarding their children's educational attainment and communication about school activities and studies have a positive effect on children's academic growth (Fan & Chen, 2001).

A similar meta-analysis of parental involvement research by Jeynes (2005) found a relationship between parental involvement and student achievement relative to race and gender. He recorded a positive correlation between academic achievement and parental involvement for minority students in urban schools, suggesting that the involvement of

minority parents in their child's schooling may reduce the achievement gap between White and minority children. That is, children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals work together to bridge the gap between the culture at home and that of the school. The study also showed that parental involvement activities are effectively planned and well-implemented result in substantial benefits to children, parents, educators, and the school, including higher student achievement, regardless of ethnic or racial background, socioeconomic status, or parents' education level. When parents are involved, children generally achieve better grades, test scores, and attendance, and consistently complete their homework. Students have better self-esteem, are more self-disciplined, and show higher aspirations and motivation toward school. Such a positive attitude about school, in turn, often results in improved behavior in school and less suspension for disciplinary reasons. Moreover, children with involved parents are less likely to be placed in special education and remedial classes (Jeynes, 2005).

Ingram et al. (2007) conducted a study concerning parental involvement and its relationship to improved student achievement, working with more than 220 parents at a Chicago public elementary school. Results indicated that any school with unsatisfactory student achievement may benefit from focusing on building parental involvement to increase performance. They maintained that schools may increase their student achievement levels by creating parental involvement programs to incite parents to work with their children at home.

As confirmed by a range of studies, research suggests that parental involvement in their child's education generally benefits the student's learning as well as the school's overall

success (Ballantine 1990; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007; Ingram et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Sussell, Carr, & Hartman, 1996).

Barriers to Effective Parental Involvement

Parents have different beliefs about what can act as a barrier to effective parental involvement, but the following have all been cited as barriers to parental involvement: poverty, language, culture, work, transportation, different views of education, helping with homework, and negative school experiences (Quezada et al., 2003). Psychological barriers exist as well (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Language

Diversity in our schools is continually growing. Language barriers are thus becoming more problematic for families that do not speak English (Boethel, 2003). Parents for whom English is not their first language find it difficult to be involved with school activities or volunteer opportunities due to the language barrier. Notices that teachers send home should be written in the families' native language; additionally, interpreters should be available during conferences, or the parents' extended families could be used to assist in communications between home and school (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Inger, 1992). Besides the language and communication barriers, some parents' native cultures discourage them from becoming too involved in their children's schooling, believing that doing so is disrespectful to the teachers (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Long Work Hours

There are some parents living in poverty that work long hours and have unpredictable schedules, and jobs like these prevent them from becoming involved in their child's education. This creates an inconsistent and irregular schedule that makes it difficult for parents to find time to be involved. In their free time, such parents may need to catch up on sleep, run errands, pay bills, or take care of other small children (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Also, in many cases, school activities or events are held at times that are convenient for the school, but not always convenient for the families (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Thus, though these working parents would like to participate, many are unable to do so.

Different Views of Education

Some immigrant parents view education differently due to varied cultural beliefs, and thus may not know how to interact with the school; or, they may feel that the education of their children is the school's issue to handle. Such cultural and ethnic backgrounds have values that differ from the perceived "American" values. Teachers may incorrectly view these parents as disinterested or unconcerned when, in fact, the parents may be interested, but just value education differently than teachers understand. That is, some cultures value education so much that they believe minimal parental influence will allow the experts to take charge and make all the decisions (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

Homework

Due to their lack of education, some parents may doubt their abilities and feel they are unsuited to assist their children with academics. This may restrain them from becoming

involved with the school, or helping their children with schoolwork (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Moreover, these parents may be perceived by school staff as apathetic when it comes to their children, when in fact, parents act ally doubt their own abilities. Some may not know how to step in to ensure homework is being completed, while at the same time trying to promote responsibility and let their children do things on their own. Other parents may be less involved because they feel like they know little about the curriculum or how to help (Griffin & Galassi, 2010).

Parents' Negative School Experiences

Parents may also avoid schools because of negative experiences they have had in the past as former students themselves, or with their own children. Since parents are most frequently contacted by the school in the wake of problems, many parents may presume there is some sort of problem or something is wrong when the school reaches out to them. Furthermore, when they are contacted, they are at times talked down to or blamed for incidences, and even spoken to by school staff in a business-like fashion (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). This arguably creates an air of impersonal connection. Such research highlights a key point that must be considered by any district that is developing plans for parental involvement—schools in low-income communities should contact parents and families more often about positive accomplishments of their children, which would work to offset other parental contact that focus on negative matters like behavior or academic problems (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Transportation and Other Obstacles

Matters related to transportation also complicate the issue of barriers to parental involvement. Griffin and Galassi (2010) note that this includes lack of a vehicle or money for bus fare, or the need to arrange longer child care to visit the school. Knowledge of school rules or policies, as well as poor communication from the school about events or meetings, are two other of the many complicating issues. Not being able to participate as they might wish can be overwhelming and even defeating if nothing is done by the school or by the parents. Most of these parents want to see their children learn and make a better life for themselves, and believe that education is the way to get out of poverty (Drummond & Stipek, 2004).

Parental involvement is important in all schools, but it is particularly crucial in low-income communities. Unfortunately, despite the benefits of parental involvement to the students and the school, research indicates that low-income parents participate much less than do their counterparts who live above the low-income status (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Latino Immigrant Parents' Perspective on Parental Involvement

The assumption that Latino immigrant parents are not involved in their children's education stems from a discrepancy between the cultural models of schooling in the United States and the countries from which those Latino immigrant parents originate (Valdés, 1996). Such a perceived lack of Latino parental involvement is thus due to their new-comer status, as it is difficult for them to become involved in schools when expectations for parental involvement are not clear, language is a barrier, and they are still in survival mode learning to

function in their new homes. Latino immigrant parents also need to constantly adjust function in their new communities. Even more, most Latino immigrant parents do not have the information to provide the type of assistance needed in American schools, and are unsure how to participate and communicate with school staff (Young, 1996).

Overall, immigrant Latino parents tend to use methods of involvement they were familiar with from their native culture, such as sending notes or verbal messages to the teacher with their children and attending social functions at school (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdés, 1996). These parents have different expectations about the roles of teachers and parents in the educational process. They perceive their role as providing nurturing, teaching values, and instilling good behavior, whereas schools expected them to handle the actual teaching of their children (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). Zarate and Meyer (2007) note that Latino immigrant parents provide informal academic support such as making sure their children attend school on time, provide a quiet time and place to do homework and monitor school attendance. Latino immigrant parents also provide *consejos* (advice) about school experiences as well as moral and emotional support by talking with their children about the value of education. Educators need to understand that the absence of Latino parents at school events does not necessarily mean they do not care. Rather, it could be because they do not speak the language or have access to childcare or transportation; other reasons could relate to difficult work schedules or their lack of familiarity with the educational system (Zarate & Meyer, 2007).

In their way, Latino immigrant parents care very much about their children's schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; López, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Since Latino immigrant

parents view the school as being responsible for the teaching, when the school asks them to assist with school activities, they may be uncertain about what role they should assume or how they should feel (Tinkler, 2002). They may even find it disrespectful to make any suggestion or interfere with the school, feeling as if they are intruding upon the school's territory (Walker, Ice, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Hence, although Latino immigrant parents are often marginalized in school due to race, class, and cultural differences, many school personnel suspect Latino immigrant parents of not caring about their children's education. To the contrary, Latino immigrant parents care deeply about the education of their children, and take very seriously the journey to come to the United States of America to provide a better education to their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Latino immigrant parents strongly value education and have high expectations for their children (Fuligni & Fuligni, 2007; López, 2001; Valdés, 1996), but it is important to pay attention to the barriers these parents may face as they work to participate in their children's schooling, if we are to gain a new understanding of their parental involvement. There are still many reasons why Latino immigrant parents do not participate as much in their children's education. Some are due to mistrust issues, differences in how they define parental involvement, negative attitudes of school administration and school personnel toward Latino immigrant parents, and a lack of bilingual personnel to assist them with the language issue (Valdés, 1996). As Delgado-Gaitan (2004) observes, when schools complain about Latino immigrant parents not being engaged in their child's education, they are in fact referring to less engaged Latino immigrant parents who lack understanding of the educational system in the United States. These parents may have difficulty accessing school resources to

assist their children because of their limited understanding of the system. Educators thus face challenges engaging these parents. Nonetheless, regardless of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, families and schools can work together for the benefit of students.

Latino Immigrant Parents' Understanding of *Educación*

There is no doubt that parental involvement benefits students' educational success. However, a proper understanding of Latino immigrant parental involvement is necessary to distinguish the ways in which Latino students negotiate the cultural differences at school and the role their parents play in their education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Latino immigrant parents need to know that educators are interested in meeting their needs and are respectful of their language and cultural differences. Reaching out to the Latino immigrant parents is a way that schools can build trust as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with them (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

De Gaetano (2007) admits one of the critical issues for schools is how to involve Latino immigrant parents in the education process. Connecting across the home and school requires educators and parents to learn about each other's culture. Schools must be acutely aware of the customs and beliefs of the various populations they serve if they are to work collaboratively for the benefit of the students. In the Latino culture, for example, "teachers are highly respected and any interference from parents may be considered rude and disrespectful" (Tinkler, 2002). Latino parents raise their children within the cultural frame of *educación*, and place a high value on providing their children with a *buena educación* (Valdés, 1996). The word *educación* (education) among traditional Latino parents is more comprehensive than the generally accepted American usage; that is, much like the notion of

holistic education, this word means more than mere academic schooling. Traditional Latino families use the term to describe the education process, which goes beyond earning good grades in school to include how children behave (politeness), how they are willing to act collectively with others, how they support and respect each other, and how they show deference to authority (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). The concept of togetherness and working in the interest of the group can be described as *collectivism*. Specifically, in the context of the Latino home culture, collectivism refers to the interdependent relationships of family members, as the Latino family is focused on the well-being of the group rather than just the individuals. These relationships are not competitive in nature, which is a characteristic trait of American society whose public-school system seems to emphasize individual competitiveness and accomplishment (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Trumbull et al., 2001).

This different way of approaching everyday life and interpersonal interactions seems to cause misunderstanding between some Latino immigrant children, and subsequently, their families, and the school. Therefore, it is important for teachers to become familiar with the culture and belief systems characteristic of the families that they serve, especially if they truly seek to maximize the strengths that ethnic minority children bring from their home environment (Duran et al., 2010). Such understandings are also critical in forging successful home-school partnerships with ethnic/minority families that are respectful, inclusive, and empowering (Pérez Carreon et al., 2005).

The way Latino immigrant parents understand what it means to be involved in their child's education is very different from the way that mainstream parents think. Latino parents can only meet an expectation of being involved in their children's education if schools

explicitly define what involvement entails. Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) studied a workshop series offered to Latino immigrant parents in a large urban school in California. The workshops provided information about collaboration between home and school, how parents can help with academics, and how the educational system operates. The Latino immigrant parents that attended the workshops became more active in their children's education by initiating more contacts with teachers, attending more parent conferences and workshops, and providing reading and homework support (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Quiocho and Daoud (2006) maintain that explaining involvement to Latino immigrant parents—what it is, how it is done, and how it benefits their children—helps alleviate misunderstanding. When educators discuss parental involvement, they are usually referring to formal involvement, where typically parents are physically involved in the schools (De Gaetano, 2004), such as attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting and other events, chaperoning for fieldtrips, or volunteering in the classroom (Zarate & Meyer, 2007). On the other hand, Latino immigrant parents feel that by doing so would encroach on the school's territory. They also have different beliefs regarding what it means to be involved in their children's education.

Chapter Summary

The classroom teacher is arguably the key to changing the level of parental participation. However, this will only occur when teacher education programs start to implement the recommendations found in the literature by providing professional development to teachers with the skills and strategies necessary for fostering alliances with those who are so critical to a child's success in school—the parents. For Latino immigrant

parents, teachers must continually emphasize the fact that the parents are the single most important factor in their children's success in school. Moreover, Latino immigrant parents can exert a tremendous influence on their children's education without understanding algebra and without tutoring their children in chemistry. All parents possess the capacity to engage in the essential behaviors that lead to academic success, and the classroom teacher can assist the parents in understanding those behaviors.

In addition, understanding the obstacles Latino immigrant parents and teachers face when working together for the benefit of the student will make it easier to determine how those obstacles can be overcome. Effectively involving parents means that schools must acknowledge the diversities of their populations and be mindful of the varying perspectives of these diverse people on involvement. Latino immigrant parents often misunderstand their role in their children's education because they do not understand the concept of involvement as defined by the school (Valdés, 1996).

The research literature on parental involvement in the education of their children supports the notion that it has a positive impact on the students' academic achievement. However, there is little research attention given to Latino immigrant parents about their experiences with parental involvement (Pérez Carreon et al., 2005). The following chapter outlines the phenomenological research design of the current study's efforts to understand the underlying meaning and experience of parental involvement through the eyes of Latino immigrant parents in North Carolina.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three includes an overview of the qualitative paradigm and the phenomenological approach used in the current research to better understand the experiences of Latino immigrant parents in a “new destination” state; that is, this study sought to examine things such as how parents navigate the educational system, how the school provides outreach, and whether the school provides communication or material in Spanish. In addition, this chapter discusses the specific research methods used in the study. The following are discussed: the research design, research questions, setting/sample selection, participants and informed consent, data collection, data analysis, research validity, reliability and trustworthiness, limitation of the study, researcher’s subjectivity statement, ethical issues, and informed consent.

Rationale for a Phenomenological, Qualitative Research Design

Due to the research question and its purpose, the first choice for this study was to do a qualitative study, since such research focuses on the experiences and interpretations of individuals as it seeks to describe how people view things and why. Whereas quantitative research focuses on measuring and accounting facts and looking at relationships between variables, qualitative research looks at the relationships between subjects, experiences, and issues, making it ideal because the answers for this study were more appropriately discovered within beliefs, attitudes, and behavior.

Furthermore, reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998), and it is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 1998). This study worked to seek out the experiences of parental involvement through the eyes of Mexican immigrant

parents in North Carolina. A phenomenological approach is suitable when a qualitative researcher desires to discover the lived experiences of participants and how participants make sense of their lived experiences (Simon, 2006). A researcher using the phenomenological approach looks for the underlying meaning of an experience, and employs data reduction to analyze statements and themes from their participants (Creswell, 2009). For this study, then, a phenomenological, qualitative approach was appropriate.

Phenomenological Qualitative Study Design

This study used a phenomenological, qualitative design in its efforts to explore the educational experiences of Mexican immigrant parents within a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina. The researcher obtained descriptions of the experiences through first-person accounts in both formal and informal interviews and dialogue. The phenomenological research design used was based on the model developed by Moustakas (1994), who noted that phenomenological research offers a critical narrative of a conscious experience. Van Manen (1990) added that phenomenology is the “systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures” (p. 11) of a lived occurrence, and maintained that the goal of phenomenological research is to gain a multifaceted, comprehensive description of an event or happening.

In this study, the researcher identified the essence of the human experiences of a phenomenon through the descriptions provided by the participants in the study, thus making it a phenomenological approach. The choice of this method was guided by the overarching research question: “What are the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents with a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District, and how are the parents being involved

in their children's education?" The research involved studying a small number of subjects via extensive interactions to identify larger patterns and glean meaning from relationships.

Phenomenological research aims to bring clarity and present situations lived by persons in daily life (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). This type of research does not try to distill phenomena to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the content in which the phenomena are studied; rather, phenomenology is situated in a paradigm that is nonhierarchical, holistic, and nonjudgmental. To this end, what most methods call "subjects" are designated in phenomenology as "participants." Moreover, the holistic nature of phenomenological research is in its view of "self and world...[as] inseparable components of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). In this study, participants shared their experiences as they happened, and the researcher's role was to discern the essence of the experience within the context in which it took place. The process made it important for the researcher to "bracket" her own experiences to fully understand those of the study's participants (Nieswiadomy, 1993). This concept, better known as the *Epoché process*, means that the researcher must take his or her biases out of the research to fully and completely focus on understanding the phenomenon that the participants have either dealt with or are dealing with currently through their eyes and voices (Moustakas, 1994). The Epoché process is discussed further below.

A qualitative phenomenological design allowed the researcher in the current study to use observations and in-depth interviews to understand the breadth and depth of each participant's life circumstances, experiences, and emotional framework (Brennan, 1998). This method helped the researcher clearly understand the participants' perceptions, focusing

directly on their human experience of a phenomenon. Creswell (2009) explained that narrative inquiry seeks to tell the stories of an individual using a comprehensive interview protocol to collect the individual's stories. For this study's narrative inquiry, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with seven parents who share a common experience as Mexican immigrant parents in the same suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina.

This study utilized in-depth interviews of participants, which are consistent with the five characteristics identified by Moustakas (1994):

1. It seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience;
2. It seeks to uncover the qualitative rather than quantitative factors in behavior and experience;
3. It engages the total self of the research participant, and sustains personal and passionate involvement;
4. It does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships;
5. It is illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores. (p. 105)

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to interview seven Mexican immigrant parents to discover common themes and patterns relating to their experiences with involvement in a suburban elementary school from the Southern School

District. This study asked parents about their experiences being involved in school activities, supporting their children's schoolwork, and actively and regularly communicating with school personnel. As discussed earlier, Mexican immigrant parents' expectations, access, and roles can remain a mystery and cause feelings of isolation, confusion, and marginalization, some of which can be remedied by more intentional and strategic efforts of a school district.

The following principal research question guided this study: *What are the experiences of Mexican immigrant families within a suburban elementary school, and how are they being involved in their children's education?* Specific interview questions assisted in obtaining data to answer this research question. Qualitative researchers pose sub-questions in addition to the central question; these sub-questions contain the same aspects as the central question such as being open-ended, natural in language, limited in number, and emerging, and can provide detail to the questions in the study (Creswell, 2005).

The following sub-questions guided this study:

1. RQ1: What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?
 - a. What do you believe will make your child successful in school?
 - b. How do you understand the role of the school and teachers in the U.S.?
2. RQ2: What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?
 - a. Do you have the same beliefs as the school about parental involvement?
 - b. Does the school support you in getting involved in your child's education?

- c. Is it easy for you to understand your child's school and how the school works in the U.S.?
 - d. In what ways do you feel you contribute to your child's academic performance?
3. RQ3: What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?
- a. How does the school help you to stay involved in your child's education?
 - b. What are the challenges that keep you from getting involved or helping as much as you would like?
 - c. Are there social issues that keep you from getting involved in your child's education? For example, shyness, English language, learning U.S. cultural norms.
 - d. What are some obstacles that keep you from understanding what is happening at school? What would help you understand?
4. RQ4: What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?
- a. What information, resources, and guidance do you believe are needed to enhance your involvement in your child's education?
5. RQ5: Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?
- a. What are some of the things the school is doing to show you they care about you?

This phenomenological study allowed the researcher to collect data through participants' interviews and observations to identify common themes from discussions and interactions. A phenomenological design is especially helpful for researchers who seek to study the depth, rather than the breadth, of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The study used this

method to improve approaches in reaching out to Mexican immigrant parents. Additionally, face-to-face interviews yielded high response rates and allowed the researcher to observe the environment and nonverbal communication of the participants (Neuman, 2003). Using a phenomenological approach allowed this researcher to dig deeper into the responses and experiences of the participants by using much more extensive questions and probes during the interview. The central theme for this study involved exploring the complexity of Mexican immigrant parents' experiences. The specific, open-ended interview questions used are listed in Appendix A and Appendix B, in Spanish and English versions, respectively.

Site Selection and Sampling Criteria

Research Setting: Southern School District

This research was conducted in a large school district in North Carolina (termed the Southern School District for the purposes of this study), which is the 16th largest school district in the nation. Its student population has been growing steadily over the past two decades, reaching 159,213 students for the 2016-2017 school year. Since 1980, the district's overall student population has almost tripled, and it has seen an annual increase of approximately 3,400 students, or 2.4% student growth. As many as 17,500 additional children are expected in the district's classrooms by 2020. There were 27,556 Latino students in the school district, which constitutes 17.3% of the student population. There were 36,720 Grades K-12 students who speak a language other than English, representing 223 languages or language groups, with Spanish being the highest (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d., Wake County Public Schools, 2017).

Site Selection: Southern Elementary School

Southern Elementary School is in a suburban area of a large county in North Carolina. More than 50% of the student population at Southern Elementary School were Latino students at the time of this study, and the school's rapid annual growth made it ideal for the current study. Southern Elementary School is an informative sample because it represents variables like those at other suburban elementary schools in the large Southern School District. In addition, the school had young students whose parents were first-generation immigrants from Latino countries, many of which whom were Mexican immigrants who are not likely to be familiar with the American educational system.

Purposeful sampling is a process of intentionally selecting a site that is more likely to provide access to a specific population or information than other sites (Maxwell, 1996). The investigator purposefully selected this school as a site to conduct the research because Latino students are overrepresented as compared to the population demographics in the county, the research focus is on Mexican immigrant parents, the school is in a city with a high percentage of Latino residents, and the school has a high population of English Language Learner (ELL) students. Southern Elementary School provided this researcher with access to Mexican immigrant parents who could offer a fresh perspective of their experiences with the educational system, enabling a better understanding of these parents' experiences in schools (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Specifically, the topic of parental involvement is appropriate because both school officials and Latino immigrant parents have concerns about Latino student achievement. Although similar concerns exist at multiple schools, selecting this school enabled the researcher to spend more time building relationships with Mexican

immigrant parents by exploring their experiences and context using a phenomenological approach.

Purposeful Sampling

The population for this study consisted of seven Mexican immigrant parents from Southern Elementary School who are not proficient in reading or speaking English. This school had been designated in need of improvement by the federal mandate, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), because of student performance on end-of-grade tests. Designing effective parental involvement outreach efforts and activities is a major initiative at the school.

The purposeful sample for this study was composed of Mexican immigrant parents of students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom of Southern Elementary School. The purposeful sampling approach and the willingness of the school to partner and work with the researcher helped provide rich information into the issues central to this research study (Patton, 1990). The parent selection was not random because the research sought participants that have been in the United States for less than five years to gain a fresh perspective of their experiences with the educational system.

Participants and Informed Consent

With the assistance of the ESL teacher, the researcher began by purposefully recruiting seven Mexican immigrant parents across Grades K-5 who had children in the ESL program from Southern Elementary School to participate in the study. Creswell (2009) states that purposeful sampling is to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or

understand the central phenomenon” (p. 214). The participants selected needed to have the least time in the United States, and were interviewed at the school to gain an on-the-ground perspective of these Mexican immigrant parents’ experiences with their children’s education.

The ESL teacher was asked to assist in identifying seven Mexican immigrant parents who had been in the United States for the least amount of time. With the suggested participants’ names in hand, the researcher performed the following:

- A Participant Invitation Letter including a confidentiality/consent form was sent to seven parents, followed by a personalized phone call explaining the risks and benefits of the study, the voluntary nature of the research, and confidentiality of the study (see Appendix A and Appendix B for the Spanish and English versions, respectively). The letter and phone call explained that the participant’s identities would be kept confidential, and asked them to sign a consent form if they agree to participate in the study.
- For the convenience of the participants, the interviews were conducted at the school. Mexican immigrant parents delivered their signed consent forms prior to the beginning of the interview. A unique coding system was used to identify participants.
- Recordings of the interview sessions were used to capture full and exact quotations for transcription and analysis. Observational notes were taken to capture each participant’s body language and contextual cues during the interview, as well as to highlight major points of the discussion.
- The interviews were recorded and transcribed from Spanish into the English language. The researcher also conducted a follow-up phone call to gather

demographic data and get clarification on some of the questions from the parents. Triangulation of the subsequent interviews and observational data was used to establish a “coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Triangulation was also achieved by asking the same questions of all parents participating in the study but going into greater depth on some topics (Coleman & Briggs, 2007).

Data Collection

All data were collected from August 2016 through September 2016 via interviews, review of documents, and a single school event observation. The use of multiple data collection strategies strongly triangulates emerging findings, so using various methods provided diverse ways for this researcher to look at the same phenomenon. Moreover, this strategy reduces the risks of incorrect conclusions, and allows for a more secure understanding of the issues that will be investigated (Creswell, 2002, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Maxwell, 2005). A comparison of the interviews, and observational data provided a more in-depth view of the Mexican immigrant parents’ experiences, challenges, successes, and overall experiences with their children’s teachers and schools.

Interview Data

To collect meaningful data, good rapport must exist between the researcher and interviewees. Since Merriam (1998) notes that “empathy is the foundation of rapport” (p. 23), and interviews are typically better in an atmosphere of trust, and because this researcher has a Latina heritage and much experience working with Latino parents, rapport and trust were

established by speaking Spanish to the immigrant parents. Each interview lasted about an hour, and was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The researcher called the parents to make appointments to meet with them at the school, where they were interviewed in a private conference room. After the interview, the researcher also conducted a follow-up phone call to gather demographic data and clarification as needed. An interview guide was designed specifically to gather parents' information (see Appendix A), and this guide or schedule is simply a list of questions to be asked in the interview. Most interviews in qualitative research are semi-structured, so the interview guide should contain several specific questions, including open-ended questions and follow-up probes that the researcher can use to gather more information (Merriam, 1998). Following this guideline, the researcher created a semi-structured interview process that consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage the participants to share their feelings, opinions, knowledge, and sensory information on their experiences with parental involvement. Patton (2002) notes that an interviewer faces the challenge of making it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world; thus, to understand the participants' world views, this researcher asked "focused questions in a sensitive manner" (p. 347). As Patton (2002) suggested, the standard open-ended interview format helped this researcher minimize variation in the questions posed to interviewees. Additionally, in the spirit of emergent or open-ended interviewing, it has been noted as important in formal interviews to provide an opportunity for the interviewee to have the final say (Patton, 2002), and this method was also used in the current study.

Overall, the analysis of the interviews in this study involved transcribing interview data, typing field notes during the interviews, and sorting and categorizing data into themes using Moustakas' (1994) revised modification of the Van Kaam Method of phenomenological data analysis.

Observational Data

Merriam (2002) stated that observation is the best method of surveying a phenomenon first-hand, specifically “when a fresh perspective is desired” (p. 13). In the current study, one observation of Mexican immigrant parents attending a school event served to verify other data gathered as well as add depth and breadth to the study (Patton, 1990). It gives a researcher an opportunity to “see things firsthand and to use his or her own knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed, rather than relying on once-removed accounts from interviews" (Merriam, 1988, p. 88). In addition, through an observer's comments, memos, and a researcher's journal, information can be obtained to produce valuable field notes (Patton, 2002).

During the current study, the researcher served as a participant observer, which allowed her to gain “inside” information. The researcher kept extensive field notes during observations to describe the phenomenon of parents' experience first-hand, and help identify how parents' actions correspond to their words during interviews (Creswell, 2002; Glesne, 1999). By observing in these settings, the researcher could understand the context within which the parents interacted within the setting, as well as see things that may even at times escape the awareness of the people themselves. Field notes taken by the researcher during the

observation also provided valuable information to support the study (Patton, 2002) by allowing her to document the behavior of parents at the school site during a parent event as well as how they respond in the face-to-face interview.

Review of Documents and Artifacts

Merriam (1988) claims that "documents and artifacts have been underused in qualitative research" (p. 105). Written communications in the form of personal and official documents and records can provide the researcher a glimpse into the mind of the constructor (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003), and artifacts can provide additional information regarding outcome-based products. In conjunction with the school event observation and individual interviews, the artifacts and document analysis in this study helped the qualitative researcher understand the context in which these materials were produced.

Overview of Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis primarily entails classifying things, persons, and events, or the properties that characterize them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). To maintain alignment with qualitative methods, the researcher followed Moustakas' (1994) revised modification of the Van Kaam Method of Analysis of phenomenological data for this study. Specifically, using the complete English translation of the transcription of each research participant's interview, the following data analysis activities were performed:

1. **Listing and preliminary grouping or horizontalization:** Every expression relevant to the experience in question was listed.

2. **Reduction and elimination:** To determine the invariant constituents and test each expression for two requirements, the researcher asked herself the following questions: Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and/or sufficient constituent for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated; overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated, or else presented in more exact descriptive terms (Moustakas, 1994). The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.
3. **Clustering and thematicization of the invariant constituents:** Identified invariant constituents of the experience that are related were clustered into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents became the core themes of the experience.
4. **Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application:** A validation check of the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme was conducted against the complete record of the research participants, with the following process of determination:
 - a) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
 - b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
 - c) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher's experience and should be deleted.
5. **Construction of an individual textural description:** Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, an *individual textural description* of the experience was constructed, including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.

6. **Construction of a textural-structural description:** For each research participant, a *textural-structural description* of the meanings and essences of the experience was constructed, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.
7. **Development of a composite description:** From the individual textural-structural descriptions, the researcher developed a *composite description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the whole group.

Research Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

“Validity refers to the essential truthfulness of a piece of data. By asserting validity, the researcher is asserting that the data could reflect the specific phenomenon claimed” (Sagor, 2000, p. 110). Hence, to ensure reasonable validity and reliability, action researchers should avoid relying on any single source of data (Sagor, 2000). In the current study, the researcher followed multiple qualitative study techniques to provide credible study results. Purposive sampling was applied based on the problem of the study, where participants were specifically selected from the school site to offer typical and divergent data on the research questions. Sources of data were used to answer the overarching research question and “establish the truth and accuracy of a claim” (Sagor, 2000, p. 112). The researcher applied direct data collection through the interview process, and member checking was performed at the end of each interview by summarizing the data and allowing each respondent to immediately correct errors or challenge interpretations (Sagor, 2000). Additionally, a constant comparative method of data analysis was employed to identify common emerging themes from the data collected.

The extent to which research findings can be generalized usefully confirms the

external validity of the study (Charles & Mertler, 2002). As common themes emerged and were repeatedly found through the parents' interviews and the researcher's observation and review of documents, the external validity for this study was strengthened. *Internal validity* relates to the extent that research findings accurately represent the experiment or treatment under investigation. It also pertains to situations, either personal or environmental, that present themselves while an experiment is occurring. Internal validity is affected by how appropriately the researcher represents the observable facts, and is impacted by the degree to which findings are recorded to accurately present the situation at hand (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). To ensure internal validity, the researcher in this study carefully formulated interview questions and followed the appropriate interview protocol.

The researcher also attempted to eliminate bias in parent observations by avoiding close involvement with group participants to ensure the study's quality in being "systematically and ethically...carried out" (Merriam, 2002, p. 30) with trustworthy findings. The trustworthiness of a study pertains to issues of internal validity, reliability, and external validity or generalizability (Merriam, 2002). The following strategies were implemented to ensure trustworthiness in the current study:

- Triangulation – Using multiple researchers, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.
- Member checking – Taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived, and asking if the data is plausible.
- Peer review – Holding discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency or emerging findings with raw data, and tentative interpretations.

- Adequate engagement in data collection – Spending adequate time collecting data such that the data becomes “saturated.”
- Audit trail – Developing a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study (Merriam, 2002, p. 31).

Attempts were also made to show the extent to which the findings of this study can be applied to other situations. Accurate descriptions were provided to ensure that external validity or generalizability were possible.

Triangulation

Most qualitative researchers use a process called triangulation to enhance the validity and the reliability of their findings. Therefore, triangulation was applied to the study by the used of multiple sources of data through the following:

- Selections of one interview site;
- Selection of seven parents from Grades K-5 in the study school;
- One observation of parents participating in a school event;
- Analysis of school documents.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined as threats to the internal and external validity of a study (Merriam, 1998). In the current study, the following limitations can be identified: a researcher-developed instrument was used, and the researcher may have held bias that affected data collection or analysis. That is, the researcher developed the instruments used in

this study (the questions asked to parents), as well as conducted the interviews. Moreover, the incorrect interpretation of the parents' responses is a possible limitation.

While every effort was made to minimize bias or subjectivity and assume a neutral stance, neutrality does not mean detachment (Patton, 2002). Thus, it is possible that my perceptions as researcher may have presented a certain bias. To minimize this, the researcher engaged in bracketing, triangulation of data, member checks, and participatory collaboration in the study's analysis.

Statement of Bias

My professional background provided me with an advantage in conducting this research, in a variety of ways. Professionally, I have served previously as a bilingual, third-grade ESL and Spanish teacher, Assistant Principal, and ESL Coordinator. This past work, particularly with ESL educational programming, has offered me unique insight into how parents' experiences can be interpreted to make programmatic improvements. Presently, I serve as Senior Administrator for Family and Community Outreach; this position gives me access to the study school's data beyond that which may be provided by participants (creating additional data for triangulation), and it also increases my level of access to school sites and participants.

Researchers using a phenomenological approach make systematic efforts to set aside their own prejudgments of the phenomenon being investigated to keep a nonbiased approach to it (Moustakas, 1994). As discussed earlier, this is better known as the Epoché process, in which the researcher remains free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the

phenomenon obtained from prior experiences or studies (Moustakas, 1994). *Epoché* (pronounced *eh-poh-chay*) is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, or to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. In this process, the researcher leaves behind their own experience so they can better understand the experience of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

To uphold the Epoché process in this study, and because phenomenological research does not try to distill phenomena to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the content in which they are studied, I guarded against preconceived notions and expectations, and remained open to new ideas. This helped me maintain the nonhierarchical, holistic, and nonjudgmental paradigm in which phenomenology should be situated (Moustakas, 1994). The parents that took part in the study were deemed participants and not subjects, and they participated actively in the results. They shared their experiences openly, and my role was to discern the essence of the experience within their own context to take my own biases out of the research. This allowed me to fully and completely focus on understanding the level of school involvement the parents described through their own perspectives. Due to my professional experience working with parents as well as providing Parent Academies, I have personal insight into what parental involvement looks like within the community, and my own views on how parents should be involved in their child's education. In conducting this study, then, I was aware that I needed to focus on the experiences that were expressed by the participants through their eyes, rather than mine.

The research methodologies employed in the current study assisted in this process considerably. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) propose, I spent considerable time collecting,

analyzing, and interpreting empirical data. In manipulating the data, I was confronted with my own opinions and prejudices constantly; however, via this barrage of empirical data, my own notions were confirmed and/or changed by this study. Further, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) remind us that the researcher's primary goal is to add knowledge and generate theory, not to pass judgment or blame, so I attempted to describe as many dimensions as were visible from the findings, rather than to only support my own initial ideas. Finally, I questioned my own biases regularly and kept them in check, and I recorded field notes from my own responses and reactions to interviews and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Ethical Issues

Federal regulations identify concerns regarding the research subject's protection from harm, right to privacy, notion of informed consent, and the issue of deception. Board reviews, moreover, work to determine whether the risks of the study outweigh the benefits (Gall et al., 2003). To ensure the participants' confidentiality and freedom from harm in the current study, the research project was submitted for approval to the North Carolina State University and "Southern School District" Institutional Review Boards. To minimize any ethical concerns, field notes, interview recordings, and verbatim transcripts were kept confidential. Codes and audio recordings were stored in a secure file. Participants and interviewees were assigned pseudonyms and referred to by these codes in all written texts. The school site's name was similarly disguised. Only the researcher had access to the consent form that linked the real identity of each participant to his or her pseudonym and site. In addition, the researcher adhered to strict confidentiality practices.

Information obtained from this research was used for the purposes of completing my dissertation as well as to add to available literature on the topic. Furthermore, subjects were given the option to withdraw from the study if they had concerns or objections. Explanatory letters, forms, and phone calls were used to gain informed consent from potential participants. Legal requirements and principles for gaining consent to conduct this study were fulfilled as follows:

1. Participants were advised orally and in writing about the confidentiality process of the study;
2. Purposes and benefits of the research were shared with participants;
3. Disclosure of any risks to participants were shared; and
4. A provision allowing participants to withdraw at any time was explained. (Charles & Mertler, 2002, p. 12-13)

The instruments or methods of data collection used were of as high a quality as possible, unobtrusive, and inoffensive. The concept of informed consent of respondents was crucial as an ethical step to confirm their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. The participants were furthermore guaranteed confidentiality in being assured that no one other than the researcher would see their individual answers, and that any participant quotes used in the study would not include names or identifying characteristics.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included an overview of the qualitative paradigm and the phenomenological approach used in the current study to better understand the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents in a “new destination” state. In addition, this chapter explored

the specific research methods used, including the research design, research questions, setting/sample selection, participants and informed consent, data collection, data analysis, research validity, reliability and trustworthiness, limitations of the study, researcher's subjectivity statement, and ethical issues.

Chapter Four explains the findings from data gathered from the interviews of the seven Mexican immigrant parents, and elaborates on the common themes and patterns relating to their experiences with involvement in a suburban elementary school from the Southern School District in North Carolina. Specifically, this study sought to understand these parents' experiences being involved in school activities, supporting their children's schoolwork, and actively and regularly communicating with school personnel. Immigrant parents' expectations, access, and their roles can remain a mystery and cause feelings of isolation, confusion, and marginalization, some of which can be remedied by more intentional and strategic efforts of a school district. The findings in the next chapter shed some light on this important issue in education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Parental involvement is a critical contributor to children's overall academic success. Research has noted the correlation between parental involvement and student achievement and, for this reason, it is critical that schools include immigrant families in school activities and their children's education (Delgado Gaitan, 2004). Working to address this issue, the current researcher conducted a phenomenological qualitative study of the experiences of seven Mexican immigrant parents with respect to their integration into their child's Southern Elementary School, their understanding of the school's expectations for their children, their own expectations of the school with respect to parental involvement, obstacles to their involvement, and the ways in which they are involved in their children's education.

A review of current literature relating to parental involvement provided a research basis for this study. To gain deeper insight into the phenomenon, the researcher conducted interviews with seven Mexican parents, using the lens of phenomenology to focus on the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Specific interview questions assisted in obtaining the essence of each participant's experience. This qualitative researcher posed sub-questions in addition to the central question to provide further details on the phenomenon; these few questions addressed the same aspects as the central question, and were likewise open-ended, natural in language, and emerging (Creswell, 2005). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?

2. What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute “involvement” in their children’s education?
3. What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children’s education?
4. What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children’s education?
5. Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?

Interview Analysis

First, with the assistance of Southern Elementary School’s English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, the researcher purposefully recruited seven Mexican immigrant parents with children across Grades K-5 in the ESL program to participate in this study. Per Creswell (2008), purposeful sampling is to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 214), and the seven participants in the current study were purposefully selected from the school’s ESL classes because they had been in the United States for the least possible time. Participants were interviewed at the school to gain an on-the-ground perspective of these Mexican immigrant parents’ experiences with their children’s education.

Data collection occurred from August 2016 to September 2016 through open-ended interviews, one school event observation, analysis of school documents and follow-up questions asked of participants by telephone. Triangulation of the subsequent interviews and observational data was used to establish a “coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Triangulation was also achieved by asking the same questions of all parents

participating in the study, but going into greater depth on the topics (Coleman & Briggs, 2005).

The names of the school and parents have been assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The recorded interviews were transcribed from Spanish into the English language by a private company. All the participants gave explicit permission to have their responses audio-recorded, and were informed that the audio files would be kept confidential and housed in a secured place for two years.

Table 4.1 below provides an overview of the study participants. The remainder of the chapter includes the responses of study participants during the interviews, along with an analysis of how parents answered each question. Emergent themes for each question are then highlighted to show patterns in parents' responses.

Table 4.1: Overview of Interview Participants

Participant	Age	Years in the U.S.	Married	Lives with Partner	Education	Occupation	No. Children	ES	MS	HS	Other
Felicita Garcia	30	5	Yes		ES	Housekeeping	2	1	1		
Cindy Perez	31	5	No	Yes	HS	Housewife	3	1	1		Toddler
Alejandra Guzman	30	5	Yes		MS	Babysitter	2	1	1		
Martina Dolores	30	1	No	Yes	HS	Housewife	2	1			Infant
Juana Lopez	38	4	Yes		HS	Waitress	5	2	2	1	
Susana Martinez	39	4	Yes		MS	Babysitter	4	1	2	1	
Teresa Flores	45	2	Yes		TS	Housewife	2	1		1	

**ES: Elementary School, MS: Middle School, HS: High School, TS: Technical School*

Participant Felicita Garcia

Felicita Garcia was a 30-year-old female who had resided in the United States for five years at the time of the current study. She seemed to be a happy mom, and answered each question with great joy. As she only completed up to the fifth grade in Mexico, she can hardly read, write, or do simple math. She has two children, one who was born in this country and another who was born in Mexico. One child attends Southern Elementary School, while the other goes to a local middle school.

Felicita is happily married, and both she and her husband work. She works for a house-cleaning company, but noted that she still manages to keep her home clean and make sure the children are ready for school each day. When possible, Felicita assists them with their homework, and attends school events when her schedule permits. In Spanish, she stated:

Y de mantener mis quehaceres de tener mi casa limpia, cocinar, asegurarme de que mis hijos estén listo para ir a la escuela. Cuando es posible ayudarles con las tareas y si el tiempo me permite asistir a los eventos de la escuela. (“And to keep up with my chores of making sure my house is clean, cooking is done, and making sure my kids are ready to go to school. When it is possible to help with homework and if time allows, attend school events.”)

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents’ perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children’s education?*

To this, Felicita answered that the school’s role consists of not leaving any children without an education and making sure children are registered to go to school to learn. She believed that the school should keep parents informed of upcoming school events and

teacher-parent conferences by calling them, or sending home information in Spanish. She stated:

For example, we are reminded when the children are track[ed] out and when they need to return to school. At the same time, we are also reminded to continue teaching our children at home, so that they will not forget what they have learned during the school year.

For the teacher, Felicita believes that the teacher's responsibility is to teach Felicita's son and other children to read, write, and do math. She claimed, "I hold the teacher responsible for my child's education; after all, the teacher is the expert."

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?*

Felicita thought that involvement in her child education meant her attendance at different school events, so that she can learn what is going on in the school and support her children however she can. She also believed that she contributes to her children's learning by advising them to take advantage of an education and encouraging them daily to attend school. She noted:

I think by advising our children to take advantage of the education, we are providing them, and by encouraging them to attend school every day and to "*échales ganas*," since every day the teacher teaches something different. When I said "*échales ganas*," I mean for my children to give their all by paying attention to the teacher, studying hard, learning everything they need to, and be on their best behavior, so that, this way, they can learn quickly and do well in school.

Felicita felt that she and her husband were making a great sacrifice to provide their children with a better future by ensuring they take advantage of the educational system in the United States with the hopes that, one day, their children will have a career that allows them to provide for themselves and be economically secure.

Because she attends school events when she can, Felicita argues that she is an involved parent:

I attend school events when I have time. I work, and sometimes my work schedule could be complicated. However, I contribute by sending snacks to the classroom. I try to help with homework when I can. I read books to my children, and they also read too. I try to attend the teacher-parent conferences to see how my children are doing at school. I check their report card to see how they are doing.

Felicita feels it is important for all parents to attend school events so they can learn how to support their children. She claimed that she receives school information about helping her children learn at home just like they learn at school, declaring that “we as parents need to make our children study at home so that they will not forget what they are learning.”

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children’s education?*

Due to her job schedule, Felicita claimed that she does not have enough time to be more involved in her child’s education, but that she tried to be involved as much as possible despite the challenge. Not knowing the language was also noted as a big challenge for Felicita in not being able to assist effectively with homework or communicate fully with the teachers. She wondered, “I mean, how wonderful it would be to know the language and be

able to understand the homework to help my children at home?” Another barrier Felicia noted was the lack of communication skills and English vocabulary to communicate with teachers, though she admitted that her shyness and embarrassment about this made it even more difficult. She said:

I think the teacher speaks very nicely and uses big words that many times I do not understand them, even when the translator tells me in Spanish...I hate it that I do not speak the language to better communicate and understand the homework to be able help more.

There are also school rules that Felicita did not understand. She claimed that, overall, it was not easy to understand the American educational system, stating:

I do not think it is easy to understand the educational system in this country; For example, there are different school calendars, school levels of education from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, and not to mention all the policies they have. It is very difficult for parents to help with homework too, due to the language and also not knowing or understanding it.

She did, however, praise how the school facilitated parental involvement by treating parents well and making them feel welcome on campus with a receptionist and teachers who are bilingual. The school also communicates well with the parents, Felicita added, such as by sending information home (in Spanish) about what is going on in the school. Additionally, the school offers interpretation services to those who need them for parent-teacher conferences. “All this,” Felicita maintained, “facilitates the communication between the parents and teachers.”

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?*

Felicita mentioned that the school facilitates communication between the parent and teacher by providing interpreters during conferences, having a receptionist on staff that speaks Spanish, and hiring bilingual teachers. Yet she did suggest some resources that are still needed, such as parent workshops that provide information on how to help with homework. She even noted how ideal it would be if the school offered English classes for parents.

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

Felicita indicated that she did feel the school cared about her and the other parents, answering, "Yes, the school cares about us. After all, we are the parents of the children that go to this school." She was also comforted by the fact that she always felt welcome and valued by the school, in part because someone was always and available to courteously help with communication, whether the bilingual receptionist or a teacher who spoke Spanish. This made Felicita feel she was being treated fairly by the school, and that the school effectively enabled "communication between the parents and teachers."

Participant Cindy Perez

Cindy Perez is a female who was 31 years in age and had been in this country for five years when the study was conducted. She seemed worried at the beginning of the interview,

and when asked, stated, “*Si, simplemente tengo pena de no contestar bien las preguntas*” (“I am simply embarrassed of not knowing how to answer the questions correctly”). I ensured her that there were no correct answers, and that I was only seeking to understand her experiences for my study. I furthermore tried to break the ice by sharing that she reminded me of my mother when she was young, and how my mother also worried when people asked her questions. She giggled and told me that I was a nice lady, and said she would help me with my study by answering with the truth. She then became more receptive and open to my questions.

Cindy attended school up to the 10th grade in Mexico. She had to quit school despite wanting to continue because her parents could not afford to send her to the next big town to go on with her education. She claimed that she hoped to attend classes soon to learn the English language, so she could go back to school herself to receive training for a job as a secretary. She has three children, one who was born in this country and two who were born in Mexico. One child attended Southern Elementary School, one was in middle school, and the other was a toddler. Though not married, Cindy lived with her partner at the time of the study, whom she praised as a great provider and stepfather for her children. She worked from home as a babysitter, caring for other Latino mothers’ children while they worked. Her job did not pay much, but she felt that she was at least contributing to the household. Cindy said that she was thankful to be in this country, and for her children to be able to attend school in the United States, the land of opportunities.

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents’ perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children’s education?*

Cindy believed that the school and the teachers are experts in children's education. It was the school's responsibility, she said, to make sure that there are teachers who are equipped to teach students for whom English is not their first language. She also maintained that the school's responsibility was to ensure children attend school daily, saying, "If my child is absent, the school right away calls asking why my child is not in school. Here the students do not miss school." Cindy mentioned another school responsibility to regularly supervise teachers by stopping by classrooms to check on how they are treating and teaching the students. She added that it is the teacher's responsibility to teach children well and provide extra time for those who speak no English and only Spanish, or for those students that might need extra help learning something. She remarked:

If the child does not know something, the teacher needs to be able to explain it one, two, or three times until the child understands it well. I mean for them to pay close attention to what the students need to learn. The school and teachers are the experts, so they should know what to do with the students who are doing well and with those who are not. For example, for those students that are not doing well, to make sure they provide them with extra time to learn or something like that.

Cindy argued that teachers must also communicate with parents periodically to let them know what and how their kids are doing in school, regarding academic performance as well as behavior.

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?*

Cindy believed the school wanted her to be involved in her child's education by helping with homework, making sure her child attends school daily, and attending school events. However, she admitted that, at times, she did not understand how the school operates, since she did not attend school in the United States herself. Cindy stated, "I am learning as my child advances in school, but I have noticed that there is more involvement of parents here." She gets involved in her child's education by making sure her child goes to school every day to learn, adding, "I mean for my child to give it his all by studying, learning, and being on his best behavior, so that he can pay attention to the teacher, and this way he can learn quickly." Cindy's involvement also consisted of communicating with the teacher when she did not understand something, trying to help with homework as much as she can, and seeking school assistance when she did not understand. She attended parent-teacher conferences, and asked the teacher for guidance when she needed help understanding something.

Research Question 3. *What factors do you perceived facilitate or challenge your efforts to support your children's education?*

Cindy highlighted one of the main challenges she faced in trying to support her child's education as not being able to speak and understand the English language. Though she can understand and speak some English, she admitted that "there are times when I am embarrassed of not speaking it correctly, and I wonder if I am going to be understood and taken into consideration." She stated:

Although there is always someone who speaks Spanish at the school, I still would like to be the one to communicate as needed. I do not like this feeling of being

handicapped, and it makes me feel sad. I am very appreciative of the school seeking ways to help parents to communicate what is going on at the school, and making us feel part of the school.

Cindy also noted the challenge presented by her own limited education making it difficult for her to assist her child with certain content areas. She recalled many times when she could not help her child with homework, simply because it was in English and she did not understand. This made Cindy feel inadequate to help her child with homework, as she confessed, “I barely finished second year of high school, so my knowledge is very elementary. I help my child as much as I can, but I feel frustrated and helpless not being able to help as needed.” She expressed that, at times, she is unsure how the school really functions or the expectations for her involvement, but added, “I am learning as my child advances in school, but I have noticed that there is more involvement of parents here.”

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are needed to enhance their involvement in their children’s education?*

Cindy noted that her child’s school frequently sent home information about school events that parents were invited to attend. She admitted that she would like to attend all the school events, but her schedule was at times complicated and did not allow her to go, saying: I do not work, but I am busy taking care of my children. Perhaps if the school event schedule would be at different times, the school can provide child-care and transportation, I feel that these services will encourage more parents to attend school functions.

She also indicated that, even though there was always someone that spoke Spanish at the school, and despite the school's efforts to seek ways to communicate with parents what is going on at the school, it is not enough. Cindy stated:

I feel the school needs to hire more bilingual personnel since more than half of the students' parents speak Spanish. I think we need resources and guidance in Spanish to help our children with homework and to better understand the school system.

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

When asked about her perspective on her child's school's view of her as a parent, Cindy did believe that the school cared about her. She stated:

Yes, the school cares about me. There is always someone at the school that speaks Spanish who communicates with us. The school is always sending us information about school events and for us to come. The fact that they are able to provide my child with special education services and the extra tutoring so that he could learn faster shows how much the school cares for my child.

She also praised the quality of education her child was receiving in this country, and the resources that she was provided, declaring, "Oh, and as far as the education in the United States, it is thousand times better. There are many resources the school provides, for example, programs for students that need help by teaching them in different ways."

Participant Alejandra Guzman

Alejandra Guzman was a 30-year-old female who had immigrated to America three years before participating in the current study. She seemed to be a very happy and enthusiastic mom who loves this country, recalling that she had wanted to come to the United States to live “the American dream” since she was a young child. When asked what the phrase “the American dream” meant to her, Alejandra shared with great emotion:

It means owning our own home, my husband having a decent job to provide for his family, our children attending a great school, and for me to stay home and be a housewife and provide for my family by keeping the house clean, making dinner, and taking care of the children.

Alejandra is happily married and has two children, one in elementary school and one toddler. She attended school in Mexico up to the eighth grade, but had to discontinue her education when she was forced to work and helped support her family. After working for many years, she got married and soon decided to come to the United States. At the time of the study, she worked from home tending to other children while also caring for her son.

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents’ perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children’s education?*

Alejandra felt the school and the teachers should know what the children need to learn, basing this on her assumption that the belief that the school and teachers are experts in a child’s education held true in the United States. Her view was that the school is responsible to hire teachers who know how to teach students for whom English is not their first language. She expressed, “It is the school’s responsibility to make sure they have great teachers to

teach children to read and write.” Related to this issue of language barrier, Alejandra added that school personnel who speak Spanish should be used to reach out to parents who do not speak English and assist with any matters they might want to address.

It is the teacher, Alejandra maintained, who is responsible for students’ learning and safety. However, Alejandra conveyed, “I think that sometimes the teacher does not pay too much attention to the children that do not speak English,” and believed more attention or help should be provided to such students. Overall, communication was very important to Alejandra as a parent, and she stated, “We need to know how our children are doing in school, if they are behaving and paying attention to the teacher so they can learn.”

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute “involvement” in their children’s education?*

Alejandra did feel that the school wanted parents to support their children’s education by helping with homework and attending school events. Yet she noted that there have been times when, due to the language, she did not understand how to assist with homework or chose not to participate in school events or volunteering activities. Still, she felt that she was an involved parent, commenting:

I feel I am very involved in my children’s education by making sure my children are ready to attend school daily, that they have their *mochila* (backpack) and school supplies ready. I also tell them to behave in school and listen to the teacher.

Although Alejandra did not speak or understand the English language at the time of this study, she did work to ensure that her children completed their homework and reading.

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?*

Alejandra cited the biggest challenges to supporting her children's education as not speaking the English language, being able to help with homework, or comprehending school policies. The language barrier was a major factor for her being able to understand the homework and communicate with school personnel. Alejandra stated, "I'd like for the school to always have a translator or more bilingual personnel available to assist us with any questions or concerns. I feel, this way, I will be able to fit in better." She noted times when the school sent information home in English, and others when it was in Spanish. She expressed appreciation for the fact that the school at least tried to include immigrant parents in school activities by sometimes sending home school information in Spanish, but felt the school should be more consistent in making sure they send information to Spanish-speaking parents in their own language. When she gets information in English, Alejandra said, she runs to the school to find out what it means, but sometimes she gets no help. "The school has a receptionist that speaks Spanish," she stated, "But she is always busy and can't always help the parents who speak Spanish."

At times, she admitted, Alejandra feels helpless because she cannot assist her children with their homework, only because it is in English that she does not understand. Considering how to remedy this situation, she expressed, "I need an orientation in Spanish to understand what is required of me and how I can help with homework." Alejandra maintained that the school should provide offer homework assistance before and after school for students who

might need it, and added, with confidence, “After all, it is the school’s responsibility to make sure my child learns.”

Another barrier Alejandra cited was not knowing or understanding all the school’s norms and rules. She appreciated the fact that the school sends invitations home about school events, but lamented that she often still felt out of place at the events because she does not know what to expect. She cried as she expressed:

I often feel embarrassed to attend school events because the American parents look at me weirdly, wondering maybe why I do not speak English, or who knows what. I just do not like the way they look at me. What I am trying to say is, like, if they feel sorry for me. I do not want to cause shame to my child.

Thus, Alejandra contended that the school needed to teach her their expectations, rules, and norms so that she can understand and fit in better.

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children’s education?*

Alejandra would like to learn how to better support her children with their education, and thought it would help if she had the opportunity to attend school to observe what her child is doing and how she is learning, perhaps for half a day. She would also like to be able to help her child with homework, but admitted that she did not know how; she felt that the school should offer assistance with homework for students with parents who cannot help. Such homework assistance, she claimed, would be best if offered before and after school hours. Another idea she presented was something “maybe like an orientation or workshop”

that would help her gain understanding of how she can support her child's education. She mentioned having received some information about the school starting some educational workshops, and excitedly proclaimed, "I cannot wait to attend and learn."

Communication is important to Alejandra, and she wanted to have more with her child's teacher. She stated, "Yes, I sometimes meet with the teacher, but I would like to receive frequent phone calls letting me know how my child is doing." In addition, Alejandra wanted the information sent home from the school to be in Spanish rather than in only English as it often is, to communicate with the many parents who do not speak or read the language. In fact, Alejandra believes that "the schools need to hire more bilingual people that speak Spanish, since there are a lot of Latino parents that do not speak English that need a lot of help just like I do." Her ideal vision was for the school to hire more personnel that speak Spanish to make them available to assist parents with questions or concerns. Alejandra even claimed that she would like to become a volunteer if the school would offer more bilingual personnel to guide and explain to her what she needs to do. This would allow her to fit in better, while also helping her avoid the current embarrassment she feels when attending school events.

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

There have been times when Alejandra thought the school cared, and others when she did not. For example, there was a time when she came to school to meet with the teacher and find out how her child is doing in school. Though the receptionist at the school knew

Alejandra did not speak English, she still sent her to speak with the teacher. Alejandra expressed the frustration she felt when this occurred:

I get to the room, and the teacher just looks at me and says something in English. I just stand there staring at her, not knowing what to say or do, until my poor daughter comes to my rescue. My daughter with her broken English tried to translate for me. Oh, I really hate this type of situation. I felt so defeated.

Thus, since many Latino families are in the same predicament as her, Alejandra believed that the school should always have bilingual personnel available to assist Spanish-speakers, if they really care for these parents. Regarding this, she mentioned feeling sorry for the receptionist, who she claimed always looks overwhelmed, and made a connection between this and the school's care for immigrant parents:

Truly, if the school really cares, then there needs to be more resources to help us. We need help in understanding what is expected from us, and how we can support our children at home with homework.

Participant Martina Dolores

Martina Dolores is a female who was 30 years old and had been living in the United States for one year when this study took place. She has two children, one that attends elementary school and another who is just a baby. Though not married, Martina lives with her partner, and works as a housewife taking care of her family. She expressed being homesick and missing Mexico a lot, adding that it was taking time to get accustomed to living in this country. However, she is aware that living in the United States can provide

greater opportunities for her and her family, and wants her children to get an education and become professionals since she only finished high school herself. She looked sad as she shared:

I would have loved to continue going to school, but my parents couldn't afford to pay for my education. I had to start working to help the family. I am going to motivate my children to behave in school and get good grades, and this way they could get a scholarship to go to the university.

Martina also acknowledged that she needed to assimilate to this country by learning English, familiarizing herself with the area, making friends, and learning how national systems work, such as the legal, educational and medical systems, stating, "*Tengo mucho que aprender, pero le voy a echar ganas por mis hijos.*" ("I have a lot to learn, but I am going to give it my best for my children.")

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?*

Martina cited that the responsibility of the school is to teach, reading, writing, and math. She stated, "The school is the expert on what the children need to know; the school has a guide that tells them what each grade level needs to learn." In her view, the school should monitor its teachers to make sure they are instructing students by the teacher guide. She also felt the school's role was to hire teachers who know how to instruct students for whom English is not their native tongue. Martina furthermore held the school responsible for communicating expectations with parents, and letting them know how they can support the

school and teacher to, in turn, supports the student. About this, Martina shared feelings of confusion:

I feel lost and confused. The school needs to provide new parents with an orientation where we can learn about the school transportation, the norms and rules, how they want us to participate in the school, and how the school is supporting students for whom English is not their native language. I am especially confused about the school calendar and helping with homework.

Martina added the view that teachers need to develop positive relationships with their students, since they spend so much time during the day with them. She believes that communication is very important between the teacher and parent, and therefore, teachers should contact parents more frequently to share how their child is doing in school. Martina concluded by saying, “I worry about my child, especially when he does not speak or understand the English language. I wonder if he is doing okay.”

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute “involvement” in their children’s education?*

Martina shared her view that the school is responsible for teaching, but it is her role to help her child with homework. In Mexico, Martina helped her child with homework all the time, and he got excellent grades. She continued by noting, “Actually, right now, it’s complicated because I do not speak the language, so I am feeling very limited when it comes to helping with homework.” Still, Martina shared that she tries to help her child with homework as much as she can, yet cried as she said, “I feel so helpless not speaking and

understanding the language to better help my child with homework.” Still, Martina did recall that she helped her son with his schoolwork:

I am involved in my child’s education, at home we read books, I teach my child how to read, write, and do basic math. I do this in my native language, which is Spanish. I hope this will help him with school.

She also very proudly noted her involvement in the way she makes certain her child is always ready for school and has his backpack. She also gets involved in her child’s education by ensuring he attends school every day and behaves so he can learn English quickly since Martina often assists him with schoolwork in her native Spanish language.

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children’s education?*

Martina said that the school was good about making sure parents are informed of upcoming school activities by sending flyers home with information in Spanish. She also mentioned appreciating that the school’s Spanish-speaking receptionist is available to assist parents when they have questions or concerns, adding, “I am thankful for such a wonderful school that cares for immigrant parents.” She did, however, say that she would like for the school to provide immigrant parents with an orientation on how the school operates, its expectations, norms and rules, transportation routes/schedule, calendar, and how to qualify for free or reduced lunch. Addressing issues related directly to this study, Martina also expressed that she wanted to know about ways parents can participate in the school, how the school supports ESL students and helps students with homework, and other school pertinent information.

Martina believed teacher-parent communication is very important, and felt that teachers needed to contact parents more frequently to share how their child is doing in school. However, she noted that her not speaking or understanding the English language was getting in the way of her effective communication with teacher. She said, “I mean you really need it to be able to get around, since everywhere you go English is spoken. Plus, I want to be able to fit in.” Because understanding English is so critical, Martina asserted that the school should offer English classes to provide parents like her with the skills needed to assist with homework and communicate with teachers.

The biggest barrier for Martina, notably, was her immigration status. She shared, “It is critical to for us to become legalized. There are many resources that we do not qualify [for] because we are not legal. I also fear for the safety of my family.” Clearly, then, the legality of parents’ immigration status and residency in the United States was an issue of concern not only regarding safety, but also in that it can limit the opportunities afforded to immigrant families like hers.

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children’s education?*

Martina would like for the school to provide an orientation or workshop to immigrant parents on how the school operates, covering topics such as the school’s expectations, norms and rules, transportation routes/schedule, calendar, and how to qualify for free or reduced lunch. She also expressed a desire to understand ways parents can participate in the school, how the school support students for whom English is not their native language, and what the

school does to help students with homework. Though she mentioned that she would appreciate information about where she can take English classes in the community, she added, “It would be ideal if the school can offer the classes here at the school.” Martina would also like to receive more frequent communication from the teacher on how her child is doing in school.

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

Martina answered that she did feel the school cares about her, in part because the school sent home notices of upcoming school events in Spanish, and offers interpretation services during events or when parents meet with their child’s teacher. She continued:

The school has a bilingual receptionist that helps with questions or concerns. For example, I received the application for free or reduce lunch and breakfast in English. I came to the school and the receptionist explained and helped completed it. The receptionist is very kind to parents.

Participant Juana Lopez

Juana Lopez was a 38-year-old female who had been in the United States for four years when she participated in this study. She was married, and had five children in school. Two children attended elementary school, two attended middle school, and one was at the high school. Juan shared that raising a family of seven was expensive, forcing her to find a job to contribute to the family income. She said she loves her job as a waitress, and makes enough money with the tips to contribute to buying her children the extra things they need.

She admitted that life with five children who need a lot of attention was not easy, but she viewed them as her rock and held high hopes for each one.

Juana's family decided to move to the United States for the educational opportunities the country offers for her children. Though a strong believer in education, she admitted that she had barely finished high school herself, and wished for children to go as far as to attend university. Juana said she tries to be active in her children's education as much as possible, but acknowledged that it was hard at times due to her work schedule. Juana would love one day to continue with her own education and learn business management with the hopes of one day opening her own restaurant.

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?*

Juana said the school was responsible for hiring competent teachers that understand the culture of Latino students. Since it was a dual-language school where our children learn English and Spanish at the same time, she felt the school needed to hire competent bilingual teachers equipped to teach both languages. Juana also viewed the school as a kind of manager to enforce norms and rules and keep parents informed:

If my child gets in trouble, hurt, not doing his homework, and/or is not behaving, then the school needs to have a conference with us to let us know what is going on. What I mean is for the school to keep open communication with the parents about anything that relates to our children, also about any school event that parents need to attend.

For the specific responsibility of the teacher, Juana felt it was to ensure children are learning, and to provide them with a classroom environment where they can nurture their desire to

learn. “I think the teacher needs to monitor what each child needs to learn,” Juana commented, “I mean, the teachers and the school are the experts. They should know what each student needs to learn to be promoted to the next grade level.” She added that the teacher’s job was also to maintain open communication with the parent, stating, “I want to hear from the teacher often, not just when is time for a Parent and Teacher Conference. Teachers need to pick up the phone and call us; I do not think it is asking for too much.”

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute “involvement” in their children’s education?*

At first Juana thought her only expected involvement was to send her child to school, but she soon learned that was not the case. She shared:

I quickly learned that the school’s expectation is for parents to help with homework, participate by attending school activities, keep an eye on the school folder that comes in the child’s backpack since it contains information, and to be ready to respond to the school’s calls. I do not mind doing all these things, but it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure our kids know how to do the homework.

Juana sees her involvement in making sure her child reads every day and completes the homework, though she admitted the latter was not easy in stating, “It’s hard to help with homework, but we try to help as much as we can. We also try to attend every school event there is. We want our children to be successful in school.”

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children’s education?*

Juana feels the school facilitates efforts for parents to support their children's education by providing interpretation services during school events and parent-teacher conferences. She was pleased with the fact that the school had begun to offer workshops for Latino parents, taught in Spanish by Latino personnel, "where we learn ways to help our children with reading, math, and technology." Juana shared that the workshops took place in the evenings and most parents came straight from work, so the school provided dinner for the family, along with homework support and childcare. Juana continued, "I have to give the school credit for creating a friendly and safe environment for parents. The school is really trying to include all parents. I will give them a thumbs-up!"

Juana cited the language barrier as another challenge she faced, but noted that the school did have personnel who speak the language to help parents as needed. Juana shared, "I would like to be able to speak English, so that I will be the one talking directly with the teacher and be able to help more with homework, since there is so much that gets lost in translation." Not knowing all the school's norms and rules was another challenge, and Juana felt that parents should learn what they are, especially those rules that pertain to attendance and suspension from school.

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?*

To this, Juana answered that having more bilingual people at the school would be useful since there are so many Latino parents who do not speak English and need help with communication. She expressed, "The receptionist speaks Spanish, but she is only one person.

We need more like her in the school.” Due to the school having so many parents limited in the English language, she suggested an afterschool homework program to help students with homework. Juana stated:

I have heard that other schools offer such programs for students that are falling behind in reading or math. I believe it is called tutoring...I hope I am not asking for too much, but I feel the school needs to have something in place to help students.

Other information Juana would appreciate included resources about the school’s norms and rules related to school suspension, attendance, and parents’ educational rights

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

When it comes to whether the school cares about parents like her, Juana felt strongly that it did. She expressed:

I think this is a great system since I noticed the attention given to the children’s education. not only do they provide support for the students such as ESL classes, they also provide support for parents of different languages.

Earlier in the interview, Juana mentioned the friendly and safe environment created by the school to make parents feel welcome, including a receptionist who speaks Spanish; parents are invited to stop by the school anytime, and the school is available to assist with questions or concerns. As an example, Juana said, “I mean, they provide an interpreter when there is meeting with the teacher, so the parent can communicate with the teacher to discuss openly how their child is doing in school.” Juana also commented on the school’s workshops in Spanish, offered for parents who wish to learn how to help their children with their

education. Even more, while the parents are learning, their children are being provided with homework assistance. Juana also praised the constant communication from the school letting parents know about events and activities. Overall, Juana believed that the school cares a lot for the parents, and gave the school her thumbs-up approval.

Participant Susana Martinez

At the time of this study, Susana Martinez was 39 years old and had been living in the United States for four years. Married with four children, she had one child in elementary school, two in middle school, and another in high school. She contributed to the household income by working from home as a babysitter, and hoped the family could save and eventually buy a mobile home. She noted how she was still getting used to living here, saying that it was hard to live in a country where you do not speak the language or understand how things work. She stated, “*Cada día aprendo algo nuevo de este país*” (“Every day I learn something new about this country.”) However, she had no plans of returning to Mexico, especially because of the educational and job opportunities the United States offers. She was looking forward to gaining full-time employment when her youngest daughter finished elementary school.

Research Question 1. *What are the Mexican immigrant parents’ perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children’s education??*

Overall, Susana agreed that the primary role of the school is the children’s education. She stated:

The school is responsible for the education of the children. Certainly, we are our children's first teacher, and have to provide them with *buena educación* (a very good education), such as having good manners, behaving in school, and listening to the teacher and adults.

The teacher's role, Susana believed, is to teach the fundamentals like reading and math. She felt that students needed to be taught from the start, beginning in Kindergarten, if they wish to build a strong foundation.

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?*

This question seemed to agitate Susana, because she thought that the school wanted parents to become involved in what their kids are learning. She noted the difficulty that such an expectation presents for parents who speak little or no English:

Okay, we can partially help with homework since we do not speak, read, or understand the English language. There are times when the homework goes back incomplete, so we send a Spanish note letting the teacher know that our child will need help completing the rest of the homework.

However, Susana did bring up many other ways she, as a Latino parent, gets involved in her child's schooling:

We make sure our children eat breakfast, are clean, help with homework as much as we can, and attend school events such as the workshops where we learn how to help our children with schoolwork... [We also] attend the teacher conferences where we find how our kids are doing in school, and sometimes we attend school fieldtrips with

our children. We tried to be involved since we want our kids to be successful in school.

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?*

By sending home information about the school events coming up, Susana maintained that the school facilitates support for the children's education. She even commended the many times when the school would call Latino parents with reminders about school programs being offered in Spanish. Susana elaborated:

The school also started offering parent workshops with a variety of topics so parents can support learning at home. One example of a great workshop that I attended was about how to help with math. I tell you—I learned a lot.

She also mentioned the benefit of the school providing dinner so more parents can attend school functions even if they work late into the evening, and called it “a nice gesture on the part of the school.” The interpreters provided by the school to assist with communication when there is a parent-teacher conference, as well as the bilingual receptionist ready to help as needed, were two other factors that Susana felt facilitated her involvement. Speaking of the receptionist, Susana said, “I just pick up the phone and call her all the time when I have questions or concerns.” Susana concluded by adding, “All these services support parents to be more involved in our children education.”

Regarding the challenges related to language that she faces in supporting her children's education, Susana spoke at length:

Now, I need to be real and tell you about the barriers. I do not believe there is a language barrier when it comes to communicating with the school, since we are provided with information and interpretation in Spanish. However, I believe not knowing the English language could be a barrier when it comes to helping our children with homework. Also, it could be a pain sometimes when you want to communicate immediately with your child's teacher, and you cannot because you have to wait for an interpreter or for the receptionist to be able to help you. I think of how easy it would be if parents could only speak the language.

Other barriers Susana mentioned were the fact that parents do not have enough time to attend school events because of their work schedules, and the issue of transportation, which she nearly forgot to address. She stated, "Transportation is a big barrier too since many of us only have one car and usually the husbands use it to go to work." She noted that she takes the bus to go to her job, but must pay for a taxi when she attends school events; to this, she remarked, "I do not mind doing this once in a while, but it gets to be expensive."

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?*

Susana answered that she wanted to see more continuous workshops on topics related to the things the children are struggling with in school, so that she can be better prepared to assist her children at home. She also suggested the value of a workshop with information on making the transition from elementary to middle school, and then from middle school to high school, so that she could help prepare her children for these changes. Additionally, Susana

felt that the school needed to hire more bilingual staff, stating, “The receptionist is the only person in the office that speaks Spanish. There a couple of teachers that speak Spanish, but are always busy teaching students and do not have time to help.”

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

Susana replied in the affirmative to this query, believing that the school does care because they make sure parents get involved in school activities. Susana stated:

As I mentioned earlier, the school sends parents information in Spanish about the different workshops or school events. The workshops are taught by a Latina teacher who speaks Spanish. The school provides childcare, dinner, and for teacher conferences, they provide interpreters to help with communication. There is also a secretary who speaks Spanish who helps us a lot.

Participant Teresa Flores

Teresa Flores was a female, 45 years in age, who was happily married at the time of who study to a “hard worker” who provided for her and her family. She had two children, one who attended elementary school and one in high school. She and her husband had finished technical school and were living comfortably in Mexico until they lost their job, could not find any in Mexico, and were forced to come to the United States to work. She was working temporarily as a housewife, and considered herself a student learning English. Her English was getting better every day, and she was working to become fluent. She said she wanted to get a job soon to contribute to the household income.

Research Question 1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?*

Teresa said it was the school's responsibility to hire qualified teachers to teach the children well. She remarked, "There are good and bad teachers, and the school needs to supervise them to make sure there are doing their jobs." As far as the teacher's responsibilities, she felt it was important that they focus on instructing all the subjects well and testing continuously. Teresa stated:

I really do not know how they teach here, but if you are teaching a subject and within a particular lesson, at the end of the lesson, there needs to be a test [to] check if the students learn the material or not. The teacher needs to monitor the students' learning to make sure they are learning all that is related to the academics, and if not, to assist those students that need the assistance.

Research Question 2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?*

Teresa claimed there are various ways parents can become involved. She said, "I think the school wants me to help with homework, volunteer, and attend school events," but added that she needs the school to tell and show her how they would like her to become involved. Teresa cited her own involvement efforts as helping with homework and attending all the conferences with the teacher, as well as talking to her child about the importance of having an education and providing motherly *consejos y ánimos* (advice and encouragement) to boost self-esteem by praising her daughter's intelligence and talents. She said she talked to her daughter about *échale ganas* (putting extra effort), encouraging her to study hard so she

can get good grades, get into college, and possibly land a job where she could earn *mucho dinero* (a lot of money) and be more economically well-off.

Another way that Teresa recalled getting involved was by attending school events and parent workshops offered in the evenings. She said she liked the workshops, especially because she is learning many education terms and ways to support her child at home with reading and math. However, she admitted that she still had a lot to learn, so attending these workshops was her way of putting in more effort to support her child at home.

Research Question 3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?*

Communication is very important to Teresa, who argued that the school facilitates open communication by keeping parents informed of school events, inclement weather, and opportunities for parents to participate. Teresa expressed, "I would like for the teacher to call me periodically to let me know how my child is doing. I do not want to wait until the teacher conference to hear about it."

As far as challenges, Teresa viewed not speaking the language as a big one. She responded, "Obviously, not speaking the English language makes us feel limited to be able to communicate with the teacher and school and assist our children with their homework." She feels that parents need to learn how to speak, read, and write English to be able to help their children with homework, and suggested that the school offer English classes for parents who do not speak the language. Teresa also shared a desire for more information on academic resources, so that parents can learn what is available to support their children's learning. She said, "The truth is, I still do not understand everything about how this school works." Teresa

regularly attended the school's workshops, but admitted that she had a lot more to learn; still, she affirmed that by attending these workshops, "*Me animan a seguir echándole ganas para poder ayudar a mi hija*" ("I get encouraged to continue putting extra effort in learning how to support my child at home"). She asserted that the workshops could be improved, though, if they covered topics related to the overall educational system as well as the norms and rules of the school, claiming, "*Tengo muchas ganas de aprender*" ("I have a big desire to learn").

Research Question 4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?*

Teresa stated earlier in the interview that communication between the teacher and parents was, in her view, essential for her child's education. For this reason, she wanted to have more frequent communication with the teacher, specifically about her child's progress and performance, and did not "want to wait until conference time to hear how my child is doing." Hiring more bilingual personnel to assist with communication for non-English-speaking parents is another way Teresa felt the school could help enhance parental involvement.

When addressing the parent workshops at the school, Teresa said she was learning a great deal of new educational things and enjoying it. However, she did suggest that the workshops would be more effective and useful for her if they also included "information about understanding the educational system, as well as learning about the school's norms and rules."

Research Question 5. *Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?*

Teresa expressed, “It’s obvious the school cares about us. They keep us informed of the different school events and ways we can participate.” She felt that the school facilitated open communication by informing parents of the different events at the school, alerting them about inclement weather, and sharing ways that parents can participate. The school also treated Teresa with respect, she maintained, anytime that she comes to the school for assistance. “The office has a Spanish speaking receptionist who provides assistance to all parents,” she noted. Teresa again brought up the school’s efforts to educate parents by providing a series of parent workshops on ways to support reading, math, and other topics at home. The value she placed in the school was clear in her claim, “I feel very blessed to have such a wonderful caring school.”

Emergent Themes

The following Table 4.2 provides an overview of the emergent themes related to the current study’s Research Question 1:

1. *What are Mexican immigrant parents’ perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children’s education?* (This question is answered in two parts, A and B.)

Table 4.2: Emergent Themes for Research Question 1

Participant	School's Role	Teacher's Role
Felicita	Expert in Education School Attendance School Communication	Teaching Teacher Communication
Cindy	Expert in Education School Attendance Hiring Qualified Teachers Teacher Supervision ESL Resources	Teaching Teacher Communication
Alejandra	Expert in Education Hiring Qualified Teachers School Communication ESL Resources	Teaching Teacher Communication
Martina	Expert in Education Teacher Supervision School Communication	Teaching Teacher Communication
Juana	Expert in Education Hiring Qualified Teachers School Communication	Teaching Teacher Communication
Susana	Expert in Education	Teaching
Teresa	Hiring Qualified Teachers Teacher Supervision	Teaching

RQ1A – Parent Perceptions of the School's Role

Responsible for school attendance. Felicita and Cindy both believed that the school is responsible for making sure children attend school daily to learn. Cindy stated, “If my child is absent, the school right away calls me, asking why my child is not in school. Here the students do not miss school.”

Experts in education. Felicita, Cindy, Alejandra, Martina, Juana, and Susana all held the school and teacher as the experts in their children's education. Alejandra assumed that such a view was common in the United States, and asserted that these experts should know

what the children need to learn. Martina supported this view in noting that “the school has a guide that tells teacher what each grade level needs to learn.” Susana also held the school responsible for the education of the children. To this end, Juana felt that the teacher should monitor what each child is learning and what they need to be promoted to the next grade level. Cindy added another suggestion in stating that the teacher needs to provide extra time for students who are not doing well and need more time to learn.

Hiring qualified teachers. Cindy, Alejandra, Teresa, and Juana are the four parents who said that the school is responsible for hiring qualified teachers. Cindy extended this expectation by stating, “I feel the school’s responsibility is to make sure they have teachers equipped to teach students that English is not their first language.” Teresa agreed when she commented, “It is the school’s responsibility to hire qualified teachers to teach our children well.” Juana, too, concurred, but enhanced her view by considering culture as well as language when she stated, “The role of the school is to hire competent teachers that understand the culture of Latino students.”

Teacher supervision. Cindy, Martina, and Teresa agreed that it is the school’s responsibility to supervise and monitor teachers in the classroom to confirm they are using the proper curriculum. Cindy said, “It is the school’s responsibility to periodically supervise teachers by stopping by their classrooms to check how they are treating and teaching the students.” Martina similarly claimed, “The school needs to monitor teachers by making sure they are teaching according to the teacher guide,” and Teresa concurred in remarking that the presence of both good and bad teachers necessitates that the school “supervise them to make sure there are doing their job, which is to teach all that relates to academics.”

School communication. Alejandra, Felicita, Martina, and Juana felt that school communication is vital, and that the school is responsible for initiating it with parents. Felicita mentioned keeping parents informed of upcoming events and parent-teacher conference by either calling them or sending home information in Spanish. The issue of language was prevalent in the interviews, among most participants. Alejandra indicated that the school should have bilingual personnel assigned to reach out to non-English-speaking parents to assist parents with concerns they might have. Such personnel and information sent home in Spanish, Martina believed, should communicate to parents the school's expectations and ways parents can support the school and teacher to, in turn, support their children. To this end, Martina felt that an orientation for new parents could be useful to communicate information about school transportation, norms and rules, chances for parental involvement, and efforts to support ESL students. She also expressed confusion about some of the school norms, especially the academic calendar. Addressing communication in her interview, Juana felt the school should work to maintain open communication with parents about anything that relates to their child, and asserted, "If my child gets in trouble, hurt, not doing his homework, and/or is not behaving, then the school needs to have a conference with us to let us know what is going on."

ESL resources. Cindy and Alejandra argued that the school should provide extra resources for students who do not speak English. To teach well, Cindy claimed, teachers need to give extra time to those students who speak mostly Spanish and little English:

If the child does not know something, the teacher needs to be able to explain it one, two, or three times until the child understand it well. I mean, for them to pay close attention to what the students need to learn.

Alejandra similarly conveyed, “I think that sometimes the teacher does not pay too much attention to the children that do not speak English. I feel there should be more attention or help provided to these students.”

RQ1B – Parent Perceptions of the Teacher’s Role

Teaching. All seven parents held the teacher primarily responsible for teaching their children. Juana would especially like to ensure teachers do not treat students as just a number in the class, but rather as a unique child with the desire to learn. Martina agreed that teachers need to follow a teaching guide in their instruction, much like Susana’s view that “the role of the teacher is to teach the fundamentals such as reading and math. Students need to be taught from the very beginning, starting in Kindergarten to start building a strong foundation.”

Besides citing the need for focus on teaching all subjects well and testing regularly to confirm progress, Teresa also added:

I really do not know how they teach here. But if a teacher is teaching a subject within a particular lesson, at the end of the lesson there needs to be a test to check if the students learned the material or not. The teacher needs to monitor the student’s learning to make sure they are learning all that is related to the academics and, if not, to assist those students that need the assistance.

Cindy enhanced this idea with her view that teachers should provide extra time to those to Spanish-speaking students who do not know English, as well as to students who might need extra help learning something.

Teacher communication. Cindy, Felicita, Alejandra, Martina, and Juana all felt it was the teacher's responsibility to initiate communication with parents. These parents expressed a common desire for frequent communication from the teacher on how their children are doing in school, specifically if they are behaving and paying attention; they also wanted to know about any upcoming school events. As Juana so eloquently summarized:

I believe it is the teacher's job to keep an open communication with the parent. We want to hear from the teacher often, not just when is time for a Parent and Teacher Conference. Teachers need to pick up the phone and call us; I do not think it is asking for too much. The school has to keep parents informed. For example, if my child gets in trouble, hurt, not doing his homework, and/or is not behaving, then the school needs to have a conference with us to let us know what is going on."

The following Table 4.3 provides an overview of the emergent themes related to the current study's Research Question 2:

2. *What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education? (This question is answered in two parts, A and B.)*

Table 4.3: Emergent Themes for Research Question 2

Participant	Ways the School Would Like Parents to Get Involved in their Child's Education	Ways Parents Get Involved in Child's Education
Felicita	Attend School Events	Provide <i>Consejos</i> (Advice) Ensure Child Behaves in School Encourage Daily School Attendance Help with Homework Read Books Attend School Events Attend Parent and Teacher Conferences Send Snacks to Classroom Check Report Cards
Cindy	Attend School Events Help with Homework Ensure Child Attendance	Provide <i>Consejos</i> (Advice) Encourage Daily School Attendance Ensure Childs Behaves in School Help with Homework Attend Parent and Teacher Conferences Communicate with Teacher
Alejandra	Attend School Events Help with Homework	Encourage Daily School Attendance Ensure Child Behaves in School Have Backpack and School Supplies Ready Help with Homework Read Books
Martina	Help with Homework	Encourage Daily School Attendance Ensure Child Behaves in School Have Backpack and School Supplies Ready Help with Homework Read Books Support Native Learning at Home
Juana	Attend School Events Help with Homework	Attend School Events Help with Homework Read Books
Susana	Support Child's Learning Help with Homework	Attend School Events Help with Homework Attend Parent Workshops Attend Fieldtrips Attend Parent and Teacher Conferences
Teresa	Help with Homework Volunteer in School Attend School Events	Provide <i>Consejos</i> (Advice) Help with Homework Attend Parent and Teacher Conferences Attend School Events Attend Parent Workshops

RQ2A – Parent Perceptions of the School’s Expectations for their Involvement

Attending school events. Cindy, Juana, and Teresa all sensed that the school would like for them to attend school events as a way of being involved in their child’s education. In addition, Felicita felt the school wanted her to find out what was going on in the school by attending events, so that she could then use what she learned to support her children.

Alejandra similarly felt the school wanted parents to support their children’s education by attending school events, but she said she at times avoided doing so due to the language barrier, saying, “There have been time when, due to the language, I do not participate.”

Helping with homework. Alejandra, Susana, Martina, Cindy, Juana, and Teresa believed one expectation the school held was that parents would help with homework.

Susana shared:

Okay, we can partially help with homework, since we do not speak, read, or understand the English language. There are times when the homework goes back incomplete, so we send a Spanish note letting the teacher know that our child will need help completing the rest of the homework.

Issues related to her inability to speak English have caused Alejandra to be unable to assist with homework, and she admitted that, at times, the language barrier causes her to choose not to participate.

Encouraging school attendance. Cindy is the only parent who felt the school expected her to send her child to school daily. She clearly stated, “The school wants me to be involved in my child’s education by making sure my child attends school daily.”

Supporting student's learning. Susana was the only parent who believed it was the school's expectation for her to help with her child's learning. She voiced, "I think the school wants parents to become involved in what the kids are learning."

Volunteering at school. The only parent that thought she was expected to volunteer at the school was Teresa, who explicitly stated, "I think the school wants me to help volunteer at the school."

RQ2B – Parent Perceptions of their Involvement in their Children's Education

Provides *consejos* (advice). Felicita, Cindy, and Teresa cited the *consejos* (advice) they provide their children as evidence of their involvement. Cindy provided this advice by talking to her child about taking advantage of an education, as she shared, "I mean for my child to give it his all by studying, learning, and being on his best behavior, so that he can pay attention to the teacher, and this way he can quickly learn." Teresa's comment elaborates on the idea further:

I talk to my child to provide motherly *consejos y ánimos* (advice and encouragement). I talk to my daughter about the importance of having an education and pump her self-esteem by telling her how smart and talented she is. I tell my daughter all the time to "*échale ganas*" ("put effort in") studying hard, get good grades, and this way she will be able to go college to study a career. I tell my daughter that by having a career she will have the possibility of getting a great paying job where she could earn *mucho dinero* (a lot of money). I said "*hija vas a estar mejor que uno*" ("Daughter, you are going to be better off than us").

Ensuring a well-behaved child. Four of these Latino parents claimed that they stay involved in their children's education by telling them to behave in school. Cindy, Martina, and Alejandra said their involvement included making sure the children are on their best behavior in school, listening and paying attention to the teacher to aid their learning. Felicita shared their view, and stated it most eloquently:

When I said “*échales ganas*,” I mean for my children to give their all by paying attention to the teacher, studying hard, learning everything they need to, and be in their best behavior so that, this way, they can learn quickly and do well in school.

Encouraging school attendance. Felicita, Cindy, Alejandra, and Martina said they get involved by encouraging daily school attendance for their children. Alejandra said, “I feel I am very involved in my children's education by making sure my children are ready to attend school daily.” Martina echoed the sentiment by adding, “I make sure my child attends school every day.”

Having backpack and school supplies ready. Martina also cited getting involved by making sure her children have their school supplies and backpack daily. Alejandra likewise shared, “I feel I am very involved in my children's education by making sure they are ready to attend school daily, that they have their *mochilas* (backpack) and school supplies ready.”

Helping with homework. All the parents in this study said their involvement in their children's education included helping them complete homework. Felicita, Alejandra, Teresa, Susana, Juana, and Cindy assisted their children with homework as much as they could, and made sure the homework was completed. Still, the looming issue was clear as Martina cried and shared, “I feel so helpless not speaking and understanding the language to better help my

child with homework.” On the other hand, Cindy went the extra mile to find a solution to this problem in helping her child with homework, saying, “If I do not understand, I seek school assistance.”

Reading books. Martina, Juana, Alejandra, and Felicita worked to ensure that their children read every day. Felicita added, “I read books to my children, and they also read too.”

Supporting native language learning. Martina is the only parent that said she supported her children’s learning at home using her native language. She shared proudly that she was very involved, noting, “At home we read books. I teach my child how to read, write, and do basic math. I do this in my native language which is Spanish. I hope this will help him with school.”

Attending school events. Juana, Felicita, Susana, and Teresa tried to attend every school event so they could stay involved. Felicita shared, “I attend school events when I have time. I work, and sometimes my work schedule could be complicated.” Still, however, four of the parents reported attending school events was important to their efforts at involvement in their children’s education.

Attending parent workshops. Two parents, Teresa and Susana, attended the Parent Workshops offered by the school in the evenings. Susana voiced this act of involvement, saying, “I attend school events such as parent workshops, where we learn how to help our children with schoolwork.”

Attending parent-teacher conferences. Felicita, Cindy, Susana, and Teresa get involved by attending the parent-teacher conferences to find out how their children are doing

in school. Cindy reported going the extra mile by asking for help when she needs it as she remarked, “When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher for guidance.”

Attending fieldtrips. Susan is the only parent that shared how she and her husband sometimes attend fieldtrips, stating, “We sometimes attend school fieldtrips with our children. We try to be involved since we want our kids to be successful in school.”

Communicating with child’s teacher. Only Cindy noted her involvement included communicating with the teacher. She voiced, “I get involve by communicating with the teacher when I do not understand something.”

Checking school report cards. Felicita is the only parent that said she checked her child’s report card to see how they are doing.

Sending snacks to the classroom. Only Felicita said she got involved in her child’s education by contributing snacks for the classroom.

The following Table 4.4 provides an overview of the emergent themes related to the current study’s Research Questions 3:

3. *What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children’s education?* (This question is answered in two parts, A and B.)

Table 4.4: Emergent Themes for Research Questions 3

Participant	Ways the School Facilitates Parental Involvement	Challenges to Parental Involvement
Felicita	Welcoming Environment Bilingual Personnel School Communication Interpretation Services	Language Homework Communication Time Lack of Education Complex School System Shyness/Embarrassment
Cindy	Welcoming Environment School Communication	Language Homework Lack of Education Shyness/Embarrassment Complex School System
Alejandra	School Communication	Language Homework Written Communication Lack of Education Shyness/Embarrassment Complex School System Bilingual Personnel
Martina	Welcoming Environment Bilingual Personnel School Communication	Language Homework Communication Complex Educational System Teacher and Parent Communication Legal Status
Juana	Welcoming Environment Interpretation Services Parent Workshops	Homework Language Communication Complex Educational System
Susana	Interpretation Services Parent Workshops School Communication Bilingual Personnel	Language Homework Communication Time Transportation
Teresa	School Communication	Language Homework Complex Educational System

RQ3A – School Factors Facilitating Parent Efforts to Support Children’s Education

Welcoming environment. Felicita, Cindy, Juana, and Martina feel the school provides a welcoming environment that facilitates parental involvement. For the ways in which school seeks to make parents like her feel part of the school, Cindy was very

appreciative. Felicita likewise believed the school treats parents well, and felt welcome. Juana went further to credit the school for creating a friendly and safe environment for parents as she expressed, “I have to give the school credit for creating a friendly and safe environment for parents. The school is really trying to include all parents. I will give them a thumbs-up!” Martina echoed the others’ comments by stating, “I am thankful for such a wonderful school that cares for immigrant parents.”

School communication. All parents except for Juana shared how the school keeps an open communication with parents by letting them know of school-related events. Cindy appreciated the school’s efforts to help parents by communicating what is going on at the school. This includes, as Susana mentioned, the school’s frequent sending home of information about upcoming events, and even calling parents to remind them about school programs being offered in Spanish for Latino families.

Martina lauded the way the school informed parents of upcoming school activities by sending flyers home with information in Spanish, as did Teresa. As communication is very important to her, Teresa also appreciated the notices she received from the school about inclement weather and ways parents can participate in school activities. These and other communications, Felicita shared, are provided to parents via students’ take-home folders. Though Alejandra said she was grateful for the school’s invitations to school events, she admitted that she often does not know what to expect and, therefore, feels out of place.

Bilingual personnel. Martina, Felicita, and Susana each mentioned the school’s bilingual receptionist, who helps parents who speak Spanish. Felicita remarked, “The receptionist speaks Spanish, and is available to assist parents when they have questions or

concerns.” Her high availability and willingness to assist was confirmed by Susana, who added, “I just pick up the phone and call her all the time when I have questions or concerns.” She concluded by acknowledging that all the services at the school “support us as parents to be more involved in our children education.”

Interpretation services. Felicita, Susana, and Juana mentioned how the school provides interpretation services for parents to communicate with their child’s teacher. Juana and Susana both commented on how the school facilitates the effort for parents to support their children’s education by providing them with interpretation services during school events and when parents have their teacher conferences. Felicita confirmed by saying. “When the school schedules teacher/parent conferences the school asks the parents if they will be needing interpretation services.” Felicita believes that, “All this facilitates the communication between the parents and teachers.”

RQ3B – Parent Perceptions of Challenges to Supporting their Child’s Education

Homework. All seven parents cited not knowing how to speak and understand the English language as a big barrier their ability to assisting their child with homework. Alejandra expressed feeling helpless because of this, as she cannot understand her children’s homework that is in English. Cindy similarly noted many times when her lack of English understanding prevented her from being able to help with her child’s homework. Teresa echoed the frustration by saying, “Obviously not speaking the English language makes us feel limited in assisting our children with their homework.” Felicita imagined “how wonderful it would be to know the language and be able to understand the homework to help

my children.” Martina continued, “I mean, you really need it to be able to get around since everywhere you go English is spoken. Also, it is critical to help my child with homework.” Juana echoed all the others’ comments in voicing, “I would like to be able to speak English to be able to help more with homework.”

School and teacher communication. Felicita, Juana, Alejandra, Martina, and Susana maintained that not speaking and understanding the English language could often present a big challenge in communicating fully with the teacher and school. Teresa observed how it made her “feel limited” in her ability to communicate with the school. Juana mentioned that, although the school has personnel who speak Spanish and help parents as needed, she still wanted to learn English so she could be “the one talking directly with the teacher since there is so much that gets lost in translation.” Martina added further the importance of knowing the language since it is spoken ubiquitously throughout the country, not to mention that communication with her child’s teacher is, as she said, “critical.” The frustration of not speaking English was clear to Susana, and she said “how easy it would be if I could only speak the language” as she recalled having to wait for an interpreter or for the receptionist when she went to the school to speak with a teacher. Alejandra addressed this issue herself, remarking, “I’d like for the school to always have a translator or more bilingual personnel available to assist us with any questions or concerns. I feel, this way, I will be able to fit in better.”

Shyness/embarrassment. Felicita, Cindy, and Alejandra expressed feeling shy or embarrassed at not being able to speak the English language, and due to their own level of education. Felicita shared:

I feel perhaps a bit of shyness and embarrassment not knowing how to speak to the teacher, not knowing what to ask and/or to share. I think the teacher speaks very nicely and uses big words that many times I do not understand them, even when the translator tells me in Spanish.

Cindy could understand and speak English a little bit but said that, at times, she was “embarrassed about not speaking it correctly” and worried she might not be “understood and taken into consideration.” Alejandra expressed a similar feeling:

I often feel embarrassed to attend school events because the other parents just look at me weirdly, wondering maybe why I do not speak English or who knows what. I just do not like the way they look at me. What I am trying to say is, like, they feel sorry for me, and I do not want to cause shame to my child.

Written school/home communication. Alejandra contended that the school needed more consistency when sending home school information. She stated, “There have been times when the school sends information in English, and times when it is in Spanish. I would like for any school information to be sent home in Spanish.”

Lack of education. Felicita and Cindy believed their lack of education inhibited them from fully being able to communicate with the teacher or help their children with homework. Regarding communication with the teacher, Felicita stated, “I think the teacher speaks very nicely and uses big words, that many times I do not understand them, even when the translator tells me in Spanish.” It was Cindy who expressed not being able to help with certain content areas and homework due to her limited education, stating, “I barely finished

second year of high school, so my knowledge is very elementary. I help my child as much as I can, but I feel frustrated and helpless not being able to help as needed.”

Complex school system. Six of the participants – Felicita, Cindy, Juana, Martina, Alejandra, and Teresa – reported that not knowing and understanding the education system and the school rules/norms or policies could be a challenge to their efforts to support their children’s education. Felicita addressed this complexity directly:

I do not think it is easy to understand the educational system in this country. For example, there are different school calendars, school levels of education from elementary to middle school, and from middle school to high school, and not to mention all the policies they have.

Juana specifically wanted to learn about “school suspension and school attendance.” Cindy shared that there had been many times when she was unsure how the school really functions, but added that she was “learning as my child advances in school.” Teresa concluded by stating:

The truth is, I still do not understand everything about how this school works. I keep attending the parent workshops that the school offers, where I am learning a ton; However, I feel I have a lot to learn and, by attending these workshops, *me animan a seguir echándole ganas para poder ayudar a mi hija* (I get encouraged to continue putting effort in learning how to support my child at home). I would like for the workshops to also include information about understanding the overall educational system, as well as learning about my child’s school, specifically about the norms and rules. “Tengo muchas ganas de aprender” (“I have a big desire to learn”).

Lack of time. Felicita and Susana both claimed they did not have enough time to be involved in their children's education, due to their work schedules and varying hours. Notably, though, Felicita expressed, "Time is a challenge, but I try to be involved as much as possible."

Transportation. Susana is the only parent that viewed transportation as a barrier to getting involved in her child's education. She explained that her family only had one vehicle, which her husband used to go to work, hence she was forced to take the bus to work and hire a taxi when she wanted to go to school events. However, Susana noted the problem with this in that "it gets to be expensive."

Legal status. Only Martina cited legal status as a barrier to parental involvement in children's education. She shared, "It is critical to for us to become legalized. There are many resources that we do not qualify for because we aren't legal. I also fear for the safety of my family."

The following Table 4.5 includes the emergent themes related to the current study's Research Question 4:

4. *What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?*

Table 4.5: Parent Responses on Information Needed to Enhance their Involvement

Participant	Information, Resources, and Guidance Needed to Enhance Involvement in their Children's Education
Felicita	Parent Workshops
Cindy	Varied Times for School Functions Childcare Transportation Bilingual Personnel Parent Workshops
Alejandra	Bilingual Personnel Classroom Observation Homework Support Program Parent Workshops Parent and Teacher Communication School and Home Communication Volunteer Opportunities English Classes Tutoring Program
Martina	Parent Workshops English Classes Parent and Teacher Communication
Juana	Bilingual Personnel Homework Program Parent Workshop English Classes Tutoring Program
Susana	Bilingual Personnel Parent Workshops
Teresa	Bilingual Personnel Parent and Teacher Communication Parent Workshops

RQ4 – Resources Needed to Enhance Parents' Involvement in Children's Education

Varied times for school functions. Cindy maintained that she would like to attend all the school events, but was limited in part by a schedule that was sometimes complicated. While she did not have a job outside the home, she worked caring for her children, and thought her involvement could improve “if the school event schedule could be at different times.”

Childcare. Though she desired to attend all the school's events, Cindy indicated that she may attend more of them if the school could provide childcare. Such a service, she

added, would also encourage more parents to attend school functions. She was the only study participant that cited childcare as a need.

Transportation. If the school provided transportation to and from school events, Cindy argued, it would serve to encourage more parents to attend these functions. No other participant mentioned transportation.

Bilingual personnel. Three participants – Cindy, Juana, and Alejandra – argued that the school needed to hire additional bilingual, Spanish-speaking personnel to assist with communication. As Cindy pointed out, more than half of the students’ parents speak Spanish, and Juana likewise noted that many Latino parents at the school do not speak English and need help with communication. Though she acknowledged that the receptionist did speak Spanish, Juana maintained, “We need more like her in the school.” Echoing this, Alejandra expressed that it would be “ideal” if the school had more personnel that could assist Latino parents in Spanish.

Classroom observation. To learn how to better support her child’s education, Alejandra shared a desire to attend school with her child to observe first-hand what is happening in the classroom and how her child is learning.

Homework program. To address the issue of not being able to help her child with homework, Alejandra suggested that the school offer a homework support program, before and after school, for those students whose parents cannot effectively assist. Juana likewise suggested an afterschool homework program to help students whose parents are limited with the English language.

Parent workshops. All seven participants in this study felt that parent workshops are greatly needed. Alejandra sought general help understanding how she can support her child's education; when she received information about new educational workshops at the school, she excitedly proclaimed, "I can't wait to attend and learn." Regarding specific topics, Felicita wanted information on how to assist with homework, while Cindy, Teresa, Martina, and Alejandra wanted knowledge about how the school system operates as well as its expectations, norms and rules, transportation routes/schedule, yearly calendar, financial aid, volunteering opportunities, and academic support available for ESL students. In line with this participant's views, Juana also expressed a desire to learn more about the school's norms and rules, particularly as they pertain to suspension, attendance, and parents' educational rights. Susana also described wanting to attend a workshop with information on grade-level transitions, such as from elementary to middle and then high school, so that she could prepare her children for those changes. Susana, on the other hand, wanted more specific information about the students' coursework, and suggested the value of a workshop that taught parents about topics students are struggling with in school.

Parent and teacher communication. Three of the parents in the study addressed communication between parents and teachers. As parent-teacher communication is essential for a student's education success, both Teresa and Martina wanted frequent communication with the teacher about their child's performance in school. As Teresa shared, "I do not want to wait until conference time to hear how my child is doing." Alejandra agreed, noting that, in addition to meeting with the teacher, she "would like to receive frequent phone calls letting me know how my child is doing."

School and home communication. Recalling how the school at times sent home information written in only English, even though many parents at the school did not speak or understand the language, Alejandra contended that such information should be provided in Spanish for Latino parents to increase their understanding.

Volunteer opportunities. Alejandra would like to volunteer at the school, but needs to seek information on how to become one and the specific ways she can volunteer. Her reasoning was based on gaining more comfort with the school environment, as she believed that becoming a volunteer would help her feel more comfortable and fit in better so she would not be embarrassed when attending school events like she currently did.

English classes. Teresa, Felicita, and Martina said that learning English would be useful. Language was viewed by Teresa as a big barrier for those parents that do not speak English, and she asserted that parents must be able to speak, read, and write English if they are to be effective in assisting their children with homework. Felicita wanted information on where she could take English classes, and Martina said that it would “be ideal if the school can offer the classes here.”

Tutoring program. Alejandra maintained that she would help with homework if she knew how to do so, and therefore felt that the school should offer a homework assistance program for those students whose parents are limited with the English language, preferably before and after school hours. Expressing the same idea in favor of school-based tutoring, Juana had “heard that other schools offer such programs... [as well as] programs for students that are falling behind in reading or math,” and it was clear she felt strongly about the school’s obligation to help students in this way.

Table 4.6 below includes an overview of the emergent themes related to the current study's Research Question 5.

5. Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?

Table 4.6: Emergent Themes from Research Question 5

Participant	Ways the School Demonstrates Care for Parents
Felicita	School Cares Bilingual Personnel Welcoming Environment School and Parent Communication
Cindy	School Cares Bilingual Personnel Welcoming Environment School and Parent Communication School Resources
Alejandra	School Cares Bilingual Personnel School and Parent Communication
Martina	School Cares Bilingual Personnel School and Parent Communication
Juana	School Cares Bilingual Personnel Welcoming Environment School and Parent Communication Educational Workshops Interpretation Services
Susana	School Cares Bilingual Personnel Welcoming Environment School and Parent Communication Educational Workshops Interpretation Services Childcare Dinner
Teresa	School Cares Bilingual Personnel Welcoming Environment School and Parent Communication Educational Workshops

RQ5 – Parent Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them

School cares. For the most part, all parents felt that their children’s school cares about them. Teresa happily called it “obvious” that the school cared because they worked to keep parents informed of school events and chances to participate. Citing the “great system” marked by attention and support given to Latino students in ESL classes and to parents who speak different languages, Juana concluded that the school did care about parents like her. Felicita eloquently answered in the affirmative as well, saying, “After all, we are the parents of the children that go to that school.” However, Alejandra was less certain about this question, and shared that she had mixed and wavering feelings about whether the school cared about her or not; at times, she felt the school cared, while at other times she did not. Alejandra angrily shared an instance where she did not feel the school gave her or her needs much consideration:

There was a time when I came to the school to see my child’s teacher to find out how my child is doing in school. The receptionist knows I do not speak English, but still sent me to speak with the teacher. I got to classroom and the teacher just looked at me and said something in English. I just stood there staring at her, not knowing what to say or do, until my poor daughter came to my rescue. My daughter with her broken English tried to translate for me. Oh, I really hate this type of situations; I felt so defeated.

If the school really cares, Alejandra argued, they should always have bilingual personnel available to assist Latino parents.

Bilingual personnel. Susana, Felicita, and Cindy appreciated that there was always a person at the school who spoke Spanish. Juana and Teresa similarly praised the office receptionist who helps Spanish-speaking parents who stop by the school with questions. Martina elaborated on one time when the bilingual receptionist helped her, recalling, “I received the application for free or reduced lunch and breakfast in English. I came to the school, and the receptionist explained it and helped me complete it. The receptionist is very kind to parents.” Alejandra presented the same view in always wanting bilingual personnel to be available in the school kindly, adding that the need was especially critical because the receptionist “is only one person and always looks overwhelmed.”

Welcoming environment. Five of the seven parents in this study believed the school provides a welcoming environment. For Felicita, the presence of someone to help her with communication, whether it is the bilingual receptionist or a bilingual teacher, helps her feel welcome. Moreover, she enjoyed the courteousness with which she was treated at the school. Similarly, Juana mentioned the helpful bilingual receptionist as she described the school’s friendly and safe environment, where parents are made to feel welcome and stop by the school anytime. Teresa’s comments were perhaps most complimentary; she claimed, “I am being treated with respect when I come to the school for assistance. I feel very blessed to have such a wonderful, caring school.”

School and parent communication. All parents in this study agreed that their children’s school effectively facilitates open communication with the parents. Juana, Susana, and Cindy spoke about the constant communication from the school letting parents know about current and upcoming events. Teresa added that the school also informs parents when

there is inclement weather, and provides information on volunteering opportunities and ways they can participate in school activities; Alejandra appreciated the school's efforts to include parents in this way. Martina, too, discussed the school's frequent sending home of information in Spanish and commented on the value of the interpretation services provided. Felicita addressed the communication issue by again bringing up the fact that the bilingual receptionist or a bilingual teacher is always available to assist Latino parents; this, along with the courtesy with which parents were always treated, made her feel cared for by the school. Communication, then, between the parents and the school, was important to making all the study participants feel as though the school cared for them.

School resources. Cindy was the only participant who brought up school resources as evidence that the school does care for her as a parent. She stated, "As far as the education in the United States, it is thousand times better. There are many resources the school provides for students that need help by teaching them in different ways." She also commended the school for offering her child special education services and extra tutoring so that he could learn faster, more evidence in her view that the school cares.

Educational parent workshops. Teresa shared how the school worked to educate parents by providing a series of workshops in which they learn ways to support students' learning at home. Juana liked that these workshops taught parents how to better assist their children with school. Suggesting it was even more indicative that the school cares, Susana noted that the parent workshops are taught by a Latina teacher who speaks Spanish.

Interpretation services. Both Susana and Juana mentioned the interpretation services offered during parent-teacher conferences to facilitate communication as evidence the school

cares. Juana was pleased that the school would “provide an interpreter when there is a meeting with the teacher so the parent can communicate with the teacher openly to discuss how the child is doing in school.” The informal interpretation services provided by the school’s bilingual receptionist were cited by Susana as being helpful.

Childcare/dinner. For Susana, the childcare and dinner provided by the school during the parent workshops are evidence of the school’s care. Since the school is aware that many parents come directly from work, the food and childcare services are offered to encourage more parents to attend the workshops.

School Event Observation

Table 4.7 below includes the themes that emerged from the current researcher’s observation of an event at Southern Elementary School, the Family Academy (Parent Workshop).

Table 4.7: Emergent Themes from the School Event Observation

Ways Parents Get Involved	Parents’ Barriers to Involvement	Ways the School Facilitates Involvement
Attends School Events	School Policies	Welcoming Environment
Reads to Child	School Calendar	Bilingual Receptionist
Helps with Homework	Homework	Parent Workshops
Provides <i>Consejos</i> (Advice)		
Encourages Child to Behave		
Encourages School Attendance		

Analysis of the school event observation data and the data gathered from the parent interviews revealed an apparent overlap of surfacing themes. During the parent workshop,

while the researcher observed, the presenter asked parents how they get involved in their children’s education. To this, the parents replied that they attend school events (such as parent workshops and parent-teacher conferences), as well as provide *consejos* (advice) to their children about the importance of good behavior, attendance, and finishing homework. These themes resonate with the themes that emerged from RQ1.

In regards to barriers that kept them from being fully involved in their children’s education, the parents cited not knowing all the school’s rules or norms or the English language to help with homework. These barriers echoed the themes gathered from RQ3.

School Artifacts Analysis

For the current study, the researcher analyzed several school artifacts and samples of communication sent home to parents. When looking at several school flyers that were sent home with the students, it was evident the school works to facilitate communication with their Latino families. The school sends home information in Spanish about key school events and where they can take free English classes. Additionally, parent workshops offered by the school teaches them strategies to support learning at home. The theme that surfaced was home communication. Table 8 below provides an overview of the materials analyzed.

Table 4.8: Overview of School Artifacts Analysis

Artifacts Type	Information Provided
Family Academy Flyer	Schedule of seven parent academies
Magnet Fair Information Flyer	Information about the District’s Magnet Fair
Free Classes Flyer	Information about where to go for free English classes
“Read to Achieve” Event Invitation	Information about Read to Achieve (for third graders only)
Student Reassignment Meeting	Information about student reassignment for the 2017-2018 school year

Summary of Findings

Study Overview

Throughout the interviews, school event observation, and school artifact analysis, several similar threads were woven. First, all parent participants were in their 30s, except for one that was in her 40s. Five of the parents were married, and two lived with their partners. Three parents were housewives, one worked in housekeeping, one was a waitress, and two worked from home babysitting children. All of them had been in the United States for less than five years at the time of the study, having come here for economic reasons.

Participants had varied educational level. One parent only had an elementary education, and could barely read, write, or do simple math. Two parents only completed middle school. Three parents had a high school diploma, and one parent went to technical school. All of the parents valued and wished for their children to get a good education. All but one of the parents did not speak any English, though they expressed wanting to take classes to learn it, and the other parent could speak only a little.

The following sections discuss how the parents in this study responded to the interview questions, and examines how their answers align with the literature review.

Parent Perceptions of the Role of the School and Teacher (RQ1)

The way parents view their role in their child's education correlates with their level of participation (Hornby, 2011). Some parents view education differently because of varied cultural beliefs, and may feel that it is the school that should deal with their children's education (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). This is true for Latino immigrant parents, who

see the school as responsible for teaching, and furthermore may be uncertain about what role they should assume when asked to assist with school activities (Tinkler, 2002). Feeling as though they are intruding upon the school's territory then, many Latino families find it disrespectful to make any suggestion or interfere with the school (Walker et al., 2011). In line with the literature, the Mexican immigrant parents in the current study confirmed that they viewed the teacher and the school as experts in education. As such, they allowed these experts to take over and make all decisions related to their children's education, citing ways that include hiring qualified teachers to teach ESL students and initiating communication with the home.

Parent Perceptions on their Involvement in their Children's Education (RQ2)

The way parents view their role in their child's education is crucial to their participation in the student's learning (Hornby, 2011). Those with other cultural and ethnic backgrounds understandably have some values that differ from perceived "American" values, values which affect behaviors and expectations. Teachers may see such parents as disinterested or unconcerned when, in fact, they simply value education differently than the teachers understand (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The physical absence of Latino immigrant parents at school Open Houses, Parent-Teacher Association events, parent-teacher conferences, fieldtrips, classroom events, and other school-based activities are more likely due to the barriers they face in understanding and navigating the American education system (Turney & Kao, 2009). Notably, as pointed out by Quijano and Daoud (2006), this

misunderstanding regarding Latino immigrant parents can be alleviated by merely explaining involvement to them, such as what it is, how it is done, and how it benefits their children.

Moreover, the literature does not aptly capture the types of activities in which Latino immigrant parents do engage to support their children's education. The current study, however, revealed many insights on this. Specifically, the Mexican immigrant parents who participated see their role as provide *consejos* (advice) to their children to behave, do their best in school, get their homework completed, attend school every day, and have their *mochilas* (school backpack) ready; they also contribute to a school's needs in ways such as donating snacks, supplies, and materials.

Factors Challenging Parent Efforts at Involvement in Children's Education (RQ3A)

The current study's findings indicated that parents have different beliefs about what can act as a barrier to their involvement in their children's education. Nonetheless, if schools wish to be more effective in facilitating parental involvement, especially from Latino immigrant parents, they must better understand—and eventually address—the challenges to these parents' participation (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Specifically, issues related to language and communication discourage immigrant parents from becoming too involved in their children's schooling, in part for fear of being disrespectful as it is viewed according to the mores of their own Latino culture (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Additionally, lack of education may cause some parents to doubt their abilities and feel unsuited to assist their children with academics, which may then restrain them from becoming involved with the school or helping their children with homework (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). The current study's findings confirm the literature, as the Mexican immigrant parents who participated acknowledged that their limited education and inability to speak and understand the English language could be a challenge in their efforts to help with homework and communicate with the teacher.

Another challenge cited by the Mexican immigrant parents in the study was being unfamiliar with the workings of the United States education system, particularly for Latino students and parents, especially those in new destinations (López, 2001). Mexican immigrant parents simply want to know what is expected of them, so that they can better support their children, as well as advocate and express their aspirations (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). Conversely, once the schools learn about these barriers along with the parents' goals and commitments, they can then become more responsive in their efforts to engage parents. In turn, as research has shown, increasing parental involvement works to boost student performance (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004), so more involvement of Latino parents could foreseeably translate to improved academic achievement for their children.

Factors Facilitating Parent Efforts at Involvement in Children's Education (RQ3B)

The Latino immigrant parents in this study indicated that Southern Elementary School paid attention to the barriers they face when trying to participate in their children's schooling. This, they maintained, was evidenced by many of the school's actions, particularly in their provision of resources to the parents. For example, the school facilitates their involvement by providing them with a welcoming environment, bilingual personnel, and home communication. They cited the helpful bilingual receptionist in the front office, who

makes them feel welcome and provides assistance as needed. These parents also shared how the school keeps an open communication with them by frequently sending information home, written in Spanish, announcing school events. Furthermore, the school has frequently reached out to immigrant parents via information sent home with the students as well as direct telephone calls. Such sustained collaboration works to build the parents' trust for the school, which they may not inherently have, but arguably need if they want an effective relationship with the school.

Resources Parents Need to Enhance Involvement in Children's Education (RQ4)

Southern Elementary School provides parents with some resources to enhance their involvement in their children's education. These resources include a Spanish-speaking office receptionist who creates a welcoming school environment and is available to assist Latino parents. Additionally, the school maintains open communication with the parents by sending home school-related information in Spanish. The school even offers interpretation services during school events and parent-teacher conferences to support non-English-speaking parents and enable a more successful meeting. To help parents support learning at home, the school also offers parent workshops throughout the school year.

The parents in the current study strongly held the view that the school needed to hire more bilingual bicultural personnel, particularly since half of the students in the school are Latino. Other needed resources cited in this study include language assistance to help the Latino parents who speak Spanish; homework support for students that parents cannot help due to their own lack of education or limited English language proficiency; and more

educational workshops designed to teach parents how to support their children's learning at home.

Parent Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them (RQ5)

All seven Mexican immigrant parents in the study said they believed that the school cares for them. De Gaetano (2007) maintains that involving Latino immigrant parents in the educative process is one of the critical issues for schools. Furthermore, if schools aim to connect with students' families, educators and parents must strive to learn about each other's culture. Schools must be acutely aware of the customs and beliefs of the various populations they serve if they want to work collaboratively for the benefit of the students. At the same time, Latino immigrant parents must know that educators are interested in meeting their needs and respectful of their language and culture (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

More than half of the student population of Southern Elementary School is either from Mexico or Central America. Recognizing the prevalence of this group in its population, the school is a proponent of teaching Spanish through their dual-language program, thus demonstrating that it values the students' culture and language. This is furthermore exemplified by the presence of a bilingual receptionist and other Spanish-speaking faculty and staff to assist Latino parents with face-to-face communication—helping to make the parents feel valued by the school and more comfortable when on campus. Notices of upcoming school events or other pertinent information that are sent home to Latino parents are written in Spanish.

In addition, the school offers a series of parent workshops delivered by a Latina instructor, designed to provide strategies to help parents support their children's learning at home. Notably, research suggests that such a practice results in increased parental involvement. In a large urban school in California, Latino immigrant parents were offered a workshop series that provided information about collaborating with the school, assisting with academics, and the overall operations of the educational system. The Latino immigrant parents that attended the workshops became more active in their children's education, with specific behavior that included initiating more contacts with teachers, attending more parent conferences and workshops, and providing reading and homework support (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Southern Elementary School's parent workshops then, may or may not be intentionally designed to encourage more parental involvement, but one could argue that the result of the workshops could be effective in getting parents involved.

Family Academy (Parent Workshop) Observation

When the observation and interview data were analyzed and compared, an overlap of themes surfaced. During the parent workshop observation, the presenter directly asked parents how they get involved in their children's education. To this, the parents responded that they get involved by attending school events such as parent workshops and parent-teacher conferences, help with homework when possible, and provide *consejos* (advice) to their children about good attendance and behavior in school. These themes resonate with the themes that emerged from the interviews.

During the workshop, the parents also addressed some of the barriers they face in their efforts to be fully involved in their children's education. Some of the issues they mentioned include lack of understanding of the school's rules and norms, and not speaking the English language so they could help with homework. The comments gathered from parents during the workshop observation echoed what the parents who were interviewed shared.

School Artifacts Analysis

Analysis of school artifacts made clear that the school aimed to facilitate communication with Latino parents by sending home information about school events that were written in Spanish. Some of the events that the school informed the parents about include Family Academy parent workshops, Magnet Fair, free English classes, Read to Achieve, and student assignment information. The parents who were interviewed appreciated the efforts of the school to maintain open communication with them and facilitate parental involvement. From this, the theme of school and home communication emerged.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the analysis of data collected from interviews and one school event observation. Interviews were presented and analyzed individually by how parents responded to each question, correspondingly, the observation and artifacts data were analyzed. Recurring themes that emerged from the interview questions were noted. Lastly, findings were presented based on the alignment of parents' answers to the questions with the research on the topic as discussed in the literature review. After discussing the current

study's findings as they relate to extant research, the next chapter includes implications of the findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview of the Study

Latinos are now becoming increasingly dispersed across the country, with many moving to states that previously had very few Latino residents (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004; Singer, 2004). Although they remain home to the majority of this country's Latino population, established Latino states' overall share of Latinos has decreased since the 1990s (Guzmán & McConnell, 2002). At the same time, the proportion of Latino immigrants in several "new destination" states, mainly in the Southeast, Midwest, and Northwest, has increased dramatically (Pew Research Center, 2005). One such new destination for Latino immigrants is North Carolina, where hundreds of thousands of people from Mexico and other Latin American countries have moved as economic, political, and environmental refugees attempting to find jobs and a better life for their families. Thus, for the past three decades, the budding Latino population has played a pivotal role in reshaping North Carolina's demographic and economic landscape (Gill, 2010).

Research literature demonstrates that both destination, or where they go, and factors at the school itself affect the educational outcomes of Latino immigrant and minority children (Pong & Hao, 2007; Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Few studies, however, have examined school contexts in new Latino destinations. Kandel and Parrado (2006) conducted two case studies examining Latino students in public school within a new destination community in the South. Their analysis of an elementary school in rural Mississippi identified limited funding and resources to accommodate the influx of Latino students, and noted that the school relied instead on the community, such as local churches

and businesses, to offer resources like tutoring and English classes to the students. They also examined an elementary school in urban North Carolina, and their case study revealed similar problems (Kandel & Parrado, 2006). Furthermore, even fewer studies have systematically compared school contexts in new and established Latino destinations (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). There is little known about the schools that Latino immigrant students in new destinations attend, nor do we understand how these schools compare with those in established destinations. More research, then, is required to assess how schools in new Latino destinations are accommodating the academic, social, and linguistic needs of this group of students, along with the nature of their parents' involvement in their education.

Additionally, Mexican immigrant parents can be unsure about their roles, access, or the expectations of them for involvement in their children's education, which may cause them to become isolated, confused, and marginalized (Karsada & Johnson, 2006). Some of these issues can be arguably remedied by a school's more intentional and strategic efforts to engage Mexican immigrant parents and let them know what is expected of them so that they can better support their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). Research in this area can provide insight to bolster the ability of schools to do so.

To meet this gap in the current literature, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of seven Mexican immigrant parents with respect to their integration into their child's school, their understanding of the school's expectations of their children and of their involvement in the education process, the ways in which parents are involved in their children's education, and obstacles to their parental involvement. This qualitative,

phenomenological study took place within a suburban elementary school from a Southern School District in North Carolina.

Discussion of Emergent Themes

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates the connection between the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELL) and parental involvement. Schools that have meaningful parental involvement report increased levels of student performance, improved school attendance, higher graduation rates, and greater numbers of students moving on to enroll in higher education (Epstein, 2001).

To confirm as well as learn more about this phenomenon, the current study interviewed seven Mexican immigrant parents with respect to their experiences about what the school is doing to facilitate their involvement in their children's education. Specifically, this study revealed how Latino parents view their role in their children's education, as well as the challenges they face in their efforts to get involved. Findings were largely aligned with the research literature, though added insight was gained through several emerging themes.

Latino Parents' View of the Role of the School, Teacher, and Themselves

Latino parents believe that it is primarily the school's responsibility to educate their children. Though most school staff view parental involvement narrowly, overlooking the variety of ways that parents can and do support their children's education (Mapp, 2003), Latino parents do feel they have a role in their children's education. It is to provide nurturing support and instill values such as good behavior in their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdés, 1996), as well as to teach their children at home. It should also be noted that Latino

parents believe these efforts are important in contributing to their children's academic development.

In line with the literature, the Mexican immigrant parents in this study all perceived the role of the school and teachers as being "experts" in their children's education. These parents viewed the school's responsibility to hire qualified teachers to instruct ELL students. They felt the teacher was responsible for teaching their children what they need to be promoted to the next grade level, and for initiating teacher and parent communication.

Responses provided by this study's participants about their involvement in their children's education also aligned with the literature. While parental involvement has not been clearly defined, most researchers would agree that it should center on increasing the communication between the home and school, and supporting learning at home (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). When the parents in the study were asked about how they get involved in their child's education, their responses echoed the research about supporting learning at home as they recalled how they provided *consejos* (advice) to their children by encouraging them to behave in school, attend school daily, have their school supplies ready, and complete homework. The parents also addressed involvement via communication with the school that included attending school events such as parent-teacher conferences and parent workshops.

Facilitation of Latino Parental Involvement by the School

Parental involvement has been identified as a critical component of public education in the United States, and it is therefore imperative that Latino parents are involved in their

children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Schools arguably hold some responsibility for trying to encourage parents to get involved. Epstein (2001) stresses that parental involvement policies and practice should provide for several activities including communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. In seeking to identify how an elementary school in North Carolina facilitated the involvement of its Latino parents, the current study revealed several ways. Specifically, the Mexican immigrant parents in the study reported that the school facilitates their involvement by providing them with a welcoming environment, bilingual personnel, and home communication. They cited the helpful bilingual receptionist in the front office, who makes them feel welcome and delivers assistance as needed. These parents also shared how the school keeps an open communication with them by frequently sending information home, written in Spanish, announcing school events.

Challenges/Barriers to Latino Parents' Effective Involvement

For schools to make parental involvement integral and effective, they need to understand its benefits as well as the challenges or barriers that prevent parents, especially Latino immigrant parents, from participating in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Language has been cited as one of the most significant barriers to parental involvement across numerous research studies (Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Zarate & Meyer, 2007). If they are lacking or limited in English proficiency, Latino parents cannot as effectively help their children with homework or easily communicate with school personnel (Zarate & Meyer, 2007). This English language barrier results in communication gaps

between teachers and Latino parents that creates fear, embarrassment, frustration, and intimidation in Latino parents, leaving them to feel disempowered to participate in any decision-making affecting their children's education (Guzmán, Medina, & Wong-Ratcliff, n.d.). Delgado Gaitan (2004) cites Latino parents' level of education as another challenge that inhibits their ability to become involved in their children's education.

The findings in the current study aligned with the literature. Latino parents in general regard education as very important, and the participants in this study reflected high educational aspirations for their children to succeed. However, the Mexican immigrant parents in the study mentioned that not knowing the English language was a major challenge that hindered their efforts at communicating with the teacher or being able to help their children with homework. They also argued that their own lack of education made understanding the content difficult, which furthermore kept them from effectively assisting with homework.

Another aspect to consider is that immigrant parents can often struggle to understand or navigate systems that are unfamiliar to them or which do not seem to "speak their language" (Valdés, 1996). Latino students and parents, especially those in new destinations, may be unfamiliar with the American education system (López, 2001). Likewise, the parents in the current study found this country's educational system to be challenging, and claimed to not really understand the school's rules and norms.

Factors Needed to Enhance Latino Parental Involvement

Reaching out to the Latino immigrant parents is a matter of building trust as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents. Latino immigrant parents need to know that educators are interested in meeting their needs, and respectful of their language and cultural differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The current study investigated the information, resources, and guidance needed by Mexican immigrant parents to improve their involvement in their children's education.

The immigrant parents in this study maintained that additional bilingual faculty and staff at Southern Elementary School personnel is needed, since more than half of the school's student population is Latino. Though they were vocally appreciative of having the bilingual receptionist, they felt more personnel was necessary to help Spanish-speaking parents with communication. They also indicated a desire to have frequent communication with their children's teacher, rather than having to wait for the next parent-teacher conference.

Most of the parents in the study expressed the desire to learn how to better support their children's learning. They suggested that the school offer more educational workshops on strategies for doing so, and that more parent workshops would enhance their involvement in their children's education. Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) studied a workshop series offered to Latino immigrant parents in a large urban school in California, which provided information about collaboration between home and school, how parents can help with academics, and the operations of the educational system. The Latino immigrant parents that attended these workshops became more active in their children's education by initiating more contacts with teachers, attending more parent conferences and workshops, and providing

reading and homework support to their children. Before the workshops, the parents in the study had wanted to be involved, but did not know how. Quioco and Daoud (2006) claim that merely explaining involvement to Latino immigrant parents – what it is, how it is done, and how it benefits their children – helps alleviate misunderstanding.

Parents' Perceptions of Whether the School Cares for Them

In conclusion, all seven Mexican immigrant parents in the study voiced that the school genuinely cares about them, as it provides them with resources to enhance their involvement in their children's education, offers a welcoming environment, and treats them well. The bilingual, friendly receptionist makes them feel especially welcome, and she frequently assists them. They also feel that the school keeps them well-informed of school events and other pertinent information, even providing interpretation services for school events and parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, these parents appreciated that the school offered workshops to provide parents with educational strategies and ways to support their children's education.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined as threats to the internal and external validity of a study (Merriam, 1998). In the current study, the following limitations can be identified: a researcher-developed instrument was used, and the researcher may have held bias that affected data collection or analysis. That is, the researcher developed the instruments used in this study (the questions asked to parents), as well as conducted the interviews. Moreover, the incorrect interpretation of the parents' responses is a possible limitation.

While every effort was made to minimize bias or subjectivity and assume a neutral stance, neutrality does not mean detachment (Patton, 2002). Thus, it is possible that researcher's own perceptions may have presented a certain bias. To minimize this, the researcher engaged in bracketing, triangulation of data, member checks, and participatory collaboration in the study's analysis.

Statement of Bias

My professional and personal background provided me with an advantage in conducting this research, in a variety of ways. Professionally, I have worked previously as a third-grade bilingual, ESL and Spanish teacher, Assistant Principal, and ESL Coordinator. This experience, particularly with ESL educational programming, has offered me unique insight into how parents' experiences can be interpreted to make programmatic improvements. Presently, I serve as Senior Administrator for Family and Community Outreach; this position gives me access to the study school's data beyond that which may be provided by participants (creating additional data for triangulation), and it also increases my level of access to school sites and participants. In addition to my professional experience, my personal background as a child of immigrant Mexican parents allowed me to better understand these parents and their involvement in their children's education.

Researchers using a phenomenological approach make systematic efforts to set aside their own prejudgments of the phenomenon being investigated to keep a nonbiased approach (Moustakas, 1994). As discussed earlier, this is better known as the Epoché process, in which the researcher remains free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon obtained from prior experiences or studies (Moustakas, 1994). *Epoché* (pronounced *eh-poh-*

chay’) is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, or to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. In this process, the researcher leaves behind their own experience so they can better understand the experience of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

To uphold the Epoché process used in this study, and because phenomenological research does not try to distill phenomena to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the context in which they are studied, I guarded against preconceived notions and expectations, and remained open to new ideas. This helped me maintain the nonhierarchical, holistic, and nonjudgmental paradigm in which phenomenology should be situated (Moustakas, 1994). The parents that took part in the study were deemed participants and not subjects, and they participated actively in the results. They shared their experiences openly, and my role was to discern the essence of the experience within their own context to take my own biases out of the research. This allowed me to fully and completely focus on understanding the level of school involvement the parents described through their own perspectives. Due to my professional and personal experiences working with parents as well as providing Parent Academies, I have personal insight into what parental involvement looks like within the community, and my own views on how parents should be involved in their child’s education. In conducting this study, then, I was aware that I needed to focus on the experiences that were expressed by the participants through their eyes, rather than mine.

The research methodologies employed in the current study assisted in this process considerably. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) propose, I spent considerable time collecting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical data. In manipulating the data, I was confronted with

my own opinions and prejudices constantly; however, via this barrage of empirical data, my own notions were confirmed and/or changed by this study. Further, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) remind us that the researcher's primary goal is to add knowledge and generate theory, not to pass judgment or blame, so I attempted to describe as many dimensions as were visible from the findings, rather than to only support my own initial ideas. Finally, I questioned my own biases regularly and kept them in check, and I recorded field notes from my own responses and reactions to interviews and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Implications for Policy

Overall, parental involvement has been identified as critical component of public education in the United States and it imperative that Latino parents are involved (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). While this study used qualitative methodology and its findings may not be generalizable to national and state practices, prior research suggests there may nonetheless be possible implications for educational policy. The key to the educational success of Latino immigrant children is the fostering of family, school, and community partnerships and parents' ability to navigate these interconnected systems (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Ramirez, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Latino immigrant parents need to know that educators respect their language and cultural differences and want to meet their needs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Notably, parental involvement has long been part of policy at the federal level through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which requires that Title I schools develop policies and compacts between the school and the family that outline how the two stakeholder groups will work together to boost student achievement (Mapp,

2011). Later, the United States Department of Education (2013) identified a Dual Capacity-Building Framework to guide the work of school districts. Based on existing research and best practices, this framework is designed to act as a scaffold for the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs. It fundamentally lays out a process to guide school and district staff to engage parents and help parents work successfully with the schools to increase student achievement (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013).

However, whether a school is Title I or not, all American schools should be required to have a parental involvement policy, and making this possible requires that the United States public education system include parental involvement as an integral part of education reform (Mapp, 2011). As of January 2010, 39 states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws mandating the implementation of parental involvement policies (Belway, Durán, & Spielberg, 2010). In 2012, Massachusetts was one of several states to integrate parental involvement into its educator evaluation system, making it one of the four pillars of its rubric for evaluating teachers and administrators with the hopes of helping to close the achievement gap (Massachusetts, 2012).

The findings of the current study provide insights that policymakers can apply to such education reform. We can view the increase in the number of states supporting policies directed at promoting parental involvement as a sign of progress toward improving educational opportunities for all students. Hopefully, the findings of this study along with existing research and ongoing education reform efforts will incite more states to implement parental involvement policies to provide parents with the educational tools they need to support their children's academic success.

Implications for Educational Practice

Recommendations for School Districts

The last few years have been marked by a rapid increase in the immigrant student population, with Latino students being the largest group (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Capps et al., 2005; Gibson, 2002; Kochhar et al., 2005; Wortham, 2001). Therefore, the issue of Latino immigrant parental involvement deserves attention, especially for immigrant parents. School districts can make distinct changes to better serve this population. The dramatic population growth of Latino students has reshaped the landscape in the Southern School District of North Carolina, one of the states with the largest Latino immigrant population. This carries education-level implications for the school district that deserve attention.

Based on the current study's findings, there are several possible recommendations for the school district. One recommendation is the creation of a Family and Community Engagement Department to oversee the implementation of parental involvement policies and the allocation of funds and resources to support schools. It would furthermore be ideal if schools were encouraged to use the dual capacity-building framework (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013) as a scaffold for the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs, and to hire more bilingual/bicultural staff to serve the Latino students and parents. There must also be additional funds allocated to support innovative, sound parental involvement programs in schools, especially those with a high Latino student population, as well as to provide teachers and staff with professional development opportunities to learn best practices for increasing parental involvement.

Recommendations for Schools

This section is written as part of my commitment to Southern Elementary School and the Mexican immigrant parents who participated in the study. Based on themes found in the current study, the following recommendations were formed, indicating that schools should:

1. Hire bilingual/bicultural parent liaison(s) to work with families and help parents by:
 - a) Interpreting as needed to facilitate parent and school communication.
 - b) Facilitating parent workshops on how to understand the educational system and other topics to support learning at home.
2. Provide an orientation for all new immigrant parents about the school's rules, policies, and opportunities for parental involvement, as well as use video technology to introduce parents to the United States educational system; the video could familiarize parents with a child's annual learning objectives, and address topics such as college preparation, opportunities for afterschool activities or tutoring programs, and standardized testing.
3. Partner with the community college to offer English classes for Latino parents at the school site, helping to improve their English language skills so they may be more apt and better able to help with homework, attend events, and establish a presence in their child's school.
4. Partner with the community college to offer Spanish classes for educators (school faculty and staff) at the school site, and further break the language barrier by having faculty and staff attempt to use Spanish phrases when speaking with parents.

5. Survey parents to find out what hours and days would be more convenient for them to attend school events.
6. Provide transportation, childcare, and dinner to increase parent participation at school activities.
7. Provide an afterschool tutoring program to help Latino students with homework.
8. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and staff on best practices for increasing parental involvement, as well as to offer them an opportunity to learn about Latino culture and how to engage Latino parents in their children's education.
9. Adapt to the needs of the Latino student population and their parents by assessing current and needed resources.

Recommendation for Future Research

Few studies have examined school contexts in new Latino destinations, and even fewer have systematically compared school contexts in new and established Latino destinations (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). Indeed, the current literature on Latino education is based almost entirely on the experiences of Latinos in established destinations, in part because the geographic diversification of Latinos is a relatively recent phenomenon (Marrow, 2005). The current qualitative study aimed to provide some insight into what Southern Elementary School was doing to engage their immigrant families, and its results would be excellent to attempt to replicate future research to see if comparable results would be found in similar schools within the district. To get more accurate data than what was gained in this study, future research on this phenomenon should include and seek out the perceptions of

teachers and school principals on how they get immigrant parents involved in their children's education. The results could benefit the school district by highlighting the actions the schools are taking to give immigrant parents the support they need to get involved in their children's education, and could help the district system allocate additional resources to schools facing a large population of Latino students.

Conclusion

Results of the current qualitative study suggest that Mexican immigrant parents strongly value education and have high aspirations for their children, yet they have a different perception of what parental involvement means and how to accomplish it. Additionally, the interviews, observation, and artifact analysis in this study indicate that the school works to reach out to Latino immigrant parents by providing them with a bilingual receptionist, interpretation services during school events and parent and teacher conferences, communications to parent written in Spanish and educational parent workshops to learn strategies to support their children's learning at home.

Given the barriers they face, increasing parental involvement among immigrant parents can be difficult. It is therefore of critical importance that staff members and educators are cognizant, mindful, and sensitive to these parents' unique challenges when implementing strategies and supports aimed at getting them involved in their children's education. One of the first and most important steps educators can take to address the barriers Latino immigrant parents face and increase parental involvement is to create a warm, safe, and inviting environment where Latino immigrant parents feel welcomed. Other measures require a reexamination of the approaches educators and schools use to increase parental

involvement—all of which will ideally work to improve the integration and performance of Latino students in our American schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: General Interview Guide (Spanish)

Maria Rosa Paredes Rangel
(919) 323-5000

Propósito de la investigación: Es examinar las experiencias de los padres mexicanos inmigrantes recién llegado a los estados unidos con respecto a su integración en su escuela, su comprensión de las expectativas de la escuela sobre sus hijos, las expectativas de la escuela con respecto a la participación de los padres, obstáculos para su participación y las maneras en que los ellos se involucran en la educación de sus hijos en una escuela primaria de WCPSS.

PI1: ¿Cuáles son las percepciones de los padres inmigrantes mexicanos sobre el papel de la escuela y de los maestros en la educación de sus hijos?

- A. ¿Qué cree usted que hará a su niño exitoso en la escuela?
- B. ¿Cómo entiende usted el papel de la escuela y los maestros en los Estados Unidos?

PI2: ¿Qué comportamientos perciben los padres inmigrantes mexicanos constituyen "participación" en la educación de sus hijos?

- A. ¿Tienen usted las mismas creencias como la escuela sobre la participación de los padres?
- B. ¿La escuela le apoya en involucrarse en la educación de su hijo?
- C. ¿Es fácil comprender cómo funciona la escuela de su hijo en los Estados Unidos?
- D. ¿En qué maneras siente usted que contribuye al rendimiento académico de su hijo?

PI3: What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education? ¿Cuáles son los factores que los padres mexicanos perciben que facilitan o desafían los esfuerzos de apoyar a sus hijos en la educación?

- A. ¿Cómo le ayuda la escuela a participar en la educación de su hijo?
- B. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos que le impiden participar o de ayudar como le gustaría a usted en la educación de su hijo?
- C. ¿Son los problemas sociales que le impidan participar en la educación de su hijo? Por ejemplo, timidez, aprendizaje del idioma inglés, las normas culturales de los Estados Unidos.
- D. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los obstáculos que le impiden comprender lo que está sucediendo en la escuela? ¿Qué le ayudaría para entender?

PI4: ¿Qué información, recursos y orientación creen que los padres inmigrantes mexicano necesitan para mejorar su participación en la educación de sus hijos?

- A. ¿Qué información, recursos y orientación cree usted que se necesita para mejorar su participación en la educación de su hijo?

PI5: ¿Creen ustedes que la escuela se preocupa por ustedes?

- A. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que la escuela hace para mostrarle que se preocupan por usted?

Appendix B: General Interview Guide (English)

Maria Rosa Paredes Rangel
(919) 323-5000

Research Purpose: Is to examine the experiences of Mexican immigrant parents with respect to their integration into their child's school, their understanding of the school's expectations about their children, expectations of the school with respect to parental involvement, obstacles to their involvement, and the ways in which parents become and are involved in their children's education in a Southern Elementary School.

RQ1: What are the Mexican immigrant parents' perceptions about the role of the school and of the teachers in their children's education?

- A. What do you believe will make your child successful in school?
- B. How do you understand the role of the school and teachers in the U.S.?

RQ2: What behaviors do Mexican immigrant parents perceive constitute "involvement" in their children's education?

- A. Do you have the same beliefs as the school about parental involvement?
- B. Does the school support you in getting involved in your child's education?
- C. Is it easy for you to understand your child's school and how the school works in the U.S.?
- D. In what ways do you feel you contribute to your child's academic performance?

RQ3: What do Mexican immigrant parents perceive are factors that facilitate or challenge their efforts to support their children's education?

- A. How does the school help you to stay involved in your child's education?
- B. What are the challenges that keep you from getting involved or helping as much as you would like?
- C. Are there social issues that keep you from getting involved in your child's education? For example, shyness, English language, learning U.S. cultural norms.
- D. What are some obstacles that keep you from understanding what is happening at school? What would help you understand?

RQ4: What information, resources, and guidance do Mexican immigrant parents believe are needed to enhance their involvement in their children's education?

- A. What information, resources, and guidance do you believe are needed to enhance your involvement in your child's education?

RQ5: Do Mexican immigrant parents feel the school cares about them?

- A. What are some of the things the schools is doing to show you they care about you?

Appendix C: Participant Invitation Letter (Spanish)

Estimado Padre,

Mi nombre es Maria Rosa Paredes Rangel, soy estudiante de doctorado en la Facultad de educación y desarrollo humano en la Universidad de estado de Carolina del norte. Actualmente estoy trabajando en mi tesis y me gustaría realizar mi investigación en la escuela de su hijo. El propósito de mi estudio es examinar las experiencias de los padres recién llegados a los Estados Unidos con respecto a su integración a la escuela de su hijo, su entendimiento de las expectativas de la escuela, las expectativas de la escuela con respecto a la participación de los padres, obstáculos para su participación y las maneras en que usted se involucrados en la educación de sus hijos.

Se le pide su participación en esta investigación ya que nos gustaría que comparta sus experiencias de cómo usted se está integrando a las escuelas de los Estados Unidos, cuáles son sus percepciones de la participación de los padres, y cómo perciben el papel que juegan los padres en la educación de sus hijos. La información obtenida en este estudio ofrecerá a los distritos escolares y educadores una base lo cual pueden explorar estrategias sobre la participación de los padres que pueden ayudar a hacer una diferencia en el éxito académico de los estudiantes latinos. Se le pedirá participar en una entrevista en persona con grabación en cinta. Esperamos que su participación dure una hora de su tiempo. Yo le llamaré por teléfono para programar la entrevista que se llevara a cabo en la escuela de su hijo.

Los riesgos potenciales asociados con este estudio son la posibilidad de ponerse emocional durante la entrevista. Esto será manejado atreves de recordarle que la entrevista puede interrumpirse en cualquier momento y cualquier parte de la entrevista puede ser omitido por su solicitud. Esperamos que esta investigación ayude con las estrategias y enfoques para ayudará a mejorar la participación de los padres latinos de distrito escolar.

Por favor, entienda que la participación es totalmente voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no en ninguna manera afectara su relación actual o futura con la escuela de su hijo o su facultad, estudiantes y personal. Usted tiene el derecho a retirarse de la investigación en cualquier momento sin penalización. Usted también tiene el derecho a negarse a responder a cualquier pregunta (s) por cualquier razón, sin ninguna penalidad.

Su privacidad individual se mantendrá en todas las publicaciones o presentaciones resultantes de este estudio. Todos los participantes serán anónimos a través de seudónimos. Todas las grabaciones en cinta serán destruidas adecuadamente en la conclusión de este estudio. Con el fin de preservar la confidencialidad de sus respuestas, todas las grabaciones de las entrevistas y la lista de los nombres de participantes con seudónimos correspondientes se mantendrán fuera del alcance de esta escuela primaria.

Si usted está interesado en participar, por favor complete la siguiente información y envíela al maestro de su hijo. Habrá un seguimiento de una llamada de teléfono por la investigadora la Señora Rangel donde le explicará en más detalles el proceso de la investigación. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o desea información adicional sobre esta investigación, por favor contactarme en 919-323-5000 o en mi correo electrónico a rosarangel@gmail.com.

Nombre _____

Número de Teléfono _____

Appendix D: Participant Invitation Letter (English)

Dear Parent,

My name is Maria Rosa Paredes Rangel, a Ph.D. student in the College of Education and Human Development at North Carolina State University. I am currently working on my Dissertation and will be conducting my research at your child's school. The purpose of my study is to examine the experiences of Latino immigrant parents with respect to their integration into their child's school, their understanding of the school's expectations about their children, expectations of the school with respect to parental involvement, obstacles to their involvement, and the ways in which parents become and are involved in their children's education.

You are being asked to participate in this research because we would like for you to share your experience with how you are integrating into the U.S. schools, what are your perceptions of parental involvement, and how you perceived the roles parents play in their children's education. The information gathered from this study will offer school districts and educators a foundation on which to build for the further exploration of parental involvement strategies and approaches that can help make a difference in the academic success of Latino students.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one taped interview. We expect your participation to take about one hour of your time. The researcher will call you to schedule the interview which will take place at your child's school.

The potential risk associated with this study is the possibility of becoming emotional during the interview. This will be handled by reminding you, the participant, that the discussion can be stopped at any time and that any part of the interview can be omitted by request of the participant. We expect this research will help create strategies and approaches that will assist in improving parent involvement for the school district Latino parents.

Please understand that participation is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect your current or future relationship with your child's school or its faculty, students, and staff. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions(s) for any reason, without penalty.

Your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study. All participants will be anonymous through pseudonyms. All tape recording will be properly destroyed at the conclusion of this study. To preserve the confidentiality of your responses, all interview recordings and a list of participant names with corresponding pseudonyms will be kept away from this elementary school.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the following information and send it to your child's teacher. There will be a follow-up phone call by the researcher to explain in details the research process and to schedule the interview. If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 919-323-5000 or my e-mail at rosarangel@gmail.com.

Name _____

Phone _____