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Breaking Barriers by Enhancing Collaboration Between Schools, Communities, and Spanish-speaking Immigrant Parents

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Abstract

There are barriers that interfere with parental involvement in their children's education in many schools in the U.S. However, additional barriers are often encountered by immigrant parents across our country. This investigation proposes practices that will better serve this population and reduce the barriers that affect their school engagement. One guiding question for this study is: What actions could be implemented to foster more effective collaboration between schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents? The objective of this study was to create a proposal for school personnel and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents to collaborate more effectively in terms of their children's education. The theoretical framework was guided by Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Epstein's and Sheldon's (2022) framework of the six types of involvement. These theories provided a solid foundation and guided this study to create a proposal on how to alleviate the barriers that immigrant parents face when trying to engage in their children's education. The methodology used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach that examines the experiences of eight participants using semi-structured interviews. The proposed actions are directed at educators and administrators to improve immigrant parents' collaboration and promote a more inclusive

and enriching educational environment, generating a positive impact on their children's education.

Keywords: parental involvement, parent engagement, Spanish-speaking parents, immigrants, barriers

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Introduction

Active participation and involvement of parents are crucial in the lives of their children; this is reflected in all areas of children's lives, including formal education (Kantova, 2024; Mcdowell et al., 2018; Vassallo, 2018). The participation of parents, whether biological, adopted, legal guardians, or other caregivers, is of great value. The benefits of active parental participation transfer to education as well and include better academic performance, a greater commitment to learning, and the development of social skills (Kantova, 2024). When parents show interest in their children's educational journey, they feel supported and motivated to achieve their academic goals (Araque et al., 2017). The active involvement of parents in education is essential for the comprehensive development and success of their children. However, parents face barriers when trying to get involved. These barriers are often intensified for Spanish-speaking immigrant parents in the United States, who face unique challenges related to language, limited resources, and cultural differences within the educational system (Olivos, 2020; Rodríguez Vásquez, 2023). Furthermore, Spanish-speaking immigrant parents often face barriers to engagement in their children's education, as schools frequently overlook the informal educational practices occurring within Latino households that contribute to children's social and academic growth (Olivos et al., 2011; Valdez, 2015).

Active parental involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on student academic achievement and social-emotional development (Housel, 2020). Despite the existence of numerous studies examining the engagement of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents, significant gaps remain in understanding the specific barriers they face within the U.S. educational system (Arellanes et al., 2018; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cuevas, 2020). This study aimed to contribute to the broader discourse on parental engagement by providing a

comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities that could enhance the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education. By focusing on the experiences of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents residing in an urban setting in Texas, the present research sought to address the identified gaps in the literature on parental engagement, thereby contributing to ongoing efforts to support this vital population.

Consequently, this research study was established with the objective of creating a proposal for actions to foster more effective collaboration between schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. The following question served as a guide for this study: What actions could be implemented to foster more effective collaboration between schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents? The next section focuses on examining Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Epstein's and Sheldon's (2022) framework of the six types of involvement to explain the importance of collaboration between families, schools, and communities in supporting student success.

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed within Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence theory, and the framework of six types of involvement, which was established in 1995, and updated by Epstein and Sheldon in 2022. These theories maintain that collaboration between parents, educators, and members of the community is essential to promote learning and the integral development of students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). This collaboration creates a supportive educational environment, where the student is at the center, while strong and consistent support is provided to help them reach their full potential.

Epstein's (1987) theory of the overlapping spheres of influence proposes that learning is enhanced when parents, educators, and community members work together to guide and support student growth. This perspective recognizes that the three main contexts in which children learn and develop encompass the family, the school, and the community, and must be integrated to maximize academic outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022).

Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of involvement was developed as a practical and effective approach for achieving such collaboration. Its six categories of involvement—parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community—provide clear guidance for parents, educators, and communities to work together for the benefit of students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). These forms of participation allow parents to participate in the education of their children, positively impacting their academic success and well-being.

Consequently, Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Epstein's and Sheldon's (2022) framework of six types of involvement provided a strong theoretical framework for this research. By framing this investigation on collaboration between the family, the school, and the community, it seeks to promote a favorable educational environment where students benefit from the support provided. Theoretical evidence from Epstein's (1987) theory of the overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein and Sheldon's (2022) framework of six types of involvement was used to achieve the objectives of this investigation, serving as the basis to create the instruments used to discover the barriers that currently affect Spanish-speaking immigrant parents to actively engage in the education of their children and create a proposal for actions to foster more effective collaboration between schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. In the next section, the literature reviewed focuses on the benefits,

barriers, and effective approaches that enhance parental engagement in education, particularly among Spanish-speaking immigrant families.

Review of the Literature

Benefits of Parental Engagement

Research on parental engagement agrees that family and/or parental involvement has a positive impact on student academic achievement in addition to schoolwide benefits. In a study conducted in the United States, Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) emphasized the importance of parental involvement in education. The authors concluded that when parents are actively involved, their children are more likely to earn better grades and test scores, attend school regularly, develop strong social skills, exhibit better behavior, and adapt successfully to the school environment. Additionally, Suárez and Vélez (2018) highlighted that the family nucleus plays a crucial role in the development of children's habits, values, and aspirations. In this environment, parents fulfill essential functions, such as preparing children to assume social roles, controlling impulses, sharing values, and developing sources of meaning, such as the selection of personal and academic goals.

Furthermore, Garbacz et al. (2021) argued that families and schools are central and proximate systems that promote children's education, behavior, and social-emotional competencies. In particular, dual language and bilingual education models foster engagement by validating the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Spanish-speaking families, thus encouraging their involvement in school activities (Martín Corredor et al., 2023; Olivos & Lucero, 2018). These claims are validated by extensive research which indicates that high levels of parental involvement are associated with higher academic achievement, higher school attendance, and

positive student behavior (Womack, 2020). Consequently, when schools have high levels of parental engagement, the trust between schools and families increases, and the channels for collaboration strengthen (Rubin et al., 2021).

Barriers to Parental Engagement

As research shows, parental engagement is critical to student achievement, nonetheless, some parents are not actively involved in their children's schooling process for a variety of reasons hindering their participation (Petrone, 2016). Spanish-speaking immigrant parents in the United States may encounter additional reasons or barriers when it comes to trying to be involved in their children's education (Perrigo et al., 2023). These barriers may include language barriers, cultural differences, time constraints, lack of knowledge, in addition to fear and mistrust (Perrigo et al., 2023).

Parental engagement is beneficial to student academic success; the task of educators across the country has been to develop and implement initiatives to ensure high levels of collaboration between the school and parents. However, language barriers and cultural misunderstandings about bilingual education can create feelings of exclusion (Kasun, 2016; Perrigo et al., 2023). Ortiz (2018) explains that some demographic groups, including Spanish-speaking immigrant parents, in the United States continue to be underserved due to systemic barriers, which can extend disengagement.

Parental engagement in their children's education is critical; however, for parents who do not speak the school language, engaging in their children's education remains a challenge (Dunn, 2021). Furthermore, Ortiz-Leger (2022) explains that participation practices vary from one family to another, due to reasons such as time constraints, the parents' academic levels,

and cultural norms. Nonetheless, issues related to family engagement are broader than cultural differences or even language barriers (Parsons & Shim, 2019).

While these obstacles, ranging from language barriers to time constraints related to employment and family responsibilities, pose significant challenges, they also underscore the importance of finding innovative ways to support diverse family engagement. As Keller et al. (2021) highlighted, recognizing these limitations is essential for fostering an inclusive environment where all families feel empowered to participate in their children's education. Therefore, despite these barriers, opportunities exist to bridge these gaps and enable more meaningful, accessible forms of engagement that can enhance academic success for all students.

Enhancing Parental Engagement

While non-English speaking immigrant parents, especially those from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, encounter challenges when engaging with their children's education, these challenges offer significant opportunities to foster meaningful parental engagement. To better serve this population, it is critical to move beyond deficit perspectives and recognize the unique cultural wealth these families contribute. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework underscores the various forms of capital (linguistic, familial, social, and navigational) that families possess, including Spanish-speaking immigrant families, which can be instrumental in supporting their children's success. Similarly, Moll et al. (1992) funds of knowledge theory emphasizes the idea that families, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds, possess important knowledge shaped by their life experiences, work, and family traditions. These "funds" of knowledge include practical skills, cultural practices, and community connections that can significantly contribute to a child's education. When educational institutions recognize and value these resources, they can build stronger partnerships with families (Beckett et al., 2012). Such

acknowledgement empowers parents and helps create a more inclusive educational environment, enhancing collaboration between home and school (Petrone, 2016). By validating the unique experiences and insights of parents, educators can foster stronger family engagement (Manzo, 2016; Parson & Shim, 2019).

Research shows that the contributions of immigrant parents are often underestimated within educational systems, which frequently overlook the strengths and cultural assets these families bring (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2003). Shifting the focus from deficits to potential opportunities helps educators cultivate engagement strategies that recognize and build on the existing strengths of immigrant families, ultimately creating a positive environment for both students and families (Manzo, 2016). Furthermore, schools that actively acknowledge and incorporate these forms of capital can create a more inclusive atmosphere, empowering parents to participate actively in their children's learning journey (Alemán et al., 2015; Parson & Shim, 2019).

Dual-language programs present unique opportunities for enhancing parental engagement. These settings can serve as platforms for parents to share their cultural and educational values, fostering a reciprocal learning environment that bridges home and school experiences (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Engaging Latino parents in discussions about their aspirations and concerns can lead to more inclusive and supportive educational environments (Olivos & Lucero, 2018). Schools that provide resources for bilingual families, such as bilingual materials, workshops in the parent's native language, and bilingual parent liaisons, tend to foster greater trust and participation from parents (Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006).

Ultimately, viewing Spanish-speaking immigrant families through the lens of an assets-based analysis rather than limitations allows schools to leverage the vast resources these

families offer (Benavides López, 2016; Dyrness, 2007). By implementing this type of approach educational institutions can empower Spanish-speaking immigrant parents as active participants in the school-home connection (Valdez, 2015).

Methodology

Research Design

This study focused on understanding the specific barriers faced by Spanish-speaking immigrant parents when interacting with school institutions in an urban setting in Texas. Factors such as language barriers, employment barriers, academic barriers, as well as difficulties establishing effective communication with teachers and other school personnel were examined. To meet the objectives of this research study, the researcher used a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher Positionality

In conducting this research, I acknowledge that my positionality as a bilingual instructional coach and as a Mexican immigrant shapes my perspective and approach. Working directly at the school provided me with direct access to participants, which was invaluable in establishing trust and fostering open communication. My role allowed me to engage with teachers, students, and families, and better understand their experiences within the school environment. Furthermore, as an immigrant, mother of school-aged children, and bilingual educator, I have firsthand experience navigating the complexities of the U.S. education system. My family's immigration journey has shaped my cultural identity and understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant families, particularly in terms of language barriers, cultural

differences, and limited access to resources. This shared experience fostered a strong connection with participants and enhanced my ability to gather rich qualitative data.

Research Context

This research study focused on an urban setting in Texas, which is home to a substantial population of Spanish-speaking immigrants. This place serves as a significant destination for immigrants from diverse regions, with Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, and Cuba being the most common country of origin for Spanish-speaking immigrants (Lacarte et al., 2023). Approximately one-third of foreign-born residents in the city originate from Mexico, contributing to Spanish being the predominant language spoken among this immigrant population (Balderrama et al., 2020).

Data Collection

The present investigation used an instrument in the form of a semi-structured interview protocol which was developed to achieve the aims and objectives of the investigation. For the design of the instruments, the theoretical framework was used to base the concepts, variables, and indicators, in addition to tending to the general and specific questions and objectives. This instrument included 20 open-ended questions written in Spanish, as well as exploratory questions that were used when participants needed to clarify or expand their answers.

Participant Selection

The purposeful sample consisted of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents located in an urban setting in Texas. Invitation letters written in Spanish were sent to parents in two fourth and fifth grade classes, where students were classified as Emergent Bilinguals and enrolled in dual language programs. To select participants, a second invitation letter was sent to parents

who met the study criteria of being immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. Follow-up telephone calls were then made to those who expressed interest in participating. Ultimately, a purposeful sample of eight Spanish-speaking immigrant parents was finalized for the study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality: Sra. Sandra, Sra. Marta, Sr. Juan, Sra. Laura, Sra. Ana, Sra. Abigail, Sra. Teresa, and Sra. Diana.

Before conducting the interviews, participants were provided with a consent form to be completed and returned with their children to the school. Each participant signed an "Interview Consent Form" which stipulated an at-will participation. Subsequently, appointments were scheduled to complete the interviews virtually through Google Meets. All of these steps were conducted in Spanish, a language the researcher dominates as her native language.

Data Analysis

After completing and recording all the interview videos, the audio transcription was made. Initially, guided by a thematic analysis (Dawadi, 2020), a deductive approach was used for coding using a table on the operationalization of the variables (Braun & Clarke, 2022) where the indicators were pre-identified. However, the researcher identified other emerging codes due to the use of an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022); therefore, a hybrid approach between deductive and inductive approaches was used.

The final step in the coding process involved creating a concept map, as shown in Figure I, which organized the codes into distinct categories. Consequently, it was possible to extract meaning from the data and produce a narrative by using thematic analysis and consulting the theoretical framework to draw conclusions.

Findings

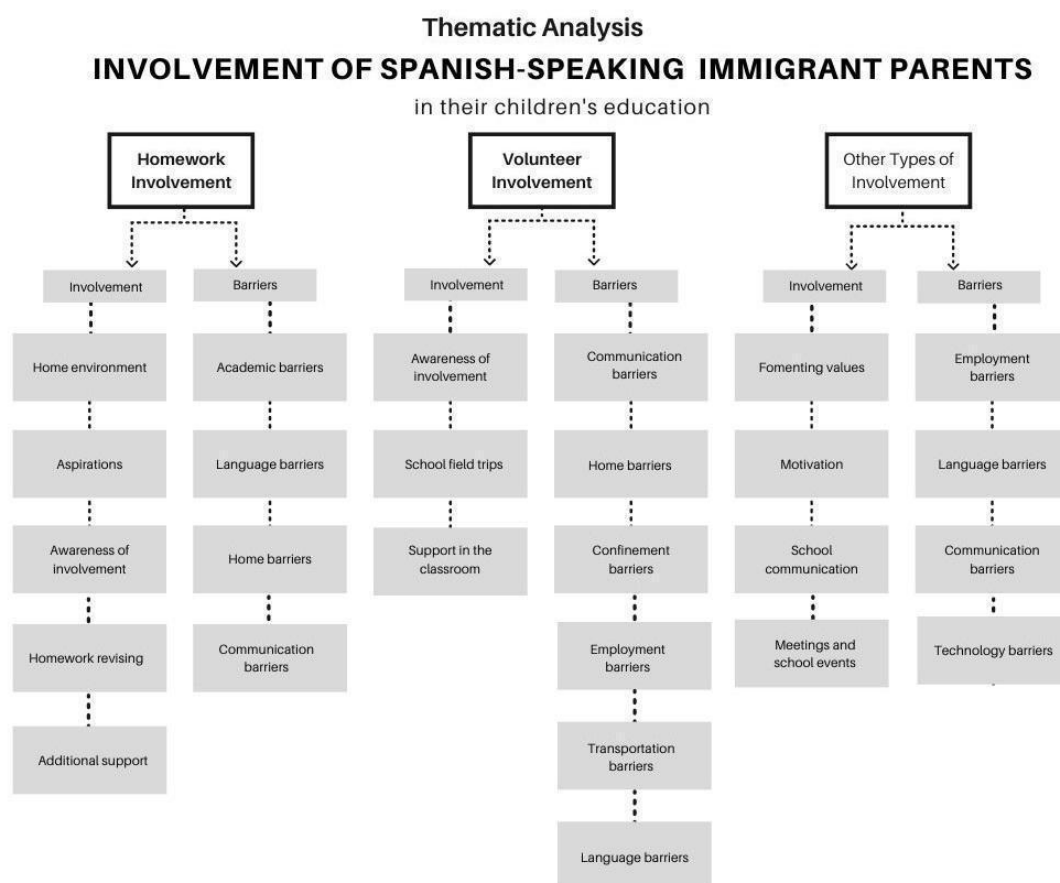
Derived from the analysis of the data, a deeper understanding of the experiences of Spanish-speaking immigrants and their children in the educational context was obtained. In this research study, eight participants were interviewed, consisting of seven mothers and one father. All participants identified as Spanish-speaking immigrants with school-age children enrolled in an elementary school in an urban setting in Texas. Their children were enrolled in a Dual Language program where they received instruction in English and Spanish. All parents interviewed believe that their involvement in school makes a positive difference when it comes to their children's education and well-being. Participants stated a range of time living in the United States, between 1 to 30 years. All participants confirmed that, since they immigrated from their country of origin, they have exclusively resided in the urban area of Texas where this study was conducted. The demographic data of the study participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Parents who participated in the study.

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Age	Country of Origin	Length of Time in the U.S.	Level of Education
Sra. Sandra	29	Honduras	2 years	No formal education
Sra. Marta	35	Mexico	15 years	High School Diploma
Sr. Juan	48	Mexico	over 30 years	Bachelor's Degree
Sra. Laura	26	Mexico	5 years	Primary Education
Sra. Ana	29	Cuba	2 years	High School Diploma
Sra. Abigail	32	El Salvador	5 years	Primary Education
Sra. Teresa	44	Mexico	28 years	High School Diploma
Sra. Diana	28	Colombia	1 year	Middle School Diploma

In this thematic data analysis, three themes and a total of 19 codes emerged, as illustrated in Figure 1. The themes that emerged from the data included homework involvement, volunteer involvement, and other types of involvement. These themes revealed 11 forms of involvement and eight barriers preventing parents from having better school participation. In general, it was noticed that all participants were involved in their children's education in different ways. On the theme of *homework involvement*, the following codes stood out: home environment, aspirations, awareness of involvement, homework revising, and additional support. However, academic barriers, language barriers, home barriers, and communication barriers were also identified for this theme. Regarding the theme of *volunteer involvement*, participation in school trips, support in the classroom, and awareness or desire to get involved were highlighted. Additionally, this theme also revealed communication barriers, home barriers, confinement barriers (related to COVID-19), employment barriers, transportation barriers, and language barriers. Finally, the theme of *other types of involvement* was addressed, where participation in the form of fomenting values, motivation, school communication, meetings, and school events were highlighted. Furthermore, this theme also presented communication, technology, employment, and language barriers.

Figure 1:



Homework Involvement

This theme highlights that all of the participants interviewed are involved in different ways when it comes to their children's homework. However, it also includes several barriers that affect parental involvement. One of the ways immigrant parents get involved in homework is by creating a learning environment at home where children are reminded of their school responsibilities. Sra. Sandra said that when it comes to helping with homework, the way she helps is, “*En estar pendiente de ellos para sus tareas que sean responsables.*” [Being attentive to their assignments so they can be responsible]. In addition, this participant included aspirations for her children, where the value of education is emphasized, “*Pues la diferencia es que vivir con*

mis hijos, yo no estudié en el, pero sí quiero que mis hijos estudien y aprendan lo que yo no lo pude hacer, que ellos lo hagan.” [The difference is that living with my children, I didn’t study, but I want my children to study and learn, to do what I couldn’t]. These academic aspirations reflect the fact that Sra. Sandra values education, expressing, “*Sí, esto lo miro de mucho valor*” [Yes, I see this as very valuable]. When it comes to getting more involved with homework, Sra. Sandra shows that there is an awareness showing that more involvement would be beneficial, “*Pues sería más mejor, aprenderían más.*” [Well, it would be much better, they would learn more]. However, Sra. Sandra revealed that she has no formal education, and this presents a barrier when it comes to getting more involved in her children's homework, “*Si yo supiera lo que ellos, o sea, le entendiera las tareas de ellos, ellos aprenderían más mejor.*” [If I knew what they do, or if I understood their homework, they would learn much better].

The majority of the participants expressed being involved in homework revisions, however some of the barriers that prevent them from becoming more involved include academic barriers. Sra. Marta expressed having a difficult time understanding the curriculum and elaborates that although she has the academic bases, the difference in learning approaches utilized in her children’s schools is noticeable:

No creo que afecte mi, mi nivel académico, ya que pues sí gradué, pero sí es muy diferente a como fui enseñada yo a cómo los están enseñando ahora. Sí, diferentes métodos a los que les están enseñando a los niños [I don’t think my academic levels affect my understanding since I did graduate, But the way I was taught differs from how they are teaching them now. Yes, different methods are being taught to children].

Furthermore, Sra. Ana expands on the academic barriers:

Sí, el papá de la niña sí tiene más nivel académico y no sé si es por el nivel académico o de qué depende, pero él sabe más y entiende mucho y en cambio yo sé poco, a diferencia de él. Entonces ella es más, acude a él por eso y como que ella sabe [Yes, the girl's father has a higher academic level, and I don't know if it's because of the academic level or what it depends on, but he knows more and understands a lot, and unlike me, I have a limited understanding. She knows to go to him for help].

Although this statement shows that there is additional support in the home, which includes other family members when clarification is needed to understand the academic curriculum, it still presents an academic barrier.

Volunteer Involvement

Regarding the theme of volunteer involvement, it was highlighted that there is very little participation on the part of the interviewed participants. The forms of volunteer involvement mentioned were school trips, support in the classroom, and awareness of involvement, or knowing that participating as a volunteer generates benefits for their children. The most frequently identified obstacle in volunteering were communication barriers, in addition to barriers at home, confinement, employment, transportation, and language.

In an effort to elaborate on the involvement of volunteers, Sra. Laura shared, *“He hecho voluntariado yo de ayudar a los maestros cuando hacen estas actividades, cómo se dice que salen de paseo, para cuidar a los niños es en paseos escolares, en paseos escolares”* [I have volunteered to help the teachers when they have these activities, like field trips, to watch over the kids when they go out, during school field trips]. This suggests that some immigrant parents are willing to volunteer on field trips where they help support student safety.

In addition to the volunteer involvement already mentioned, immigrant parents emphasized 'awareness of involvement' when it comes to volunteering. Participants were asked the question, “*¿Cree que habría alguna diferencia si estuviera más involucrado en actividades de voluntariado?*” [Do you think there would be a difference if you were more involved in volunteering activities?], and all the participants said that volunteering would be positive for their children. Sra. Marta replied, “*Pues sería más mejor porque yo aprendería muchas cosas que no sé si fuera voluntaria.*” [Well, it would be much better because I would learn many things that I wouldn't if I weren't a volunteer]. Sr. Juan expressed, “*Conocer más el a las personas en la escuela, más tener más aprendizaje en los niveles de los niños como poder ayudarle a mis hijos, ha reforzar lo que los maestros les dan*” [Getting to know more people at the school, learning more about the children's levels, and being able to help my children, reinforcing what the teachers give them]. This highlights the idea that by being more involved in volunteering activities, parents have the opportunity to have a better relationship with school personnel, and as a result, be able to better assist children at home due to those connections.

However, volunteer involvement presented several barriers on the part of parents. The participants expressed that the barriers to involvement in volunteer activities include communication barriers, home barriers, confinement barriers (as related to COVID-19), employment barriers, transportation barriers, and language barriers.

Regarding the language barrier when it comes to involvement in volunteer activities, Sra. Diana shared the following:

Porque no sé si solo sea quizás mi caso o de varios, a veces uno se limita a preguntar o estar más presente en la escuela porque quizás el temor ese de que, de ir y que alguien te entienda,

buscar a esas personas, entonces como que uno. En mi parte prefiero evitar. Ah, por lo que yo entiendo es, es un poco complicado saber si va a haber alguien que la pueda asistir

[Because I don't know if it's just my case or that of others, sometimes one hesitates to ask questions or to be more present at the school, maybe due to the fear of going and not being understood or finding people who can help. For me I prefer to avoid it. From what I understand, it's a bit complicated to know if there will be someone available to assist].

This statement indicates that some of the Spanish-speaking immigrant parents experience "temor" or 'fear' when trying to access the school and get involved or "estar más presente" [be present] and prefer to "evitar" or 'avoid' being in the circumstance of not being able to make themselves understood due to not dominating the English language. A suggestion that Sra. Diana shared to help with the language barrier was, "*Sería para apoyar a los padres inmigrantes a tener una mejor participación escolar. Más que nada teniendo, era como otros, que nos pueda traducir, es, yo creo que eso es, ese sería la, la, lo más importante.*" [It would be to support immigrant parents in having better school participation. Above all, having others who can translate for us, I think that would be the most important thing]. Therefore, it is important to have translation support available so that immigrant parents have better involvement in school.

Another barrier mentioned when it comes to getting involved in volunteer activities was the home barrier, which included all the obligations at home. The most mentioned home barrier were young children, who demand more time and care. Sra. Sandra indicated, "*Hacer voluntaria en la escuela. ¿Eh? Tal vez entendería porque mi niña tierna que tengo que no tengo con quien dejarla.*" [Volunteering at school? Hmm. Maybe I would understand, but I have a young

child, and I don't have anyone to leave her with]. Therefore, the obligation of the children at home is a barrier that prevents more participation.

Regarding transportation barriers, some immigrant parents do not have their own transportation, and when it comes to volunteering, this creates impediments for them. On this, Sra. Sandra shared, "*Sí, porque, pues yo no puedo manejar. No puedo manejar. Siempre, porque cuando me toca algo de la escuela me toca ir caminando, si no tengo que buscar quien me lleve.*" [Yes, because I can't drive, and when there's something happening at the school, I have to walk, or I have to find someone to take me].

When it comes to the COVID-19 lockdown, this has affected volunteer activities in schools and therefore continues to present a barrier. Participants mentioned that ever since the lockdown, or confinement, schools have put restrictions that hinder their participation in volunteer activities. As such, COVID-19 confinement still causes a barrier when it comes to parents getting involved as volunteers in their children's education.

However, volunteer opportunities are returning to schools as sanitary measures have been relaxed at schools in the area. But parents interviewed lacked information regarding volunteer opportunities available at their child's school; this barrier was coded as "communication barriers." Sra. Ana shared, "*Uy no estaba, no, no sabía que había actividades de voluntariado en la escuela.*" [Oh, I didn't know there were volunteer activities at the school]. Sra. Diana said, "*Nunca me hablaron de voluntariado.*" [They never told me anything about volunteering]. This highlights the lack of communication about volunteer opportunities and how important it is to keep the lines of communication open between schools and home.

Other Types of Involvement

In addition to being involved in assisting with homework and volunteering, it was discovered during interviews that Spanish-speaking immigrant parents participate in other activities related to their children's education. These activities include attending school meetings and events, communicating with school staff, motivating their children, and actively teaching values.

Regarding the issue of attending school meetings and events, Sra. Ana shared, “*Bueno lo los maestros, me ellos mandan mensajes de texto y también con las reuniones.*” [Well, the teachers send me text messages and also about the meetings]. However, participating in major school events such as graduations also presents challenges, with Sra. Ana specifically highlighting the language barrier:

Espera como cuando fuimos a la graduación, yo quedé así como, ¿Qué dijo? porque me hubiera, me hubiera gustado sentirme más incluida en la en en esos eventos importantes. Es que como el idioma me perjudica porque no, no entendí nada, ves, fue solamente en inglés. Y si me frustra. Y sí he tenido que estudiar inglés.

[Like when we went to the graduation, I was like, “What did they say?” because I would have liked to feel more included in those important events. The language barrier affects me because I didn’t understand anything, you see; it was only in English. And yes, it frustrates me. I’ve had to study English].

As for getting involved based on school communication, participants commented that they appreciated the information that the teaching staff shared with them in Spanish.

However, the participants also shared that communication barriers exist as current communication between the school and the home presents opportunities for improvement.

Sra. Teresa shared, “*Yo pienso que sí, pero ahí no sé ustedes si están teniendo tareas o no, pero sí, dice que no tienen tarea*” [I think so, but I don’t know if you all have homework or not, but yes, my child says there’s no homework]. Later expanding, “*Por ejemplo, si estuviera segura, si hay tarea o no, me aseguraría que ella respondiera a todas sus tareas y yo me enterara qué es lo que tiene que hacer*” [For example, if I was sure if there’s homework or not, I would make sure she completed all her assignments, and I would know what she has to do]. These statements show that communication between the school and the home, although sporadic, could improve, since it causes communication barriers that affect the involvement of parents.

Other barriers highlighted by participants were employment barriers. Sra. Marta indicated, “*Muchas de las actividades Ah, pues obviamente son en en las mañanas. El trabajo no permite o las actividades que se hacen en la noche, pues como quiera todavía es muy temprano para los qué trabajan*” [Many of the activities, well, obviously take place in the mornings. Work interferes, or the activities held at night are still too early for those who work]. For this part, Sra. Laura shared, “*El trabajo sí afectan el 100% porque es horario de escuela*” [Work definitely affects 100% because it’s during school hours]. She additionally added, “*Prácticamente es el trabajo que hacen en la casa y el cansancio de que ya uno ya quieres dormir y ya*” [Basically, it’s the work they do at home and the exhaustion, because at the end of the day, you just want to sleep]. The excerpt illustrates how employment obligations present a barrier and it's something that affects parental involvement.

Other ways that immigrant parents get involved is by motivating and fomenting values in their children. Sra. Marta said, “*Les ayuda cuando uno está presente para motivarlos a hacer mejor, a participar más*” [It helps when one is present to motivate them to do better, to participate more]. This exemplified how motivating their children is a way to be involved. On the other

hand, Sra. Sandra explained that, regardless of not having the academic skills or command of the English language, the involvement comes in the form of fomenting values, “*Pues, en enseñarle los valores, enseñarles que tienen que ser personas, humildes obedientes, que no sean malcriados. Enseñarles los valores de la vida*” [Well, teaching them values, teaching them to be humble, obedient people, and not to be rude. Teaching them the values of life]. These statements highlight other types of involvement of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents when it comes to their children’s education and overall well-being.

Discussion

The results were collected, analyzed, and organized based on the research question established in this study. The general objective of this research was to answer the question: What actions could be implemented to foster more effective collaboration between schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents? The objective of the study was to create a proposal that fosters more effective collaboration among schools, communities, and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. As such, the discussion of the results is organized around this central question.

When analyzing the findings, three types of involvement emerged: homework involvement, volunteering involvement, and other types of involvement. The barriers hindering such involvement included the following: language barriers, communication barriers, employment barriers, academic barriers, home barriers, confinement barriers (as related to COVID-19), transportation barriers, and technology barriers. It is important to decrease the barriers to have better involvement. However, the importance of promoting other types of involvement, such as motivation and fostering values, is also recognized in this research study because these elements play a fundamental role in the development of students and their

academic success. Moll et al. (1992) emphasize that when families bring their cultural knowledge and values into the educational process, they not only support learning but also provide students with a motivational foundation essential for their growth and achievement.

To address these needs, Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework of six types of involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022) offer targeted strategies to enhance the involvement of parents in their children's education, ultimately supporting a collaborative educational environment.

Language Barriers

Using Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework of six types of involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022) as a guide, which highlights the collaborative role of parents, educators, and the community in fostering student learning and development, I recommend that schools utilize available resources to offer interpreting services for parents and facilitate connections with community organizations that provide adult English classes, based on parent's expressed interest. This approach will empower immigrant families to access valuable language proficiency resources within the community. In instances where English classes are not readily available, this study suggests that schools draw upon existing assets, such as educational staff and parent volunteers who are proficient in the language, to develop support programs, including English courses tailored for immigrant parents navigating language barriers.

Communication Barriers

Guided by Epstein's (2022) framework of six types of involvement, which emphasizes that educators must have conferences with all parents at least once a year, as well to include follow-ups as needed and provide clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms,

and transitions, schools should offer interpreting services during meetings and events and ensure all materials, such as program information, curriculum details, and school policies, are available in Spanish or other relevant home languages. This approach will foster effective communication with Spanish-speaking immigrant families.

In linguistically diverse areas such as the region of this study, schools can utilize bilingual personnel or collaborate with nonprofits for interpreting services if additional language support is needed. Maintaining open lines of communication in different formats, including print, digital and face-to-face; inform families of programs and curriculum; provide clear expectations; contact parents when there are concerns and compliments; share strategies or guides that could help immigrant parents be more engaged in their children's education, doing it in their preferred language. Additionally, educators and school staff would benefit from training on best practices for communicating with linguistically diverse families, thus creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Employment Barriers

Epstein's (2022) framework of six types of involvement states that parents should be involved in "decision making" with the primary goal of including them in school decisions and developing 'parent leaders' and 'representatives.' Therefore, by involving Spanish-speaking immigrant parents in decision-making, school personnel might consult this population in different ways on how to improve employment barriers. In addition, different digital tools (such as text messages, emails, virtual meetings, information recorded on video, and social networks—all provided in Spanish) could be used to maintain more active involvement with Spanish-speaking immigrant families despite employment barriers.

Academic Barriers

Epstein's (2022) framework of six types of involvement sets guidelines for "Learning at Home," which emphasizes the importance of educators sharing calendars of school activities with parents and students, as well as providing information on how to support students in enhancing their skills on various assignments. Based on the findings of this study, I propose an extension to these guidelines: school personnel should offer academic and didactic sessions for parents, delivered in their preferred language. While staff can facilitate these sessions, I recommend involving parent volunteers to lead them, fostering what I call '*School Support Communities for Parents and by Parents*'. This initiative has the potential to alleviate academic barriers faced by parents while promoting engagement and collaboration within the school community.

Home Barriers

Epstein's (2022) framework of six types of involvement promotes "Collaborating with the Community." To do this, it is suggested to identify and integrate community resources and services in order to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. The current findings support the idea of providing information on services available in the community that may be useful for immigrant parents, with the goal of reducing barriers at home that hinder greater participation in their children's education. It is important to provide this information in the parents' language of preference and through different forms of communication ensuring that it is accessible and understandable to them.

Furthermore, it was identified that young children present an obstacle when trying to get involved in school. It is proposed that schools have an action plan regarding the care of younger children at important events or meetings, especially when these deal with issues that

require high attention and decision-making by parents. For the care of young children on school premises, safe, designated spaces could be used where children can play under supervision. It is also proposed to have school personnel in such cases, as well as other parent volunteers or some community service that can assist in supervising young children during school meetings or events, if necessary.

Confinement Barriers

Although this barrier is related to COVID-19, and the theories established to frame the current research study do not provide specific suggestions, I nonetheless suggest increasing communication with families. It is essential to inform Spanish-speaking immigrant parents about the different ways they can be involved in their children's education, whether at home or on the school campus. Drawing from Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth, it is vital to recognize and utilize the existing strengths within these families. Schools should encourage parents to share their cultural knowledge and practices that can support their children's learning, thereby fostering a collaborative and enriching environment.

Transportation Barriers

Theoretical evidence provided by Epstein's (2022) overlapping spheres of influence theory supports the partnership between family, school, and community. Based on this theory, it is recommended that available community or school resources be used to help lower the transportation barrier for parents. This may involve facilitating access to transportation services, such as school transportation or public transportation programs so that immigrant parents can actively participate in school and community activities related to their children's education.

Technology Barriers

Based on my study's findings and Epstein's and Sheldon's (2022) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which supports the partnership between family, school, and community, I suggest that schools take advantage of community agencies that offer computer classes and technology training for adults, such as Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. In addition, this study recommends implementing training workshops at the school site, being mindful of parents' language preferences, technology skills, availability, and access to resources, such as reliable internet connection, childcare during workshops, transportation assistance, user-friendly devices or software, and financial support or guidance to purchase necessary equipment. These computer classes and technology training could be led by the teaching staff or by other parents, thus creating an optimal environment for collaboration among the parties involved.

Motivation and Fomenting Values

The interviews revealed the crucial role that immigrant parents play in instilling values and motivation in their children. Rather than viewing these parents through a lens of deficiency, it is essential to acknowledge the rich cultural resources they bring, which positively impact their children's education, as emphasized in the work of Yosso (2005) and Moll et al. (1992). This study advocates for enhancing and promoting the active involvement of immigrant parents in their children's educational journeys.

Building on my earlier proposal, I again advocate for the establishment of collaborative groups, which I call '*School Support Communities for Parents and by Parents.*' These communities would create safe and welcoming spaces for parents to gather informally, perhaps over *café y pan dulce*, to share their insights, experiences, and strategies for promoting motivation and

values within their families. While these gatherings could begin with some structure, such as suggested discussion topics or guiding questions, the emphasis would be on fostering open dialogue and peer support rather than directing conversations from the schools.

Drawing from Epstein's (2022) overlapping spheres of influence, I recommend that schools provide essential resources, such as meeting space, materials, digital services, and optional discussion topics/guiding questions in parents' preferred language, to facilitate this collaboration among interested parents. By offering these resources, schools can empower Spanish-speaking immigrant parents alongside other parents to exchange strategies for promoting values and motivation in their children, helping them reach their full potential. This collaborative effort not only enhances parental engagement but also fosters a sense of community, enriching the educational environment for all families with diverse perspectives and experiences.

Limitations and Validity

The limitations of this qualitative study include geographic and population limitations; therefore, this study does not intend to generalize the results to different geographical areas or to populations other than those mentioned.

Regarding the validity of this research, a review of the literature was carried out, with the goal of having solid theoretical foundations. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed data was subjected to a meticulous manual thematic analysis (Dawadi, 2020). This analysis allowed the results to be presented clearly, providing solid arguments to support the conclusions and achieve the objectives of the study. In addition, an audit trail was carried out to maintain the integrity and traceability of the entire process.

Conclusion

The benefits that derive from parental involvement are many; however, there are barriers that stand in the way, and the barriers increase for Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. Informed by my experience as a bilingual educator and a Mexican immigrant, I aimed to reduce the obstacles to school parental engagement for Spanish-speaking families. My firsthand knowledge of the challenges these families face, including language barriers and limited access to resources, guided my research question and shaped my interpretation of the findings. The finding that Spanish-speaking parents often engage in their children's education by fostering motivation and values, despite barriers such as language and lack of formal education, resonated deeply with my own experiences as a child of immigrant parents in the United States. I witnessed firsthand how my parents, although not fluent in English, always emphasized the importance of perseverance, dedication, and hard work, which shaped my professional journey. This experience helped me understand how, even when parents face obstacles in school participation, their influence can be profound. Therefore, it is crucial to implement different approaches for schools to collaborate more effectively with this population, recognizing and leveraging the strengths immigrant parents bring to the educational process.

This research proposes, using as reference and building on Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's and Sheldon's (2022) framework of six types of involvement, to address these barriers using the resources that parents, the community, and the school already have. For example, nurturing the proposed *'School Support Communities for Parents and by Parents'* could help reduce the academic barriers for immigrant parents, in addition to facilitating their involvement in a collaborative environment with school organizations and more interconnected with communities in general.

The involvement in the form of motivation and fomenting values from Spanish-speaking immigrant parents was revealed during an interview with a participant without any formal education. This finding was surprising since it was the first time that this variable was presented in the investigation. However, the involvement in the form of motivation and fomenting values can be generalized to all parents and other caregivers. Therefore, incorporating strategies on how to encourage this type of involvement in parents, such as collaboration environments where participants can share knowledge and acquire more information on how to promote motivation and values with their children is important. This can contribute to strengthening the connection between home and school, thus promoting a more enriching educational environment focused on fomenting values and motivating students so that they can reach their full potential.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the proposed actions, listed in the discussion section, be implemented in educational environments where immigrant populations and emergent bilinguals are served. Ultimately, it is anticipated that the recommendations of this study contribute to reducing the barriers that limit the school engagement of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. This will facilitate greater communication and collaboration between the school, community, and the families being served, which will benefit the academic success and comprehensive well-being of students.

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