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Yo sí participo: Latinx Parental Involvement in Education In the U.S. Despite Structural Barriers and Cultural Misperceptions

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Departmental Honors in Social Work

By
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June 2021

This honors thesis by [your name] is approved.

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June 2021

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Abstract

Latinx immigrants are the fastest-growing minority in the United States. Yet research shows that these immigrants and their American-born children are less likely to obtain a post-secondary education. Further, research suggests that lack of Latinx parental involvement in education is a significant factor contributing to the low educational attainment for these students. However, Latinx parents face barriers that limit their participation in schools, and their efforts to support their children's education often go unseen. This qualitative study explores the experiences of parental involvement in schools among Latinx parents. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with five Latinx mothers. Results suggest that parents are committed to success of their children in education despite the obstacles of language barriers, social exclusion and racism, and poor communication from school and teachers. Parents' narratives also demonstrate how structural barriers and cultural exclusions are the main challenges these parents face that hinder their parental involvement in education.

Keywords: Latinx immigrants, parental involvement, barriers, education.

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Introduction

In 2019, I transferred to Seattle University to pursue a degree in Social Work from Highline College, a small community college just 25 five minutes away from Seattle. Highline was a highly diverse college and I always felt at home. Once I transferred to Seattle University, it took me some time to adjust to the change because the environment just felt different, but it wasn't easy to understand why. I was lonely and isolated. It wasn't until the end of the fall quarter, when I began to realize what was happening. At Highline, I used to have a community. I had classmates who shared similar life stories to mine. For example, many of us were first-generation students who had been navigating the system on our own. Many of us came from other countries and knew the struggles of having English as our second language. Additionally, many of us were older students who had responsibilities outside school and could not afford to quit our full-time jobs.

Unfortunately, Seattle University was very different. The student population was not as diverse, the age gap was very noticeable, most students were of traditional college age, and I was an older student. Most importantly, there was a significant Latinx student body underrepresentation. In 2019, only 12.4 % of the undergraduate student body was Hispanic compared to the 52.6% of White students (Seattle University, n.d.). I kept wondering why there are not many Latinx students pursuing higher education at SU. Or, for those who go to a community college, why they don't end up transferring to a four-year college? However, once I began to research this topic, I realized that this was a much more complex issue than I thought it would be.

Latinx immigrants are the fastest-growing minority in the United States. In 2018, according to the Pew Research Center, approximately 44.8 million immigrants made up 13.7%

of the nation's population. Immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American Spanish-speaking countries accounted for 50% of the same year's U.S. immigrant population. Despite Latinx immigrants' being the fastest-growing minority in the U.S., most specifically, Mexican immigrants and their US-born children are less likely to obtain a post-secondary education than their White counterparts (Martinez, 2011; Altschul 2011 & Budiman, Tamir and Noe-Bustamante 2020).

On a more positive note, educational attainment for Latinx, including recent Latinx immigrants, has increased for the last three decades. Over recent years, the Latinx high school dropout rate has declined, and college enrollment has increased significantly (Krogstad, 2016 & Noe-Bustamante 2020). However, despite these positive changes, the Latinx student high school and college dropout rates remain higher than other groups. Goldsmith & Kurpius (2018) and Gonzalez et al. (2013) explain that Mexican-origin youth have the highest K-12 dropout rates among all Latinx and the lowest higher educational attainment. Some research suggests that educational disparities exist because of multiple factors such as immigrant generation status, socioeconomic status, and language and cultural barriers (Suizzo et al., 2012 & Ryan et al., 2010). Interestingly, much of the literature suggested that a significant factor contributing to the Latinx low educational attainment is the lack of parental involvement in education (Goldsmith & Kurpius 2018; Suizzo et al., 2012; Ryan., 2010). Feeling surprised by the findings in the literature suggesting that Latinx parents are not invested in their children's education and that this is a primary cause for the low educational attainment of Latinx students, I decided to learn more about Latinx parental involvement in U.S. education.

Parental involvement in education is highly valued in the U.S. school system (Altschul, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018; Olivos, 2004; Suizzo et al., 2012 &

Ryan et al., 2010). Researchers strongly reaffirm that parental involvement is critical for their children's academic success and is reflected in the students' grades, lower dropout rates, more participation, and schoolwork motivation, leading to greater social and academic success (Altschul, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018; Olivos, 2004 & Ryan et al., 2010). Yet, there is evidence that Latinx parental involvement in education is the lowest compared to other racial groups (Ryan et al., 2010). The lower participation by Latinx parent participation in schools has led some researchers and teachers to label these parents as uninterested and even held them accountable for their children's educational failure (Altschul, 2011; Olivos, 2004; Ryan et al., 2010). Newer research has examined and challenged such beliefs and concluded that Latinx parents care about their children's academic success, by supporting and encouraging their children in their education (Ryan et al., 2010; Suizzo et al., 2012).

Newer literature has demonstrated that Latinx parents genuinely care about their children's education and reveals some of the challenges these families face (Altschul, 2011; Ceballo et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2015; Wassell et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the narrative that Latinx parents are uninterested about their children education still exists despite the new research suggesting otherwise. Latinx parents are often labeled as not wanting to participate in their children's schooling activities and lacking concern for participating in schools' activities. This old belief possibly persists because not enough literature focuses on other deeper factors that limit Latinx immigrant parental involvement. For example, much of the current literature tends to blur cultural differences assuming all Latinx residing in the U.S. are the same, speak the same language, and have the same struggles that may limit their parental involvement in education. It is vital to keep in mind that not all Latinx immigrant families have the same education level,

speak the same language, and have the same cultural beliefs. Therefore, this research project aims to examine the barriers Latinx parents face that limit their education involvement. Learning about these differences is important because of the evidence that indicates that these parents do care about their children's education. Still, these parents may face other barriers that affect their parental involvement, which may negatively affect their children's future educational achievements and success.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to understand the current research related to importance of parental involvement in education and perceived barriers of parental involvement in education among the Latinx immigrant population. The main goal was to answer the following questions: What is parental involvement in education? What do we know about Latinx parents and parental involvement in the school context? And what are some of the barriers Latinx families face to parental involvement in education?

Parental involvement in education

Parental involvement in education is highly valued in the U.S. school system and has been widely documented (Young et al., 2013; LaRocque et al., 2011 & Machen et al., 2005 & Fernandez-Alonso et al., 2017). Extensive research links parental participation with positive academic outcomes and reveals that it plays a critical role for children and youth's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development (Park & Holloway 2018; Chang et al., 2009; Siddiqui, 2009). Researchers also suggest that parental involvement is essential for students' academic success and pushes schools, teachers, and school systems for higher standards (Machen et al.,

2005). The government has also shown interest in promoting parental involvement in education by working closely with mental health and education systems and enacting policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 (Lechtenberger and Mullins, 2004). The NCLB law was passed with the efforts to close the achievement gap between low-income and affluent children. Policymakers developed and implemented policies for all schools to follow, emphasizing that parental involvement is critical for children's educational success (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2003). NCLB defined parental involvement as "The participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2003). However, a true definition of parental involvement is more complicated than NCLB has defined. There is a lack of clear definition for parental involvement in schools because teachers, administrators, policymakers, and parents have a different understanding of what parental involvement means and what the expectations are (Gonzales et al., 2013; Webster, 2004; Young et al., 2013). Since teachers' and administrators' expectations and opinions about parental involvement vary, parents can become confused about what is expected of them.

Communication and Collaboration Among Parents and Teachers

While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of parental involvement, the literature suggests that one of the most critical elements to parental involvement is the communication between parents and school staff members (Park and Holloway, 2018; Larocque et al., 2011). Young et al. (2013) found that communication is critical, and it should be two-way on the part of the teachers and parents this means that teachers need to find more effective ways to communicate with parents and parents needs to learn how to actively advocate for their needs

and desires for their children's education. Further, Machen et al. (2005), and Gonzalez et al. (2013), suggested that by creating more opportunities for better communication, parents would feel more encouraged and comfortable to participate because they would have a sense that the schools genuinely want them to be involved in the educational process of their children. Gonzalez et al. (2013) also explained that using more inclusive ways to communicate with Latinx immigrant parents, such as teachers sending intentional and personalized invitations to participate in school activities, could help eliminate the unintentional exclusion of these parents from school staff members. In addition to communication, another element is the need for more collaboration between parents and teachers. Collaborative partnership among teachers and parents is promoted when teachers value the parents' input and respect their values and cultural beliefs (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009).

Barriers Latinx Families Face to Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement has a significant influence on a student's academic success. It is associated with positive outcomes, including improved grades, increased rates of graduation, improved social and cognitive skills, and lower rates of suspension, to mention a few (Park & Holloway, 2018; Chang et al., 2009; Siddiqui, 2009; Altschul, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013; Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018; Olivos, 2004). Nevertheless, Latinx parental involvement is the lowest among other racial and ethnic groups, causing the negative perception that Latinx parents are uninterested in their children's education (Altschul, 2011 & Olivos, 2004). Despite such negative implications, other research also shows that Latinx parents care about their children's education but face barriers that prevent them from getting more involved in education (Ceballo et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013). These barriers include the lack of understanding of school

expectations, language barrier, and schools' lack of cultural competence and racial awareness (Altschul, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013; Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018).

The lack of understanding of school expectations was a contributing factor to the Latinx parental involvement misrepresentation in schools often mentioned in the literature. Young et al. (2013), for example, explained that in some cases, Latinx parents face challenges to get involved in schools because they do not know how to get involved or do not know what the school expectations are. Further, Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2009) found teachers often assumed that parents were not doing enough or did not care about their children's education because they did not participate in the traditional parent involvement roles such as visiting their children's classrooms, participating in events and volunteering in other school activities. However, studies also showed that Latinx families are involved in other ways (e.g., parents teach their children discipline, values, life lessons) that are unseen by teachers because these types of involvement are mostly home-based (Altschul, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Zarate 2007) Furthermore, Altschul (2011) confirmed how Latinx parents are invested in their children's education. These parents teach their children life lessons such as introducing them to hard labor at a young age to demonstrate the value of education and motivate them to succeed in school, so they do not need to work in low-wage jobs in the future. Gonzalez et al. (2013) and Zarate (2007) also observed that Latinx parents are engaged in teaching them good morals, providing advice and encouragement, teaching them valuable life lessons, purchasing materials required for class and homework assignments, take them to the library for additional support. So, not showing up to parental conferences or having close communication with teachers does not mean that parents do not care about their children's education, simply, they [parents] might teach their children life lessons (e.g., working hard to achieve success) that they are most familiar with and believe will

positively affect their children's learning. However, these parent's types of participation are reflected in ways that are not typically viewed as involvement from a White American perspective. In the U.S., teachers and American parents understand parental involvement as attending school activities, volunteering, helping children with their homework, attending school functions, taking on leadership roles in the school, and participating in the decision-making process. (Larocque et al., 2013; Turney and Kao, 2009).

The language barrier was often cited in the literature. Researchers have found that Latinx immigrants' parents who do not speak English have difficulties supporting their children in education (Good et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2015; Gonzales et al., 2013). Good et al. (2010) found that Spanish-speaking parents acknowledge that the English language was essential to communicate with teachers and other school staff members effectively. These parents also expressed concern about not having that connection with teachers because there were not enough bilingual teachers or liaisons in schools to serve as translators. Furthermore, some studies have demonstrated that Spanish-speaking parents have expressed concerns about the inability to communicate with teachers to assist their children with their homework better, where language was the main barrier (Good et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2015; Turney and Kao, 2009). In some cases, English language ability was associated with involvement, which prevented these parents from having the confidence to participate in their children's school activities even when these parents had a great desire to advocate and to have a voice in their children's education (Good et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2015).

Some research has emphasized the lack of cultural and racial awareness as being one challenge to Latinx parental involvement in education (Crosnoe, & Ansari, 2015; Good et al., 2010; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). According to the National Education Association (NEA),

“Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, developing certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching.” (Van Roekel, 2008.)

Scholars have agreed that educators must practice cultural awareness in classrooms, especially when working with minorities such as Latino/Hispanic immigrants (Gonzales et al., 2013; Park et al., 2018; Turney, 2009). Cultural awareness in schools is essential because it can influence parental involvement, helping teachers and other staff members to engage in more culturally effective outreach and create long-term relationships with Latinx parents (Gonzales et al., 2013; Park et al., 2018; Turney, 2009). In their research, Good et al. (2010) found that parents and teachers had different expectations from each other because cultural clashes can cause misunderstandings and conflicts among both groups. Moreover, they also explained that teachers lacked preparation in “multiculturalism.” Without this preparation, teachers lack the skills to understand the community they serve. Lack of cultural competence in schools also brings more barriers to Latinx parental involvement. For example, in some cases, teachers have such low expectations of these parents because of their lack of involvement, and parents end up feeling oppressed because their participation is not being valued (Good et al., 2010; Webster, 2004).

Research Design

This study examines the barriers, challenges, experiences, and opinions Spanish-speaking Latinx immigrant parents face in the U.S. that hinder their involvement in their children's education. A qualitative research method was used to study the lived experiences, barriers, and opinions of Latinx parental involvement in education. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain that qualitative research aims to evaluate and understand how people construct and view their world and how they interpret their life experiences. Further, qualitative research is used to understand ideas, experiences, and meanings. To best understand the challenges and barriers my subjects of interest face, it is best to utilize a research method that will allow me to understand their life challenges better. For this study, I conducted phone interviews with Latinx parents using semi-structured interviews containing open-ended questions. My goal was to capture their opinions and experiences about parental involvement in education. One benefit of conducting qualitative phone interviews was the flexibility to schedule the appointments. I tried to be as flexible as possible, so my participants did not feel pressured or discouraged to participate in this study.

Sampling Procedure and Description

The participants of this study were recruited through a non-profit agency in the Midwest that provides social services for immigrant families. A social worker at the agency asked mothers who are enrolled in their programs for volunteers to participate in this study. Those who volunteered gave their verbal consent to the social worker to share their phone number with me. Prospective participants were notified that a social work student from Seattle University would contact them to schedule an appointment for an interview. There was a total of ten mothers who volunteered to participate. I ended up calling only six phone numbers and completed five (N=5)

30-50-minute-long interviews. The five participants were all mothers who have children in K-12 schools. All mothers were originally from different areas of Mexico and spoke mainly Spanish with some English.

Data collection

Data collection consisted of conducting semi-structured phone interviews following the guidelines of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board. The semi-structured questions centered on parents' experiences, opinions, and feelings about parental involvement in their children's education. Once I received the prospective participants' phone numbers, I called the first six numbers. Five participants agreed to schedule an appointment, and one phone number was not in service. The interviews were typically scheduled during the school day while the participant's children were at school and late in the afternoon after they got out of work or when their significant other was at home to assist with the children while the mother was on the phone. A single interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, and the mothers received a \$20 Walmart store gift card in appreciation of their time. The interviews were audio-recorded with their permission for accuracy. At the beginning of each call, I introduced myself, asked permission to record the phone call, and discussed verbal consent. For the purpose of confidentiality, I asked the mother to go to a private room if they she was able to. I did not collect personal and sensitive information (e.g., names, addresses, immigration status, etc.). I transcribed all of the interviews and then coded and analyzed them.

To answer my research question, I designed questions for the interview to capture the experiences and barriers these mothers had concerning parental involvement in their children's education. To get the conversation started, I asked parents about their country of origin, age when they came to the U.S., language spoken at home, and their level of education. Then I

followed up with general questions about their family. I asked how many children they had, their ages and year in school, and their school type (e.g., private, charter, public). I also included questions about their opinions, attitudes, values, understandings, and interests about their role in terms of participation in their children's schools. All the interviews were in Spanish since that was the language the participants felt more comfortable with. I have listed below some of the questions I used during the interview as an example. Para usted, ¿qué significado tiene la participación de padres en las escuelas? (In your opinion, what is the meaning of parental involvement in education?) ¿Alguna vez ha usted estado involucrado/a con las escuelas de sus hijos? (Have you had the opportunity to participate in your children's school activities and/or events?) ¿Con qué frecuencia usted visitó y participó en las actividades, eventos y juntas de las escuelas de sus hijos? (How often did you visit your children's school? And how often did you participate in your children school activities, meetings etc.?) ¿Usted cree que los maestros y las escuelas valoran su participación? (Do you think your children's school values parental involvement?). The full interview guide is listed in Appendix "A".

Overall, the interviews provided valuable data for my study. Some of the answers echoed the findings from previous research described in the literature review. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of the questions and time constraints, there was not enough time to ask all the questions to some participants (e.g., some interviews were longer than others.) The table below explains the duration in minutes per interview.

Participant*	Interview Date	Time Scheduled	Duration
P1	April 5, 2021	30-45 minutes	34 minutes
P2	April 5, 2021	30-45 minutes	50 minutes
P3	April 6, 2021	30-45 minutes	40 minutes
P4	April 8, 2021	30-45 minutes	32 minutes
P5	April 9, 2021	30-45 minutes	63 minutes

*Markers (P1, P2, P3, P4 & P5) were given to each participant for confidentiality purposes.

Also, because of the nature of phone calls, I did not have the opportunity to make any physical observations during the interviews, such as body language and facial expressions. I drafted the data collection and analysis sections in relation to the research question described at the beginning of this paper. To analyze the data, I used a qualitative data analysis approach. Qualitative data analysis is often used in research to transform the data into concrete and meaningful concepts or themes to essentially draw conclusions (Monette et al., 2013; Reid et al., 2017). After a thorough evaluation of the data, I used qualitative coding—a technique in qualitative research to categorize, reduce, and simplify the data (Monette et al., 2013)—to make connections among the information given by the participants in this study. Further, to identify keywords and themes, I utilized the descriptive study method, "the process of assembling data that look, sound, act, or feel similar" (Reid et al., 2017).

Results

Findings about the participants

The initial findings showed that all (N=5) parents came from different states in Mexico, spoke Spanish and had been living in the U.S. over a decade. Also, the parents were all female and had children in K-12 schools. Table 1 below gives more detailed demographic information of the participants.

Table 2. Table of Participants' Demographics in Qualitative Research

*Participant	Parent Status	Age	Marital Status	Country of Origin	Education Level	Employed	# Years living in the U.S.	# of Children	Language spoken at home	**English proficiency
P1	Mother	41	Single	Mexico	Primary school	Part-time	21	4	Spanish	2
P2	Mother	43	Married	Mexico	College Degree	Part-time	11	2	Spanish	3
P3	Mother	35	Married	Mexico	High school	Full-time	17	3	Spanish	1
P4	Mother	30	Married	Mexico	Some High school	Part-time	16	3	Spanish	2
P5	Mother	29	Married	Mexico	Secondary School	Not employed	15	5	Spanish	3

* Markers (P1, P2, P3, P4 & P5) were given to each participant for confidentiality reasons.

** 1. Limited English Comprehension 2. Some English Comprehension 3. Advanced English comprehension 4. Fluent in English

The mothers were also asked about their education level and type of school (e.g., private, or public) they attended. Four of the five mothers had attended public schools and one mother had attended both private and public schools. Their education level was the most diverse answer. For example, one mother had finished middle school, saying, "*Yo terminé la Secundaria.*" Another mother had completed high school "*Yo fui ala preparatoria,*" and one graduated from college, "*Yo terminé la Universidad.*" Three of these mothers have part-time jobs, one is employed full-time, and one does not have a job. The five mothers explained that they carry most of the responsibility of the children in terms of taking care of their school needs. The most common answer was "*Yo llevo toda la responsabilidad de las escuelas de mis niños,*" which means that these mothers lead and supervised their children's education.

Parental involvement

In general, participants mentioned that parental involvement meant making sure their children had everything they needed to succeed academically. This included ensuring that they went to school every day, supervising that they do their homework, attending school meetings, asking teachers about their development, and teaching their children about valuable life lessons to encourage them to do well in school. P2 said, “*Para mi participar es pues como que uno esté como al pendiente de ellos, para mí, verdad. Que uno pregunte ¿cómo va mi hijo? cuando hay juntas.*” (“For me, participating is to be aware of them[children], asking how my child is doing during school meetings”). At least three of the mothers shared that parental involvement meant teaching their children how to be accountable about their school responsibilities they discussed frequently keeping track of their children’s schedules. For example, P5 commented “*...estar al pendiente de que ellos si estén haciendo la tarea que les dejan, que sean más que nada responsables. Yo siempre estoy preguntando ¿y a qué hora vas a hacer la tarea? y ¿te dejaron tarea?*” (“...being aware that they [children] are doing the task they are given and that they are responsible with their homework. I am always asking them, "at what time are you going to do your homework? What assignments were you assigned to do?"). Moreover, all five mothers often mentioned that they taught their children to be respectful to their teachers and classmates and frequently asked their children if teachers and classmates treated them well. They also talked about teaching their children to be good kids and ensuring that they have a safe environment (e.g., assessing child’s safety in classrooms) in and outside schools was another way of describing parental involvement. P2, for instance, stated that ensuring her daughter’s wellbeing in her classroom and teaching her values was part of her responsibilities as being involved in schools. P2 said,

“Mira para mí involucrar es de pues desde ver si tu hijo está contento en escuelas y Feliz y tiene una buena relación con compañeros con maestros. También de observar sus notas, por ejemplo. También asistir para mí está asistir a las reuniones de las escuelas ya sean conferencias actividades escolares.” (“To me, to get involved is to make sure that my child is happy in their school and has a good relationship with their classmates and teachers. Also, to oversee their grades and attend school meetings and teacher conferences, and other activities.”)

Themes and Subthemes

After evaluating the background of the participants, I organized the rest of the findings by themes and subthemes that emerged during the data analysis process. Two main themes emerged: 1. Barriers to parental involvement and 2. Latinx parental involvement. The first theme contains three subthemes: 1. Language barrier, 2. Social exclusion and racism, and 3. Poor communication from schools and teachers.

Theme 1: Barriers to Parental Involvement

Language Barriers.

In this study, all the five mothers expressed similar concerns about the language barrier. For example, a couple of mothers shared their hesitance to participate in school activities such as parents' nights, fundraising and other activities because they could not understand much of the English. Three mothers also mentioned that they don't usually participate in activities that the school organizes because they could not understand many things. Instead, mothers said they would typically request a separate meeting with the teachers or an email summarizing the missed

information. For example, a mother explained how she would avoid going to meetings. After all, she felt that it was easier for her to get the information after the meeting because she would not understand everything said there. This mother explained

“...me dicen oye, vamos a tener una reunión y a veces le digo, mira, no voy a asistir a la reunión porque luego no entiendo todo, pero qué te parece, si me mandan toda la información de lo que quedaron acuerdo para estar informada.” (“...they [teachers] tell me, hey, we are going to have a meeting, and sometimes I say, look, I am not going to be in the meeting because I cannot understand everything, but what if you send me all the information of what was agreed so I can be informed)

Social Exclusion and Racism

Another important finding that emerged is how the language barrier was not the only reason these mothers choose not to participate. Rather they did not feel a welcoming environment in schools and sometimes from other parents. At least 2 of the mothers expressed their desire to participate, mainly because their children asked them to be involved in their school activities like the other moms do. Three mothers also mentioned how they tried multiple times to get involved in activities, such as fundraising, volunteering during lunchtimes, gardening, and assisting during parents' cafe days, but they felt ignored and not welcomed. P1 for instance, explained how she would receive invitations from the teachers for the activities among parents to meet each other. Still, when she would go, she felt that other parents ignored her:

“Entonces yo no participaba porque me mandaban la hoja o me mandaban email para decir que iba a ver una actividad en la escuela y que se iban a juntar los papás y que luego que los papás iban a hablar entre padres para que nos conociéramos, pero yo veía

que cuando yo empecé a ir yo veía que lo papas me ignoraban." ("Before, I used to go to those events when teachers would send emails inviting parents to participate in activities to get to know each other, but then I noticed that other parents would ignore me, so I stopped participating.")

Another mother mentioned a similar experience. P4 said "... *una vez disque fuimos a plantar plantas y los padres me ignoraban yo les saludaba, pero no me contestaban y dije no ya voy a participar en estas cosas y si, deje ir a participar.*" ("Once I went to a gardening activity, but when I arrived and said hello to other parents, they ignored me. So, I told myself 'no more.' I don't want to participate in these things.) While some mothers did not feel a welcoming environment from other parents, some mothers expressed how they wanted to be more involved in their children's schools. However, their request to participate was sometimes ignored or even denied. P5 mentioned,

"Una situación que paso fue un viaje que iba a ser el grupo de mi hijo y pedían voluntarios y a veces yo quería ser voluntaria, yo tenía la oportunidad de ser voluntaria, pero, ellos me pedían que llevar a este, background check y yo me acuerdo de que yo hable con una de las trabajadoras sociales, y con unos maestros y pues yo le expliqué que yo no tenía seguro social, que si eso, fuera un problema para ir y ella la verdad que no me supo orientar. Me dijo que pues que no, que mejor no me apuntara para, ser voluntaria y eso a mi me dolió mucho." ("Once I tried to volunteer for one of my son's field trip. That time I was able to volunteer, and they needed parents to go to this field trip to help with the children and I signed up, but my request was denied because I could not provide a background check because I did not have a social security number. I

remember I talked to a social worker so she could help me to find other ways, but she just did know how to help me. She just said ‘No, do not sign up.’ That really hurt me.)”

Poor Communication From Schools and Teachers

Another perceived barrier that mothers discussed was poor communication with some teachers. These mothers explained how sometimes they felt that the teachers would only talk to them when something was wrong with their children. When parents were asked if they considered that the poor communication was due to the language barrier, most mothers said they did not think that was the case because they could understand some English or find other ways to communicate. All the mothers discussed the creative methods used to talk to the teachers, such as bringing or requesting an interpreter, using an app on their phone to translate the words they could not say, and asking the teachers to send them emails or text messages. For example, P2 explained,

“Mi hija grande fue a un colegio privado hasta el tercer grado— de kínder a tercero. No había quien hablara español allí, pero yo siempre trataba de llevar a alguien que me tradujera, e incluso ha veces cuando no lograba encontrar a alguien quien me ayudara o como comunicarme yo le decía ala maestra escribame todo, todo lo que me tiene que decir de mi hija, y yo lo leo por que yo lo podía leer. Yo me daba la idea, como el ingenio para comunicarme con los maestros.” (“My older daughter went to a private school until third grade—from kindergarten until third grade. No one would speak Spanish there, but I would always try to bring someone who would translate for me. When I could not find anyone to translate for me, I told the teacher to please make me a note, write everything

that you have to say to me about my daughter, and I will understand better that way. I used to find ways to communicate with them.”)

Interestingly, the mothers would find ways to talk to the teachers, but when I asked the mothers if teachers would do the same, they mostly said that teachers who did not speak Spanish would not talk to them unless they would request a meeting with an interpreter. Furthermore, the mothers also mentioned that they felt that teachers who did not speak Spanish were often less engaging than those who spoke Spanish. Almost all (4) of the mothers explained how they would talk to the teacher who taught Spanish whenever they had questions or concerns because they were patient and showed interest in helping them. For example, P1 mentioned that:

“A la que siempre molesto es la maestra de español. Cuando tenía alguna duda, ella es de España y ella enseña español en la escuela. Yo cuando tenía alguna duda por el idioma, se me hacía más fácil preguntarle a ella y ella podría preguntarle como a las otras maestras.” (“I always bother the teacher that speaks Spanish when I have questions or concerns. She is from Spain, and she teaches Spanish. When I had a question and could not communicate because of the language, it was easier for me to ask her, and she could ask other teachers for me.”)

All the five mothers mentioned how they appreciated that those teachers who spoke Spanish would go above and beyond doing what they (teachers) could help, and those teachers who spoke some Spanish at least tried to communicate with them. For example, they would send them text messages written in Spanish with reminders of important events, assignment instructions, due dates, and other notifications. The mothers would also receive phone calls to explain the school assignments, emails written in Spanish inviting them to school activities, and weekly updates to keep them informed about their children's education.

“Cuando mi niña entró ella la mayor a la escuela, la maestra que tiene ahorita que habla español, ella le tocó en primer grado. Entonces siempre ya se como que me ayuda de vez en cuando. Ella me dice, “cuando tu no entiendas, dime qué necesitas.” Así que ella siempre se me ayudaba. De hecho, me dio su número. Me dijo ‘este número para cualquier pregunta, yo te ayudo.’” (“When my older daughter started first grade, she had a teacher that spoke Spanish. She always would tell me, ‘If you have any questions because you do not understand, please let me know, I can help you,’ so she has always helped me and even gave me her phone number. She said, ‘here this is my number call me any time you need help.’ ”)

When I asked the mothers if they had good communication and support with teachers who did not speak Spanish, all the mothers explained that they normally did not have much interaction with teachers who did not speak any Spanish. Two mothers explained how some teachers were patient and tried their best to have a productive conversation. However, those teachers would only talk to them during the conferences or when something was wrong with their children. P3 explained,

“Pues de otros maestros que no hablan español de mi hijo yo no tengo queja, pero la verdad es que a la mayoría de los maestros no los conozco o solo hablo con ellos cuando mi hijo no hizo la tarea o no pone atención o abecés cuando le quitan el celular.” (“I do not have much to say about my son’s teachers who do not speak Spanish because I do not even know the majority of them. Or I only talk to them when my son did not do his homework, or when he did not pay attention or sometimes when his cellphone was taken away.”)

Theme 2: Latinx Parental Involvement

A significant finding in this study was the commitment for these mothers to see their children succeed with their education. These mothers demonstrated their willingness and interest to participate in their children's schools. And even when these mothers faced challenges such as those described above that often discouraged them from participating in the school activities, they continued to support their children in the ways they thought were best. For example, one mother shared her deepest desire to see her children go to college someday, and she was trying her best to help her children to succeed academically. She shared a story when her daughter was not doing well in algebra and she (the daughter) felt that she was not prepared to enter a Magnet high school (a public school with specialized courses). But the mother managed to pay for tutoring classes, so her daughter was more prepared and confident. P2 said,

“Yo empuje a mi hija mucho en el grado 7, 8 para que alimentará mucho matemáticas y álgebra para que cuando entrara a una high school [magnet] no batallara Y ella misma me decía, pero mama. Es que hay muchos temas que yo no mire, okay, pero eso no quiere decir que te vas a ir abajo. Y empecé a pagar unas clases privadas, yo pagaba 65 dólares. Era lo más barato que encontré. 65 dólares por hora de algebra. Pero valió la pena.” (“I pushed my daughter a lot in 7 and 8 grades so she could learn algebra so when she would start high school, she would not struggle. She would tell me, but Mom, there are many subjects that I did not learn, and I would say, okay, but that does not mean that you are going to fail. So, I looked for the cheapest tutor available so she could learn algebra. I used to pay 65 cents per one hour of algebra, that was the cheapest I could find, but it was worth it.”)

Furthermore, another mother mentioned how she managed to help her four children during the pandemic to continue with their classes even when they did not have computers and space to continue their education. P5 explained,

“Nos costó trabajo durante la pandemia, al principio, si tenemos el internet en la casa. Pero ellos no contaban con computadora, tenían solo una tableta, pero era muy lenta para las aplicaciones. Pero hablé ala escuela para pedir ayuda y les dije que mis niños ocupaban una computadora y si se las prestaron. También fue difícil por que donde vivimos es un departamento de dos, cuartos, y prácticamente de los mayores tenía uno en cada cuarto y, al otro lo tenia cocina y a otro lo tenía en la sala.” (“It was difficult in the beginning of the pandemic. We do have the internet at home, but my kids did not have computers. They only had one tablet, but it was too slow for the school applications. So, I called the school, and I asked if they could help us, and they provided the computers. It was also hard because we live in a small two-bedroom apartment, so I would tell the two older kids to go to the bedrooms; another was in the living room and the other in the kitchen.”)

The stories of these mothers are compelling in how they managed to overcome the challenges they faced so their children could continue with their education despite the limitation and the lack of resources.

Discussion and Implications

The primary goal for this study was to understand the barriers Latinx parents faced that limited their parental involvement in education. The themes that emerged in the study not only showed that these parents face multiple barriers to parental involvement, but also it indicated that

Latinx parents genuinely care about their children's education, and they do their best to encourage their children to do well in school. Further, this study also showed that parental involvement is not about attending conferences, school activities or parents' nights. The mothers that participated in this study expressed that the best parental contribution to education was paying attention to their children's needs at home, supervising their children to do their schoolwork, encouraging them to pay attention in class and be respectful with teachers and classmates.

Additionally, the findings of this study support previous findings in research which indicate that in Hispanic/Latino households, home-based parental involvement is the most common practice, especially in the homes of first-generation immigrant families (Altschul, 2011 & Young et al., 2013). The barriers to parental involvement in previous studies showed that the language difference could impede parents from getting more involved in their children's school activities and getting to know teachers better (Johnson et al., 2016 & Good et al., 2011). The mothers in this study also demonstrated that language was sometimes a barrier. However, the issue is that while the language could be a big factor that limits these mothers from engaging with the teachers, the reality is that those non-Spanish teachers could have done more to approach to these mothers. As I have demonstrated earlier, these mothers got creative and found ways to communicate with teachers and school administrators.

Furthermore, poor communication between parents and teachers was also a barrier to parental involvement in research. Previous findings suggest that language was a number one cause for Spanish-speaking parents not communicating with the teacher and staff members (Good et al., 2010). In this study, the mothers showed how they felt more comfortable reaching out to teachers who spoke Spanish. This is probably because Spanish-speaking teachers did more

than just communicate with the parents when something was wrong like the non-Spanish-speaking teachers did. In other words, those teachers who spoke Spanish showed more interest in trying to communicate with the parents and included them more often than those teachers who did not speak Spanish. Even though mothers explained that they do not have negative experiences with the teachers who did not speak Spanish, they wished that those teachers would do more to get to know them and to keep them informed about what is going on with their children's education. The mothers believe teachers should use methods such as sending them personalized emails giving updates about their children or simple things like text messages with reminders is enough for them to feel included and welcomed. And lastly, all the mothers shared stories of situations where discrimination was a cause that discouraged them from participating, such as not feeling welcomed by other parents and being excluded from volunteering because they could not provide a background check. So, after these findings, I question the narrative that Latinx parents do not care about their children's education because they do not "participate" in schools. I consider that we are putting too much emphasis on blaming the parents. The blame should not be on the parents but on the educational system that has failed to embrace that this nation is diverse and multicultural, not only White.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study has some limitations. This study was intended to learn the barriers Latinx parents with Spanish-speaking families face that limit parental involvement in education. Yet, the sample only brought the experiences of parents already connected and participating in programming at a non-profit organization, which means that these parents may be a group more likely to be involved in their children's schools. Also, due to time

constraints, the data analysis process could have been improved using programs that are available for qualitative research methods for better management and organization of the data.

Conclusion

This study has been a great learning opportunity regardless of the limitations. My findings are significant because the parents' narratives demonstrate how structural barriers and cultural exclusions are the main challenges these parents face that hinder their parental involvement in education. I presented situations where parents have been discriminated against and excluded because of their race, language, and immigration status. My findings also confirm previous research that shows how Latinx parents are dedicated to their children's education. They help their children with homework assignments, teach their children life lessons so they are motivated to do well in school, and they also teach their children values and accountability, just to mention a few. Despite these attempts, they are still held accountable for low Latinx student educational attainment.

Based on this research, I have four recommendations for school districts and educational policy makers. First, teachers and school administrators should have better communication strategies, such as being more specific in expectations and the roles these parents should be aware of so that teachers and parents are on the same page and also to prevent assumptions. This way parents would have more clarity about what is expected from them. Second, schools should hire more bilingual and culturally competent staff, especially in schools where Latinx students predominate, so parents have an opportunity to build that relationship with all of their children's teachers. Third, schools should create programs and activities that ensure a welcoming

environment for all the parents of different nationalities to avoid racial discrimination (e.g., planning activities that are inclusive and appropriate to all races, religions, ethnicities, etc.).

Lastly, there should be support for undocumented parents, so that their immigration status is not a barrier to volunteering and participating in schools. This leads me to a recommendation for future research, which is to learn more about those parents who want to be more involved in their children's school but are not allowed due to their immigration status. This could help to close the Latinx gap in parental involvement in education.

Appendix

Appendix A - Interview Guide (Spanish and English)

Información demográfica de padres. (Parents' demographic information)

1. ¿Por favor, me podría platicar un poco de usted? (Could you tell me a Little about yourself?)
 - a) ¿De donde es originaria/o? (Where are you originally from?)
 - b) ¿Cual era su edad cuando se vino a vivir a los E.U.? (How old were you when you moved to the U.S.?)
 - c) ¿cuantos anos tiene viviendo aquí en los estados Unidos? (How long have you lived in the U.S.?)

2. ¿Usted asistió ala escuela? (Did you go to school?)
 - a. ¿Cual es su nivel educativo? (What is your educational level?)
 - b. ¿En que país y estado usted asistió ala escuela? (In what country and state did you go to school?)
 - c. ¿La institución que usted asistió, era publica o privada? (Was the institution you attended public or private?)

3. ¿Cual es su estado civil? (What is your marital status?)
 - a) ¿Cual es el lugar de origen de su pareja? (Where is your partner originally from?)
 - b) ¿Usted sabe el nivel educativo de su pareja? y sabe donde asistió su pareja ala escuela? (ej. país y estado). (Do you know the educational level of your partner? and do you know where your partner attended school? (e.g., country and state)
 - c) ¿Sabe si su pareja asistió a escuela publica o privada? (Do you know if your partner attended public or private school?)

Información General de la familia (General information about the families)

1. ¿Me podría decir cuantos hijos tiene? (How many children do you have?)
 - a. ¿Sus hijos asisten a escuela publica o privada? (Do your children attend to a public or a private school?)
 - b. ¿Tiene hijos que asisten ala escuela grados k-12? (Do you have children who attend school in grades K-12?)
2. ¿En su casa, cual es el idioma que se habla principalmente? (What is the main language spoken at home?)
 - a. ¿Usted, su pareja o los dos hablan Ingles? (Do you, your partner, or both speak English?)
 - b. ¿Sus hijos son bilingües? (Are your children bilingual?)
3. ¿Cuál es su ocupación? (What is your occupation?)
 - a. ¿Cuántas horas trabaja al día? ¿a la semana? (How many hours do you work a day? per week?)

4. ¿Su familia tiene acceso a internet? ¿Tiene computadora en casa? (Does your family have access to the internet? Do you have a computer at home?)
 - a. ¿Usted tiene y utiliza correo electrónico? (Do you have an email address?)

Información acerca de la participación de padres en las escuelas (Information about parental involvement in schools)

1. Para usted, ¿que significado tiene la participación de padres en las escuelas? (What does parent involvement mean to you?)
2. ¿Usted cree que los padres deberían participar en las escuelas de sus hijos? (Do you think that parents should be involved in their children's schools?)
 - a. ¿Por qué lo deberían hacer, o por que no? (Why or why not parents should be involved?)
3. ¿Usted considera si la participación de padres en las escuelas es importante para el desarrollo de la educación de sus hijos? ¿Por que considera que es o no es importante? (Do you consider whether the participation of parents in schools is important for the development of their children's education? Why do you think it is or is not important?)
4. ¿Usted considera si las escuelas y maestros de sus hijos valoran la participación de los padres y por qué? (Do you consider whether your children's schools and teachers value parental involvement and why?)
 - a. ¿alguna vez a usted estado involucrado/a con las escuelas de sus hijos? (Have you ever been involved with your children's schools?)
 - b. De que manera esta involucrado/a en las escuelas de sus hijos? (How are you involved in your children's schools?)
 - c. ¿Con que frecuencia usted visito y participo en las actividades, eventos y juntas de las escuelas de sus hijos antes de la pandemia? (How often did you visit and participate in your children's school activities, events, and meetings prior to the pandemic?)

Barreras que impiden la participación de padres (Barriers to parental involvement)

1. ¿Usted ha a asistido a juntas de maestros? (Have you ever attended to teacher conferences?)
 - a. si no ha participado, ¿cual fue el motivo que no le permitió asistir? (If you have not participated, what was the reason why you could not participate?)
 - b. ¿Cuándo usted asiste a juntas de maestros o tiene alguna pregunta, la escuela tiene servicios de interpretación para usted? ¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia? (When you attend to teacher meetings or have questions, does the school have interpretation services for you? How has your experience been?)

- c. Basado en su experiencia cuando visito la escuela de sus hijos, ¿Qué tan bienvenido usted se sintió de parte de los maestros y personal de la escuela de sus hijos? (Based on your experience visiting your children school, how welcome did you feel from the teachers and staff administrators?)
2. ¿Usted siente confianza de hacer preguntas a los maestros y personal de la escuela de sus hijos? ¿Por que si o no? (Do you feel confident asking questions of your children's teachers and school staff?)
 - a. Si tiene alguna duda, ¿pregunta o alguna inquietud? ¿usted sabe con quien comunicarse? (If you have any questions or concerns, do you know who to communicate with?)
3. ¿Cree que la escuela de sus hijos tiene un buen método para motivarlos a participar? ¿Qué les hace falta? (Do you think your children's school has a good way to motivate parents to participate?)
 - a. ¿Tiene alguna recomendación donde puedan mejorar? (Do you have any recommendations for improvement?)
 - b. En general, usted esta satisfecha/o con el apoyo y trato de las escuelas de sus hijos para que usted y sus hijos tengan una buena experiencia? (In general, are you satisfied with the support and treatment of your children's schools so that you and your children have a good experience?)

Appendix B- Table 1.

Table 1. Table of Minutes of Interview per Participant			
Participant*	Interview Date	Time Scheduled	Duration
P1	April 5, 2021	30-45 minutes	34 minutes
P2	April 5, 2021	30-45 minutes	50 minutes
P3	April 6, 2021	30-45 minutes	40 minutes
P4	April 8, 2021	30-45 minutes	32 minutes
P5	April 9, 2021	30-45 minutes	63 minutes

*Markers (P1, P2, P3, P4 & P5) were given to each participant for confidentiality purposes

Appendix C-Table 2

Table 2 Table of Participants' Demographics in Qualitative Research

*Participant	Parent Status	Age	Marital Status	Country of Origin	Education Level	Employed	# Years living in the U.S.	# of Children	Language Spoken at Home	**English Proficiency
P1	Mother	41	Single	Mexico	Primary school	Part-time	21	4	Spanish	2
P2	Mother	43	Married	Mexico	College Degree	Part-time	11	2	Spanish	3
P3	Mother	35	Married	Mexico	High school	Full-time	17	3	Spanish	1
P4	Mother	30	Married	Mexico	Some High school	Part-time	16	3	Spanish	2
P5	Mother	29	Married	Mexico	Secondary School	Not employed	15	5	Spanish	3

* Markers (P1, P2, P3, P4 & P5) were given to each participant for confidentiality reasons.

** 1. Limited English Comprehension 2. Some English Comprehension 3. Advanced English comprehension 4. Fluent in English

Appendix D- Informed Consent Information Sheet

Note: This informed consent was verbally translated in Spanish at the beginning of each interview.

If you are 18 years of age or older, you are invited to participate in a research study conducted on behalf of Seattle University. The study is part of Research Capstone course in the Social Work Department. The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers, challenges, and opinions Latinx parents face that limits their parental involvement in education. Participating in this interview should talk for about 30-45 minutes. Approximately 5-10 individuals will be involved in this study. Some questions in this Interview could evoke feelings of upset or offense in some respondents, but you will have the option not to answer any question if you don't feel comfortable.

There are no known risks to participating in the study. You can choose not to answer any questions you don't wish to. All information given is confidential and the survey will not ask for your name or other direct personal identifiers. With your permission, I would like to record the interview for transcription purposes, but I will not retain this recording once the project is complete. The data collected in this study will be used to write a report and give a presentation as part of the capstone requirement, but no reference will be made that could link an individual to the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and you are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty.

If you have any concerns about your participation in this study, you can contact Elizabeth Vargas, at evargas@seattleu.edu. You can also contact the Departmental Honors course instructor Mary Robertson, at (206) 296-5906 and mrobertson@seattleu.edu. If you have any concerns that your rights are being violated, you may contact Dr. Michael Spinetta, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.

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