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The Perspectives and Experiences of Arabic Mothers About Families' Home and School
Engagement

A dissertation
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Early Childhood Education
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education

by
Fatimah Ahmed Rubayyi
August 2024

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Dr. Amy Malkus

Dr. Julia T. Atiles

Keywords: family involvement, English learners, family, Arabic families in the U.S.

ABSTRACT

The Perspectives and Experiences of Arabic Mothers About Families' Home and School

Engagement

by

Fatimah Rubayyi

Due to the rise in the rank of Arabic students in schools in the United States (U.S.), this qualitative study was designed to investigate the perspective of Arabic mothers in the U.S. regarding their experiences of involvement with their children's schools. The approach includes a convenience sample of eight Arabic mothers. Through virtual focus groups, individual interviews, and concept maps, the eight Arabic mothers shared their experiences and perceptions of what their children's primary schools and early childhood education programs are doing to involve them. Additionally, the study explored participants' recommendations for schools regarding family involvement for other Arabic families with children in schools in the U.S. The study yielded seven major themes: 1) school community/overview of school traits; 2) benefits of having children at the same school for a long time; 3) parent/teacher roles; 4) communication between home and school; 5) involvement; 6) challenges, including mothers' concerns; and 7) mothers' recommendations. The findings demonstrated that Arabic mothers have positive thoughts about their children's schools and want to participate in their children's schooling at home and school. However, they are facing some obstacles related to limited time, English, and other factors that often prevent their involvement. The research provides other Arabic families, districts, and school leaders with valued religiously and culturally responsive suggestions to facilitate and improve Arabic family involvement

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the apple of my eyes, my mother, and my father who have been encouraging and supporting with love. I dedicate this work to the love of my life, my husband, and my best friend, Yahya. To my love and my forever friends Alhanouf, Rayan, Rakan, and Tariq. To both my family and my family-in-law. To all of my wonderful friends who became members of my family.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Some students face challenges fulfilling academic assignments and struggle throughout their academic processes. These difficulties can be minimized for students whose native language is not English by offering assistance customized to their learning requirements (Han, 2012). In the United States, classrooms have experienced a growing cultural and linguistic diversity, as highlighted by the Office of English Language Acquisition (2023), which indicates a significant rise in the number of children who speak languages other than English at home over the last 20 years.

In academia, students with non-English native languages are identified as English language learners (ELs) (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2023). As the English Language (EL) or English Language Learners (ELL) label categorizes the student as lacking something (seen from a deficit standpoint), it perpetuates a negative stereotype. It may encourage a tendency to place the responsibility on the student or their family (Helman, 2020). Therefore, it was suggested to move to the term “emergent bilingual,” which views the student as working toward the enhanced goal of acquiring more than one language instead of labeling the student as having a deficiency and labeling them as an English learner or limited competent such as "English learner" or "limited proficient" (García et al., 2017). For this study, the EL or ELL terms will only be utilized when citing research that specifically identifies students with one of these labels. The term emergent bilingual is preferred and will be used in this dissertation because it is clear that a meaningful and fair education will not just develop these English language learners into proficient English speakers, but more importantly, into accomplished bilingual individuals and adults (García et al., 2017).

Leonard (2011) emphasized the critical need to focus on other elements of the student's environment, stating, "The developmental needs of all students are larger than what a school can address alone" (p. 31). Vygotsky and Cole (1978) believed that parents and the family are the child's first teachers, and the first learning experiences occur in the community in which they live. In support, Hilado (2011) and his colleagues discussed that academic achievement outcomes could be increased regarding the level of parents' positive involvement. The relationship between family and school is considered to be one of the most important features of effective school programs for all ages and grade levels (Epstein et al., 2018).

Research has found that family involvement in their children's education has a major influence on their child or children's achievement (Epstein and Sheldon, 2023). According to research, parents, children, and teachers all benefit from the collaboration between teachers and parents and their work together as a team (Grant & Ray, 2023). Additionally, research has consistently found that when the teachers, schools, parents, students, and the community work together, children's education is positively affected (The National Association of the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2022).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory was one of those selected as the basis for this study. It focuses on the child's various environments as factors that affect the development processes. The theory explains the impact of the relationship between the person and their school, friends, and families, as well as the interactions between these groups and their influence on the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). According to the ecological systems theory, it is significant to study the child's family, teachers, school, and friends, as well as focus on their interaction with one another to understand different phenomena in that child's life and developmental processes (Grant & Ray, 2023).

In particular, this study will focus on Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem, which represents the interaction among two microsystems, in this case family and school. Due to the influence family has on their children's lives, it is fundamental that teachers are aware of the importance of their relationship with the child's family as well as appropriate strategies to use when teaching English as a second language (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

A substantial number of researchers have investigated the influence of family involvement on children's social and academic outcomes (Steiner, 2014). These studies concluded that families have essential roles in children's social and academic achievement (Powell et al., 2010). Family represents the first environment that a child has interactions with.

Most of the child's personality forms as a result of these interactions within this environment (Grant & Ray, 2023; Swick et al., 2013). Family involvement in children's education positively impacts children's success (Harper et al., 2011). Consequently, it is no longer a subject of debate (Wei & Zhou, 2012).

Most parents and caregivers understand their children better than other people, and they have more opportunities to interact with these children (Carter et al., 2009). NAEYC (2009) highlighted the critical need to reduce learning gaps among all students. However, early childhood education programs still face some challenges in collaborating with families as they struggle to involve them, especially with diverse families. More studies are needed to discover different effective strategies that schools can use to support families and teachers to collaborate with each other and have healthy relationships.

The importance of these techniques and practices is evident in Epstein's body of research (Epstein, 2010; Grant & Ray, 2023). Introducing multiple family involvement strategies is important. Establishing communication is an essential strategy for developing positive

relationships with families. Communication allows the parent to be more active in the child's education, especially if the teacher creates different forms of communication. Different forms of communication will help the teacher learn more about the family and their needs (Epstein, 2010; Grant & Ray, 2023).

If early childhood educators learn how to engage the family or guardians of their students in the educational process, it would have positive effects on the child's learning (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). The parents' involvement in their children's education depends upon the teacher in many cases because the parent has direct interaction with the teacher. Moreover, Flanigan (2007) found that programs that incorporate both the teacher and the family in the learning process will be more effective if the teacher is adequately prepared to partner with parents and communities. For this purpose, training could provide preservice teachers with rich parent and community involvement experiences.

Previous research has shown that family involvement in school has positive effects on students' learning ability (Crosby et al., 2015). However, there is a limited amount of research on early childhood teachers' preparation in the area of working with families (Pedro et al., 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Creating and fostering partnerships with families has been discussed as one of the major challenges that schools face, especially families with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). Parental involvement is a critical component in children's education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Researchers have highlighted different forms of parental participation in schools and their children's education as they investigated how parental involvement with schools can enrich student learning (Alexander et al., 2017).

The United States Office of English Language Acquisition (2023) presented the most commonly spoken languages in the United States among English learners during the 2019–20 school year. It highlighted the fast increase in the Arabic-speaking population, which appeared to be the second most spoken language after Spanish.

Figure 1

Ten-Year Trends of the Five Most Common Languages of the 2006–07 to 2019-20 School Years

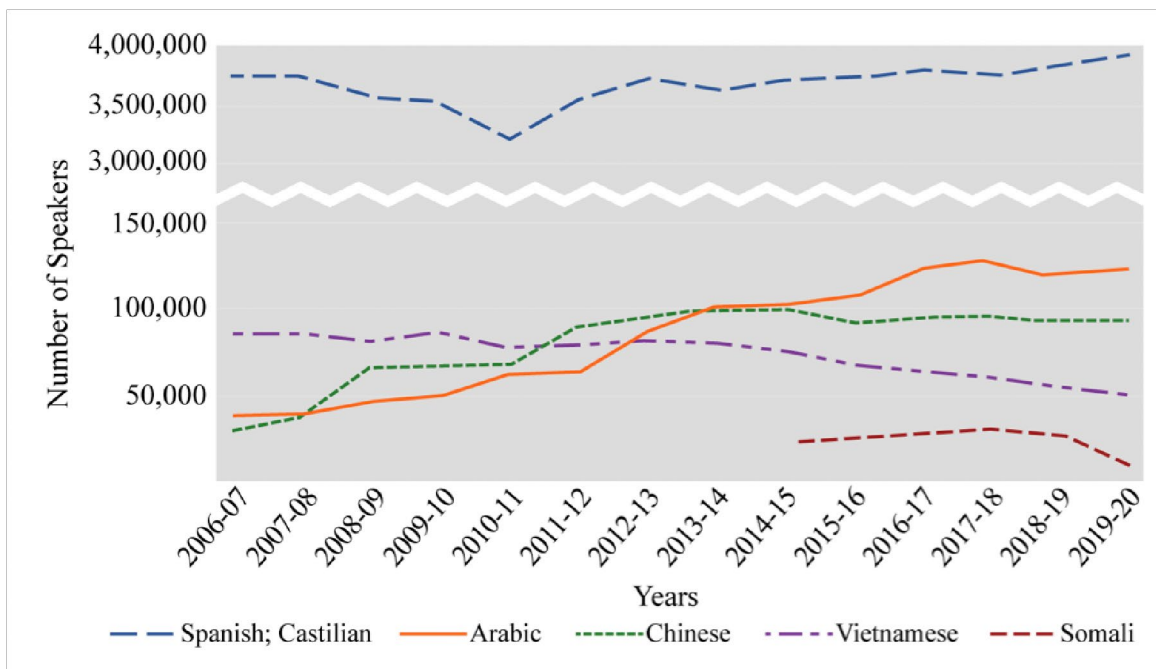


Figure 2

The Top 20 Languages on States' "Top Five" Lists of Languages Spoken by K–12 ELs: 2019–20 School Year

Ranking	States' Top 5	Number of Speakers	Percent of Total U.S.
	Languages: SY 2019–20	Reported a/	EL Students b/
1	Spanish; Castilian	3,872,159	75.69%
2	Arabic	124,410	2.43%
3	Chinese	87,256	1.71%
4	Vietnamese	57,073	1.12%

5	Portuguese	32,017	0.63%
6	Haitian; Haitian Creole	25,404	0.50%
7	Hmong	19,623	0.38%
8	Cushitic (Other)	16,829	0.33%

As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2023), the population of English learners in the United States is growing, especially the Arabic-speaking student population. For example, during the school year of 2006-2007, the number of Arabic-speaking students was 40,000; then in the school year of 2019-2020, the number increased to 125,000 students. They showed that through a period of approximately eighteen years, the number of Arabic-speaking English learners almost tripled, and the Arabic language speakers moved from the fifth position to the second position after Spanish speakers. Arabic is considered one of the top five spoken languages in U.S. public schools.

Over those years, the level of parental involvement has increased. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2012, 87% of parents reported attending school meetings, while the same measurement showed that the percentage has increased to 89% of parents attending school meetings during the 2018-2019 school year. However, the rates of parental involvement continue to indicate discrepancies among the percentage of involved families by their race, Hispanic origin, and parents' language (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). According to Gunning (2019), in U.S. schools, approximately 21% of young children who are around 5-to-17-years old primarily speak different languages than English. Due to the high number of diverse students in U.S. public schools, it is critical for schools and teachers to provide multiple strategies to work with diverse families.

An historic view of family involvement going back to the 1990s provides a base for then looking at the changes reported in more recent statistics on family involvement in the next paragraph. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), 79% of non-Hispanic White families reported attending a general meeting in 1996. Alternatively, 72% and 74% of non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic families attended, as they indicated a substantially lower percentage of family involvement in school. In 1999, the National Center for Education Statistics data showed that although the percentage of parents who attend meetings with their children is increasing, it remains lower among minority groups. For example, in 2003, among non-Hispanic Black families, parental participation at general meetings increased by 14% from 1999 to 89%, while Hispanic parental engagement increased by 10% (Valden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005).

According to Epstein and Sheldon (2023), there is much evidence of the impact of school, family, and community partnerships, and this topic hardly receives satisfactory attention from school or from state education leaders. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) mentioned that teachers are mostly prepared to teach subject content intensively for all grades, but many teachers and schools are not ready to collaborate and develop relationships with families.

Researchers discussed and highlighted that there is a substantial positive relationship between parental involvement in their children's school and student outcomes (Epstein, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This asks the question of whether schools are extending these benefits to include all children and families, particularly those who are emergent bilingual, as part of their efforts to provide access and equity for all students.

To investigate and answer such a critical question, there is an essential need for research on diverse families' perceptions, experiences, and barriers to parental involvement to understand

their needs and be able to support them to be involved with the school and be able to assist their children. The literature reviewed shows a deficiency in the research regarding parental involvement for diverse families who speak languages other than Spanish. There is a shortage of research that discusses the experiences of families with different languages and cultural backgrounds with parental involvement since the topic has not been deeply explored and studied sufficiently in the United States, even though this population is growing fast, especially the Arabic speakers. As mentioned, U.S. public schools have reported that the Arabic language is the second most common non-English spoken language in public schools. This study will research and shed light on this topic by focusing on the voices of this underrepresented group of parents who come from Arabic countries that have different languages and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to investigate Arabic parents' experiences and perspectives about their involvement in their children's school.

Research Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study was to explore and outline the opinions and experiences of Arabic parents in the U.S. regarding their parental involvement, parents' experiences, and what their children's schools were doing to involve them. This then helps develop an understanding of what strategies the schools currently use to engage families. Additionally, the study will inform possible directions that educators and professionals can consider for increasing parental involvement among this population.

To further parents' and schools' knowledge and comfort levels to partner with each other, the data and findings from this study can reveal strategies to support family-school involvement, and they could be used to improve policy implications. This study used Epstein's model of overlapping based on a theory about school-family partnerships that has been used effectively in

many studies. Epstein's model includes six concepts that explain school-family partnership: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating within the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023).

This research study fills a gap in the existing literature about parent involvement among Arabic parents who have more diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds than Spanish speakers and African Americans. Research is needed to have a better understanding of these groups' perceptions, experiences, barriers, needs, and suggestions in school involvement. It is also required to determine the limitations and promoting factors regarding the involvement of these parents in their children's schools. In the field of education, school leaders, teachers, counselors, and parent coordinators need to improve their strategies and expand their knowledge to promote more culturally responsive practices that empower parents of emergent bilinguals to participate in school activities. This study may provide insights to schools for developing more responsive activities and opportunities that improve students' and parents' involvement.

This study engaged eight Arabic mothers as participants who had children in schools in the U.S. at the time of data collection. The research design employed a qualitative approach of focus group interviews and individual participant interviews to provide a deeper understanding of parents' experiences. Moreover, concept maps were collected to obtain parents' experiences regarding parent involvement in their children's schools. The approach includes a convenience sample of $N = 8$ Arabic parents to discuss their experiences with school family involvement.

Definition of Terms

Some of the relevant terms to this study are the following:

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is often referred to as family engagement. For the purposes of this study, the term is defined as being aware and involved in schoolwork, understanding the interaction between parenting skills and student success in school, and possessing a commitment to consistent communication with educators about student progress. It refers to several aspects of parental practices and behaviors related to supporting their children's education. These include practices at home and school, and whether teachers or the school are or are not aware of their actions. These practices are shaped by parents' awareness of what goes on in school and their attitudes about school (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Jeynes, 2014; Krane & Klevan, 2019). This involvement goes beyond attending school events, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering and participating in parent-teacher organizations and committees (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Parent Partnership

Epstein added a partnership aspect as an additional component of parent involvement. In parent partnerships, all the parents, school, and community members work together by sharing responsibility for students' development and learning process (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023).

Perceptions

The individuals' beliefs and opinions regarding topics have been formed over time as a result of experiences, learning, knowledge, and interactions with the surrounding systems and other systems (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Emergent Bilinguals

The possibility to become bilingual exists for students who arrive at school speaking a language other than the instructional language, and they are in fact working toward it. When their proficiency in the new language grows, their bilingualism also grows. The term emergent

bilingual views the student as working toward the enhanced goal of acquiring more than one language instead of labeling the student as having a deficiency and labeling them as an English learner or limited competent (such as "English learner" or "limited proficient"; García et al., 2017).

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences with family engagement from the point of view of Arabic mothers with different cultural backgrounds of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?
2. What are the recommendations for parent involvement by Arabic mothers with different cultural backgrounds of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The review of the literature will begin with explanations of the laws that were developed regarding family involvement before introducing Epstein's six types of involvement, which will be used as the conceptual framework for this study (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). Research related to the effects of family involvement will be discussed within a review organized by Epstein's six types of involvement. Other articles will be discussed to provide an understanding of the current studies that involve families from different cultural and language backgrounds.

Over the last 50 years, large numbers of researchers have investigated the impacts of parental involvement on their children's performance at school (Đurišić and Bunjevac, 2017; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Despite years of studies demonstrating the value of parental participation in their children's education, many educators and researchers still report the limitations and challenges of parental involvement in schools (Epstein et al., 2018; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). The implementation of active home-school partnership strategies is essential for creating meaningful parental involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Yotyodying & Wild, 2019).

The Law

Family involvement was defined in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning" (Sec. 9101 [32]). It requires Title I-funded schools to develop a family participation program that encourages families to be active in their children's education and provides training and education. With the NCLB explanation of parental/family involvement, family involvement programs concentrate on the activities that include family members, such as

aiding in their child's learning, being actively supportive in their child's education at school, and being included in decision-making at the school as appropriate (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a 2015 renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, came as the replacement of the No Child Left Behind Act, which was enacted in 2001 and revealed that there had been small changes in the law and the definition of family involvement, but that literacy remains a barrier (Schwartz, 2017). Under ESSA, all schools that get Title I funding, a program that is designed to help disadvantaged students, are required to spend at least 1% of their funding on programs for training and educating parents. It emphasizes that low-income families must be included in decisions concerning how these engagement funds are spent (Skinner, 2020).

The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is one of the largest professional organizations that focuses on improving the quality of early childhood education. It aims to support the field to be able to provide young children with high standards of education. The association works toward protecting all children's rights. The core values of NAEYC (2011) as stated in its ethical code of conduct, include having good knowledge of the current early childhood research; considering the connection between children and families, cultures, community, and society; respecting and understanding the uniqueness and diversity of each group; and trusting and showing respect to these groups. NAEYC's principles emphasize that family is the primary environmental factor that critically influences a child's development. As the NAEYC aims to achieve the full potential of each child, it provides the field with expectations for ethical responsibilities toward that child's family. The NAEYC Code of Ethical

Conduct (2011) helps early childhood practitioners collaborate with families. It focuses on open, respectful relationships as a foundation to cooperate with families. It states the requirement of a welcoming environment for families and the respective communications.

Theoretical Perspective

According to Vygotsky and Cole (1978), parents are the first teachers for their child, and the first learning experiences occur in the community where the child lives and interacts. To effectively explore the experiences and perspectives of diverse parents about their involvement in their children's schools, a clear understanding of parental engagement should be discussed and defined. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study will be based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory and Epstein's (2010) six types of parent engagement.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner formulated his theory to explain the child's development processes, which form from the children's inherent qualities as well as interactions within their environment. The theory, named the ecological systems theory, explains multiple factors that influence a person's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Härkönen, 2001). This theory emphasizes studying the child's development in the context of all the factors in the individual's proximal and distal environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner described five levels of the child's environmental systems. He organized the contexts of development gradually, starting with the most intimate level to the broadest (Härkönen, 2001; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). These levels are often visualized as interconnected concentric circles, each influencing the other levels.

The Microsystem. The microsystem is the closest and most immediate environment to the child, the context in which they live and interact directly. This immediate surrounding

environment has an enormous impact on the child's development, as it is the primary layer in which the child communicates. This center level influences the other systems in the ecological systems theory. Positive cooperation in this system helps the child to feel confident and accepted in their environment, which allows them to develop appropriately, while negativity and lack of communication limit the child from thriving in their educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995). Examples of the microsystem are the family, school, and close friends that surround the child. When a child experiences chronic stress from their early life within one or more of their microsystems, it can impair the child's developmental processes (Swick et al., 2013).

The Mesosystem. The mesosystem is the relationships and interactions between units in the microsystems that are central to the child, such as their family, friends, and school. The ways that their family, friends, and school, and other possible microsystems interact with one another majorly influence the child's development, attitude, and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995; Härkönen, 2001). For example, the relationship between their family and their teachers will affect the child. Building good relationships with family is essential to help the student become involved in the school (Grant & Ray, 2023).

The Exosystem. The exosystem considers the people who are not very close to the child and do not interact with them directly. However, they affect the child's developmental processes by interacting with the structures in the child's mesosystem, which impacts the structures that communicate with the child directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Härkönen, 2001).

Parental work is one of the exosystems that affect the child because it significantly influences their parents' time and income levels (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). For example, it might limit the time a parent will spend with the child or be actively involved in their school as well as

other parts of their life. Moreover, work may increase the parents' stress, which can impact children (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995; Härkönen, 2001). This limitation of time, level of stress, economic stress, and other pressures impact the child.

The Macrosystem. The macrosystem includes the remote aspects of the child's culture and society. The people and things within a child's culture affect the way the child will make life decisions and how they will perceive the world. Bronfenbrenner (2000) explained that a person is influenced by the place that they live, the people in that society, as well as the cultural values and other beliefs that they share. The ideology of this larger system encompasses the other systems and significantly impacts the other contextual levels of the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

The Chronosystem. The chronosystem refers to the environmental transitions and events that happen throughout the child's life. Bronfenbrenner noticed the importance of time throughout a person's life stages. Over time, the ecological systems of the person change. Therefore, the chronosystem was added to the theory to add more description to the ways that the setting changes and impacts development over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Leonard, 2011; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

When Epstein was developing a National Network of Partnership Schools in 1980 and 1981, her theory of overlapping spheres of influence grew out of her related research. The conceptual framework of this study will be based on Epstein overlapping spheres of influence, including the six types of parental involvement in this framework. The theory identifies various factors in a child's learning and development (Epstein et al., 2018). It highlights the interaction, collaboration, communication, and partnerships between families, schools, and communities, as

they are the three major contexts within which children develop and learn (Epstein & Sheldon, 2018). The theory revises Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory with more integration and extension to explain the dynamics of individual interactions across contexts for student learning experiences (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). The framework was built on the theory that the major purpose of collaborating and developing partnerships among family, school, and community will improve students' success in school and life (Epstein, 1996).

This model includes activities that children, families, and communities could perform alone and those they could do together to influence children's learning (Epstein & Sheldon 2023). The overlapping spheres of influence model suggests that learning occurs at home, in the school, and in the community, but children learn more actively when the home, school, and community partner with each other and work together in developing, supporting, and guiding children's development and learning (Epstein et al., 2018). The major assumption of this model is that the critical reasons for school, family, and community to collaborate and partner together are essential to the child's growth and achievement.

According to Epstein, the theory consists of an external and an internal model of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1996; Epstein et al., 2018; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). The external forces that influence parental involvement include the backgrounds and practices of all the families, schools, and classrooms, as well as the many different events in the child's life. The contexts of the school, family, and community impact children's learning and influence children's education (Sheldon et al., 2004). These external and internal forces shift in their influence on the child through overlap as family, school, or community interacts more closely or from a distance during the events of a child's life. The model includes (a) time/age/grade level; (b) experience, philosophy, and practices of a family;

(c) experience, philosophy, and practices of the school; and (d) experience, philosophy, and practices of community, as the external forces.

Epstein's Framework for Working with Families. Schools are required to improve and provide programs that improve parent involvement and have the potential to improve the associations and diminish the conflict between these settings (NAEYC, 2011). Epstein's conceptual framework of six types of involvement for collaborating with families can help schools in developing inclusive school and family partnership programs (Epstein, 2010). These six types of family participation in this comprehensive framework enhance school-family-community connections and represent the various types of relationships between families and schools (Epstein et al., 2018). These provide a great outline for a school to improve the process of 1) parenting with family, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) decision making, and 6) collaborating within the community. Schools need to work toward appropriately integrating all families into their practice, including diverse families with various languages and cultural backgrounds (Epstein et al., 2018).

It is important that parenting practices get discussed among schools and families, and parent education about parent roles in their child's schooling is critical and supportive for school and family, as well as the student. It enables families to have a better understanding of the growth and development of their children as students and be able to create supportive home conditions for their children during each phase of their educational journey. Parenting discussions help schools understand more about the child and the family dynamics (Epstein et al., 2018).

The school's understanding of the families' philosophy, experience, and practice will support them in being effective at building trust between home and school and being aware of

the useful strategies to collaborate with family and positively influence student development and achievement. Schools that provide multiple forms of involvement have a higher opportunity to build trust between administrators, teachers, and parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Grant & Ray, 2023). All parents should be encouraged to help and instruct their children through monitoring, discussing, and helping with homework, and this encouragement should come from exchanging resources with teachers (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023).

Communicating with families and allowing them to be aware of school activities, initiatives, and student progress is critical to build strong relationships through effective methods of two-way communication. Epstein and Sheldon (1996) emphasized the importance of allowing all parents and students to have access to these methods of communication to follow their children's progress and be active in the other five types of involvement. All families need to be communicated with and be provided with various methods and strategies of communication which are essential at every school.

Volunteering at school is an important aspect of the involvement framework where all parents are provided with a variety of opportunities to volunteer. According to Epstein (2010), schools should develop practices that improve participation, training, and support of families, as well as activities to involve a larger number of diverse families in supporting students and the school. Jaiswal (2018) emphasized the critical impact of having parents at the school through volunteering or attending school activities, as it correlated with student success.

Learning at home includes providing critical information and supportive ideas to families about the appropriate ways to help students with homework and educational-related activities and decisions (Epstein et al., 2018). Epstein and Sheldon (2023) emphasized the importance of improving the family's ability to be involved in supporting their children's learning by creating

opportunities for families to learn about developing home environments that are conducive to learning. Schools should help the family create opportunities that support their students in their academic process, including homework, study habits, curricular projects, and other decisions (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019).

Decision-making refers to chances for parents to actively participate in the school's decision-making process. Epstein (2010) suggested encouraging families in this type of engagement to motivate parents to join committees and be able to share their concerns regarding issues that affect student learning, teaching-learning processes, and school procedures.

Collaborating within the community refers to the opportunities that schools provide for the family through sharing a variety of community resources and community services to assist their efforts. The school links community resources and services to families with the school's programs. It is coordinating family and school with community resources to ensure that they are working in the same line to achieve students' success in the neighborhood (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). Epstein's (2010) work acknowledges the importance of the community as an agent of change in a student's path.

Family-School Relationship

It is critical to focus on family-school relationships to support families' involvement in their children's education (Grant & Ray, 2023). Shim (2013) cited that parental involvement in children's schools should be supported by positive communication and relationships between parents and teachers, which affect the impact of this involvement. Swick et al. (2013) discussed the significant needs of children with traumatic experiences and concluded by giving a strong suggestion that the schools work with the family as a team, so both can provide children with a healthy environment that appropriately improves children's development processes.

Adults within the children's microsystem have critical roles in the children's development processes (Jeynes, 2014). Jeynes (2014) stated that the connection and cooperation between schools and families are the central matters on which teachers, families, and educators should concentrate. The school-family relationship allows schools and teachers to learn more from the families about the children's cultures, the families' characteristics, and the families' practices at home (Grant & Ray, 2023). This would improve the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the child's capacity to learn, and their general knowledge, which would help the teacher evaluate what the child needs to learn in terms of literacy development. Consequently, teachers' abilities to develop student-specific goals that are important stepping-stones for the child's learning and development can be improved. Meeting children's abilities and needs is a fundamental value of developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Interactions between educators, parents, family members, and their community improve learner self-efficacy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). Families will also benefit from these relationships; therefore, two-way communication should be provided to support the relationships. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) emphasized the standard practice of maintaining "reciprocal relationships with family" (p. 22).

In order to have family actively involved, it is essential to help families feel welcomed, trusted, and valued (Grant & Ray, 2023). That will improve their willingness to participate and to learn more about literacy activities that they could do with their children at home (Di Santo, 2016). Carter et al. (2009) presented the family strength model as an approach to help parents develop more opportunities for language and literacy in the home based on the family's daily routine.

Research on Family Involvement

According to the ecological systems theory, the family forms an immediate surrounding environment, or microsystem, for the child. The classroom forms another microsystem. The microsystem has an enormous impact on the developmental processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Parental involvement is not new, as it has been widely discussed and explored at multiple levels, including government systems, school administrators, educators, parent organizations and researchers (Epstein et al., 2018). This is significant as it demonstrates that the value of family engagement is recognized at different levels in educational institutions. Researchers investigating the topic of parental involvement within K-12 school systems using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research have found that by implementing early childhood education practices, teachers believe that working with families is important to positively improve children's educational outcomes (Kreider et al., 2007).

Crosby et al. (2015) conducted a three-year-long study on the impact of parents' involvement in their children's education and the effects of family involvement programs on the children's achievement. The power of parental involvement was clear in the disproportion of the groups' scores after the school applied the Family School (FS) program in which parents were engaged. The results showed that there were direct correlations between families' involvement in their children's education and the children's school outcomes. In other words, students whose parents practiced the teacher's lessons with them had higher scores than others who did not have their parents involved (Crosby et al., 2015).

Hornby and Blackwell (2018) concluded that parental engagement and partnership effectively improve parent-teacher relationships, school climate, and school attendance, as well as attitudes, behavior, and mental health of children, and parental engagement and partnerships

help parents with their confidence, satisfaction, and interest in education. Parents can supplement the child with essential knowledge through their involvement in reading, writing, crafts, homework, and exploring the outside world. Leonard (2011) said, "The developmental needs of all students are larger than what a school can address alone" (p. 31). Therefore, Leonard (2011) discussed the need to focus on other elements within the students' environment, such as parental involvement and the parent-teacher relationship.

Hilado and colleagues (2011) concluded that academic achievement outcomes could be positively increased by elevated levels of parental involvement. Parental involvement is not limited to the household of the child or the participation of the parents solely within the classroom. Parents can interact with the children through activities in the school building, in the community, and at home. There are multiple aspects and opportunities of involvement that parents can participate in to impact their child's learning and experiences. They can assist in the classroom, support the teachers by organizing materials, help with sports teams, and contact other parents outside of the school.

Researchers have found evidence that when the family is present in their child's education, there is a positive impact on the child's learning, which leads to academic success and social achievement (Jeynes, 2014; Kreider et al., 2007; Powell et al., 2010). A study conducted by Powell et al. (2010) showed significant improvements in various aspects of students' lives when their parents were engaged with their schools and academics. The study focused on the academic achievement of 140 children who participated in the study with their parents or caregivers. Parent-school involvement and parent perceptions of teacher responsiveness to children and parents were the two dimensions that researchers examined. They based their study of the relationship between parents and pre-kindergarten children on these two dimensions. The

researchers discussed the study question, which was "Whether parent-school relationships in pre-kindergarten are positively associated with children's school readiness has been far from settled" (Powell et al., 2010, p. 285). The researchers investigated the impact of parents' participation in school and how that could affect children's social and academic outcomes. The results of this study enabled the researchers to answer their questions as well as support their expectations. They found that parents' involvement in school activities improves their children's academic outcomes as it decreases some behavior problems (Powell et al., 2010).

According to Grant and Ray (2023), most students' achievement was supported by positive family engagement. Families, educators, students, and the school all benefited from these positive school-family relationships. NAEYC (2011) associated the effectiveness of early childhood educational practices with schools and communities that had policies for involving the parents. Therefore, it was important to study the relationships of each of these factors in early childhood education to ensure positive impacts on all the teaching-learning processes (Grant & Ray, 2023).

A significant amount of recent research investigated the emergent bilingual population and the best practices to improve their literacy skills. Most of these studies emphasized the critical need to extend literacy-learning experiences beyond the school or classroom practices and to include families as a factor in supporting children's literacy levels (Epstein et al., 2018). Researchers have correlated family involvement, home literacy environment, and home literacy practice with significant influences on the child's emergent language literacy development (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). The research emphasized a positive and direct impact of families on their children's social and academic accomplishments (Powell et al., 2010). Family represents the primary environment of a child, and a high level of the child's personality forms within this

environment (Grant & Ray, 2023; Swick et al., 2013). In support, Steiner (2014) demonstrated that the academic issues of ELLs would not be understood solely inside the school setting, and because of this, he highlighted the importance of the need to cooperate with families.

Challenges in Family Involvement

Families with different cultures, languages, and economic statuses face numerous challenges when trying to involve themselves in their children's education and schools (Chao et al., 2015; NAEYC, 2009). Therefore, NAEYC (2019) provided multiple recommendations for teachers and schools to apply in family involvement activities. Shim (2013) highlighted the increasing numbers of linguistically diverse families and stressed the need to increase the schools' efforts to successfully collaborate with emergent bilingual children and their families. However, the culture of English monolingualism still widely exists across U.S. school systems. To reach all children's potential for developing more language and literacy skills, families should be involved (Mindel & John, 2018).

Despite these changes, the teaching force remains mostly white, female, and middle class (Evans, 2011), which sometimes leads to a socio-cultural disconnect among teachers, students, and families. Families with language minority status often demonstrate a lower level of family engagement due to the difficulty of being understood in a school or community that maintains an English monolingualism culture. Shim (2013) investigated the dynamics of the interactions between ELL parents and teachers. The author aimed to have an in-depth understanding of the obstacles that inhibit the effectiveness of family involvement in their children's schools. The investigation was from the perspectives of ELL parents through interviews. The researcher found that there were three types of obstacles that limit the ELL parents-teacher interactions. The obstacles were the teachers' prior judgment about the ELL students and parents, ELL parents

feeling unable to participate in decision making, and ELL parents not feeling confident speaking up (Shim, 2013).

While families with more resources and higher education levels have the highest rates of family engagement (Hindman et al., 2012), those with less education and resources have a lower level of family engagement. Perceived language or culture differences can act as barriers that often limit diverse families from being engaged in their children's school and education. Families with languages or cultures outside the mainstream often feel unwelcomed, unsupported, powerless, and marginalized within their child's school (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Hornby and Blackwell (2018) also found that there is clear evidence indicating the benefits of parent involvement in their children's education. However, there are some factors that prevent parents from being more involved. They categorized these factors into parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. The researchers found that these categories included various reasons that lead to having parents that are not as involved as others: school hours, parent work limitations, parental experience, parents' attitudes from their early experiences as students in school, parents' health issues, lack of trust, a disconnect in the relationship between educators and parents, issues with communication, language challenges, transportation concerns, lack of information, and lack of teacher training.

A critical factor that all schools and teachers should understand is that parent engagement is not limited to parents' direct engagement at the school building (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) emphasized that the family can be involved in the child's education in many more ways than just practicing the lessons the teacher has already implemented in the child's learning process. Many parents, especially parents of ethnic minority groups and others who face challenges in physically being in the building, still want to be

involved in their children's learning and educational experience (Lareau, 2015). Research suggests that when parent involvement efforts move from being school-centered to focusing on the parents' needs, it will be more effective (Curry et al., 2016).

Family Involvement of Foreign/International Parents

The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) underlined the critical need to consider more efforts on high-quality family involvement regardless of ethnicity, economic status, background, language, or disability as a pathway toward developing high-quality early childhood education (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Some ELL families face challenges in helping their children's literacy development, so it is crucial to help these families by offering them knowledge, resources, and the required skills to be able to be included so they can support their children's literacy development (O'Brien, 2014; Trainin, 2017). Family involvement in children's education shows positive results in children's success (Harper et al., 2011). Consequently, family involvement in their child's education is no longer a subject of debate (Wei & Zhou, 2012).

In the case of ELL children, a positive correlation between ELL families' involvement and their children's achievement has been determined (Shim, 2013). Generally, parents and caregivers understand their children better than other people, and they have more opportunities to interact with their children (Carter et al., 2009). Researchers have identified the fundamental role of the home environment as a key factor that cultivates children's literacy skills (Van Steensel et al., 2011).

Children need to be surrounded with rich oral language to acquire basic phonological awareness, syntax, and other literacy skills, which will improve their abilities to interact in different literacy activities (Gunning, 2019). Researchers have shown that phonological awareness is an essential prerequisite and predictor for literacy development (Gunning, 2019).

Summary

Despite years of study confirming the importance of parental involvement in their children's education, many educators and researchers continue to cite schools' limitations and obstacles with parental involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). The literature review started with an explanation of the laws that have been enacted regarding family involvement. It includes Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory and Epstein's six types of involvement, which are essential theories in the field of working with family and are the conceptual framework for this study (Epstein et al., 2018). Research related to Epstein's six types of involvement and the effects of family involvement, in general, was reviewed to provide an understanding of the current studies that involve Arabic families.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) developed his ecological system theory about the different elements that affect the child's development. His theory includes five essential levels of structure. He emphasized the connection among these systems and how they significantly impact the way the child develops and interacts with their other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1977; Härkönen, 2005). His theory goes farther than the immediate environment of the child. It emphasizes all of the environments that surround the child and the impact of these elements (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Härkönen, 2005). Moreover, all levels of the ecological systems theory are reciprocal and not unidirectional (Grant & Ray, 2023).

It is essential to work with the family as a team to provide children with a healthy environment that helps them develop appropriately (Swick et al., 2013). Epstein reported that there were six categories of involvement. These six categories are a great outline for schools to develop their family engagement program and encourage families to actively be engaged in their children's education. In order for teachers to appropriately integrate the family into their practice,

they must have the skills and knowledge to provide families with help for their children at each age level. They need to use different types of communication to communicate with families, such as notes, telephone calls, conferences, and other types (Epstein et al., 2018). They must provide parents with opportunities to participate in the school's activities. They need to encourage parents by guiding them to help and instruct their children through monitoring, discussing, and helping with homework. They must allow parents to participate in decision-making as well as provide families with all of the information about community resources, social agencies, health services, and businesses and explain the programs to them so they receive the support that they need (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019).

The literature review introduced and discussed different research regarding family-school relationships, research on family involvement, challenges in family involvement, and the family involvement of foreign/international parents.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The third section presents the methods that will be used to answer the research questions and meet the purpose of the current study. The chapter discusses the study design, participation selection, as well as the instruments, data collection, and analysis methods.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate and understand the perceptions of Arabic mothers who have children in primary schools and early childhood education programs located in the United States. The study investigates participants' perceptions of their family involvement experiences along with their recommendations for schools and early education programs.

This is a qualitative research project that includes concept maps, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. Creswell (2015) emphasized that qualitative data helps provide a deep idea about a phenomenon and provides an understanding of the phenomena being investigated (Freebody, 2002).

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences with family engagement from the point of view of Arabic mothers with children enrolled in primary schools and/or early childhood education programs in the U.S.?
2. What are the recommendations for parent involvement by Arabic mothers with children enrolled in primary schools and/or early childhood education programs in the U. S.?

Participants and Recruitment

The study population includes eight Arabic parents or caregivers of children enrolled in primary schools and/or early childhood education programs in the U.S. in multiple regions

(Southeast, Northeast, Midwest). The regions were selected based on the accessibility for the researcher where the collection of data from the parents/caregivers was possible in the defined time frame. Parents who have children within the age range of PreK to 3rd grade were chosen to focus specifically on the early childhood education population.

Several forms of recruitment occurred. Initially, the researcher visited two mosques in the region, in cities in NE Tennessee that were close to her home where she was living temporarily as a doctoral student. During these visits she informed groups of parents about the study and invited them to participate. She handed out the study notification flyer along with the informed consent document (ICD). She asked parents to take the ICD home to read carefully, sign it if they choose to participate, and then return it to her in person at their mosque the following week. The researcher collected five signed ICDs on her return to the mosques.

Some participants needed to be recruited outside the local mosques due to the small number who responded. She recruited through groups of Arabic mothers who are active in WhatsApp groups related to mosques in other locations in the United States (Ohio, New York, Tennessee) by sharing an invitation describing her study that was approved of by the ETSU IRB. The invitation included her email. The researcher chose the first three who responded and met the criteria of the study. Then the researcher emailed the ICD to these additional contacts.

The eight participants included four Arabic mothers who would be returning to their home country in the near future and four who are planning to remain in the U.S. The four mothers who plan to stay in the U.S. were in their forties, a full decade older than the mothers who would be returning to their home country. The four mothers who would be returning are from Saudi Arabia. One of the four mothers who will be staying in the U.S. is from Jordan and the other three are from Egypt. All the returning mothers have graduate degrees. Of the four

mothers who will remain in the U.S., one as a graduate degree, one has completed some college coursework, one has a bachelor's degree, and one has a high school degree. Additionally, all participants were Muslim, which led to discussions about their perceptions in relation to religion in their children's schools.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

This study used multiple instruments to collect data, including the following: a demographic survey, concept map, a semi-structured focus group, a semi-structured individual interview, and researcher field notes. Zoom meetings were held for each of two focus groups and the eight individual semi-structured interviews. One focus group included the mothers who would be returning. The second focus group included mothers who would be remaining in the U.S. These meetings were recorded. In each of the two focus groups, participants were initially introduced to the researcher, to one another, and to the parameters of the study. The following sections include descriptions of each instrument and the related data collection procedures, in addition to descriptions of the study's approach to validation and reliability of data.

Demographic Survey

Once participants agreed to participate, they were sent an email with a link to a brief questionnaire that they were asked to complete, which included demographic data about the sample. This family demographic survey included information about the participants' characteristics, such as gender, age range, employment status, relationship to the child, number of children, and educational attainment. If applicable, information about the selected child was collected, including age, gender, number of years in a formal education setting, and number of years in a childcare setting (see Appendix A).

Concept Maps

Gallenstein et al. (2003) defines a concept map as a "graphic/visual representation of concepts that shows various relationships between concepts" (p. 82). According to Novak and Gowin (1984), a concept map is a two-dimensional visual image that is developed to represent the link and relationships among a learner's concepts regarding a major subject or central theme.

The concept map structure incorporates many ideas or concepts, each represented by labeled circles or boxes, and all the concepts are connected by lines that organize the link or relationship between the concepts from the participants' point of view and capture their thoughts (Hough et al., 2007). Fargas-Malet et al. (2010) emphasized that a research approach should meet the requirements to do the following:

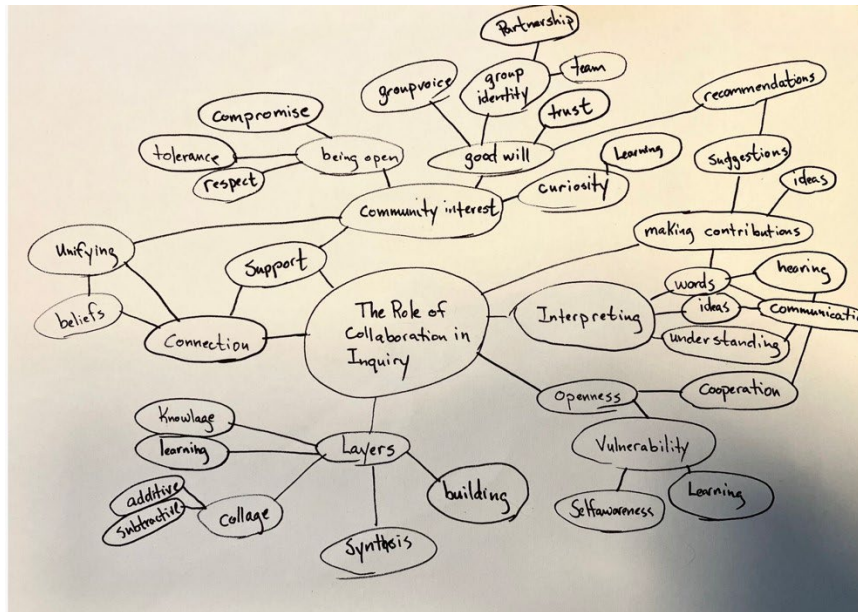
match the research questions of the project, respect limitations of time and resources, be sensitive and ethical, and take into account the particular characteristics and needs of the participants, as well as the cultural and physical setting where it takes place. (p. 18)

The concept map was chosen in this research because it is appropriate to use with English language learners who may not be able to express ideas in complete sentences (Serrano, 2010).

Figure 3 shows an example of a completed concept map.

Figure 3

Concept Map Example by a Preschool Teacher from a Professional Development Workshop



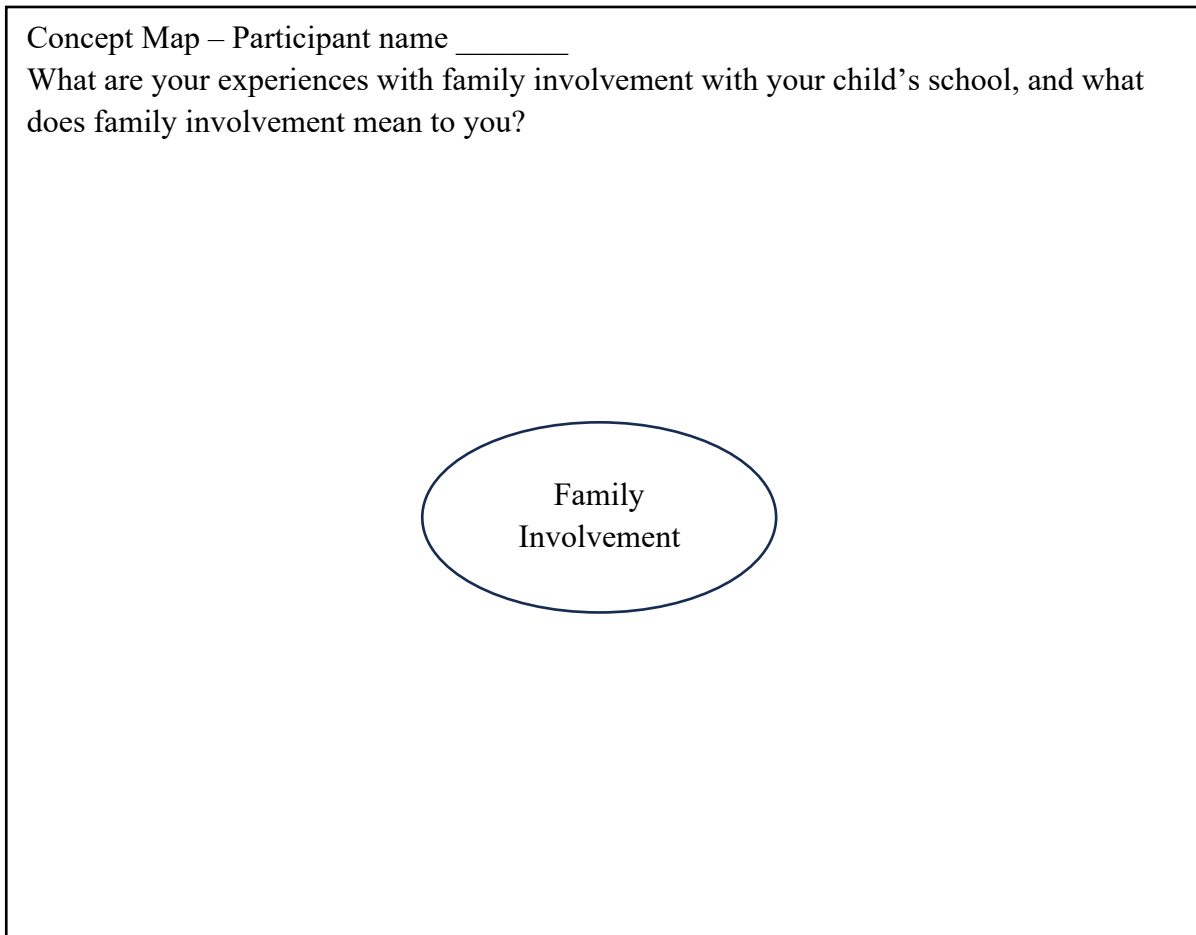
In addition to introductions and a review of participant expectations, the researcher described concept maps to participants in the first Zoom meeting that all participants attended. Following a short PowerPoint presentation describing concept maps where examples were shared, participants had time to ask questions as needed. They were then provided 15 minutes to complete their concept map using paper and pencil or a word processing program on their personal computer. Completing these maps during the meeting provided the participants with the opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification about how to complete the concept map. Participants were asked to send concept maps by email to the researcher immediately following the Zoom meeting, scanning as needed.

This concept map focused on their experiences of family involvement at their children's schools and their ideas about what family involvement means. In the concept map, participants can present, organize, and reflect on their knowledge by themselves, making their decisions about the significance of the terms they include in their maps based on their feelings,

experiences, and knowledge (Hough et al., 2007). The concept map template used for this study is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Concept Map Used for This Study



Focus Groups

Researchers utilize focus groups to collect qualitative data from multiple participants who are gathered in a non-threatening conversational setting (Gizir, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). It is an important research method for discovering participants' feelings, values, attitudes, reactions, and experiences about a topic. According to Gizir (2007), focus groups can be used to provide educational researchers with high-quality data. The

researcher should select a sample that will yield the most valuable data and continue considering the study's goal. This will help reach the purpose of using focus groups, which is to obtain a better understanding of people (Gizir, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2014). Through the focus group, researchers work toward generating a discussion of providing and exchanging thoughts in a safe and free environment to generate useful data for the study. The researcher is the facilitator who introduces the interview questions to the group and then moderates the discussion. The moderator respectfully guides the discussion and provides all members of the group with multiple opportunities to participate and have different interactions. To accomplish the goal of the focus group, the moderator needs to be able to understand the group process, be inquisitive about the selected topic, and possess communication skills that include good listening skills, while being patient, having an interest in people, and being open to new ideas (Gizir, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

As previously stated, each participant joined an initial focus group to meet other participants, learn the parameters of the study, ask any questions, learn about concept maps, and also complete a concept map. Each participant then joined a second focus group consisting of four of the eight participants. A semi-structured focus group format was conducted because it allows the participants to discuss, identify, and articulate their interests and concerns about the provided topic with others with similar characteristics (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Epstein's overlapping theory and the literature review were references for the design of the focus group interview questions (Epstein et al., 2018). The researcher created a PowerPoint presentation including the questions (Figure 5) as a method for assisting her facilitation of the discussion.

Figure 5

Focus Group Protocol

Opening

1. The facilitator introduces herself and the process for this gathering.
2. Share a bit about yourself as an international parent.

Introductory

3. Can you describe what you do to support your child's education at home and at school?
4. Have you gotten suggestions from your child's teacher or someone at the school about helping him/her **with homework**?
5. Have you gotten suggestions from your child's teacher or someone at the school about helping him/her **with behavior**?

Transition

6. Describe your experience when collaborating with the school regarding your children's learning and development?
7. How do you feel at your child's school? Do you feel welcome at your child's school?
Explain

Key

8. Describe the different ways that you and the teacher can communicate? Elaborate with examples, please.
 - Which is most successful for you?
 - Would other methods be better for you? Explain.
 - Did your child's teacher ask you the best way(s) to communicate?
9. Describe your experiences with volunteering at your child's school.
10. As a diverse parent, do you think you have the same opportunities as parents from other ethnicities for:
 - volunteering?
 - making decisions about your child's learning and education?
11. Describe a different experience when you wanted to participate in your child's school.
 - Were you able to participate? Explain.
 - Were you not able to do it? Explain.
12. Describe your experiences with helping your child with their education at home. Elaborate on challenges, available resources, and others?
13. What are your opportunities for participating in decision-making regarding your child's education at his/her school?
14. What barriers are you experiencing when contacting your child's teacher or school?

Ending questions

15. What should the school do to make diverse parents feel more connected and involved?

16. What are your recommendations for other diverse families that would help make their experiences with their child's school and education successful?

Moderator summarizes the discussion points

17. Is there anything of significance you did not get a chance to say?

Summary by the facilitator and thank you.

The focus group questions were screened by four experienced researchers (subject matter experts) in a content validity process to ensure proper wording of questions, avoid leading questions, and ensure that they address the study's research questions. Additionally, an Arabic parent who was not a participant served as a research assistant who reviewed the questions to provide feedback on the appropriateness of the approach of the language for international families.

The focus group interviews took place through Zoom meetings that were recorded. A research assistant, a student in the researcher's early childhood department, attended both focus group sessions to ensure fidelity by the researcher, that the interview protocol was followed consistently in each focus group. The participants were provided the choice to speak in English or Arabic. All chose to speak in Arabic. The researcher also spoke in Arabic. The research assistant did not speak. She observed to assure that the researcher followed the interview protocol correctly. The video was transcribed by the researcher in Arabic first and then translated from Arabic to English without the use of translation programs, as these translation programs do not accurately capture the nonformal speech of Arabic conversation. Each transcript was reviewed by a research assistant to edit for accuracy in relation to the video. Through a member-checking process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), transcripts were shared with each participant to review and comment on for accuracy of meaning.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

The third type of data collected were semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to discuss more of their perceptions of the topic based on their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Again, participants were given the choice to speak in English or Arabic. Arabic was chosen. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually for each of the eight Arabic parents and/or caregivers. All interviews ranged from 25-45 minutes. The individual interviews were facilitated and led by the researcher. A research assistant, a student in the researcher's early childhood department, attended all interview sessions to ensure fidelity by the researcher and that the interview protocol was followed consistently in each interview. The transcription process for the individual interviews followed the same processes as the transcription of the focus group interviews. The researcher transcribed in Arabic, then translated the Arabic to English. The research assistant reviewed all English transcripts for accuracy.

In a content validity process, the interview questions were screened by four experienced researchers (subject matter experts) to ensure proper wording of questions, avoid leading questions, and ensure that they address the study's research questions. The same research assistant, an international parent, who reviewed the focus group interview questions also reviewed the individual participant interview questions to provide feedback on the approach of the language for international families.

Epstein's overlapping theory, the literature review, focus group interview responses, and participant responses in concept maps were referenced for the design of the individual interview questions (Epstein et al., 2018). In this semi-structured interview process, follow-up questions were added, and questions can be modified based on participants' responses for clarification,

further elaboration purposes, or to avoid repetition (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Potential interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Field Notes

Researcher and research assistants recorded field notes immediately following the focus group and the individual interviews as well as during the interviews. They provided an opportunity for the researchers to reflect on their thoughts about the data, the demeanor of the interviewee and any contextual features about the setting that might impact the interviews (Patton, 2002; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These field notes were reviewed continuously as the researcher reviewed and coded the data. In this way, she assessed the relationship of her perceptions of the interviewees' positions during the interviews to the meaning found in their statements, helping her to formulate themes that remain close to the meaning of the participants.

Validation and Reliability of Data

In research, reliability and validity of the instruments are essential as they help decrease potential errors that might occur from measurement problems and other factors in the research study (Creswell, 2015).

Triangulation is critical to ensure the reliability and validity of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation refers to the inclusion of multiple ways of collecting data on the same research focus. Five types of data were collected to assure triangulation for this study. These include a demographic survey, concept maps, focus group interview transcripts, individual interview transcripts, and field notes.

Content validity includes a review of the research and interview questions by subject matter experts to assure the appropriateness of the interview questions in relation to the research study questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommend

investigator triangulation as critical to improving the validity and reliability of the study. This study included an international parent who is not a participant and has a child in early childhood childcare, preschool, or primary school (PreK-3) in the United States. This was done in order to assist the researcher with a review of the interview questions to ensure their appropriateness for international parent participants.

A member-checking process provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their responses to the study and ensure that these comments were what they intended to say (Creswell, 2015; Koelsch, 2013). The transcription of the focus groups and the individual interviews were emailed to each participant with highlighting that indicated their comments. This allowed participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses in the transcriptions. Participants were able to insert comments to the transcript document for clarification purposes.

According to Thorndike (1997), reliability refers to the accuracy of a measurement procedure. It is the ability to replicate the instrument multiple times and achieve similar scores with each replication (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A research assistant was enlisted to code all interview data, comparing coding to that of the researcher to assure reliability in this study.

Data Analysis

This section includes the methods of data analysis used in this study to examine the concept maps, focus group interviews, and individual interviews.

Concept Maps

Concept maps are measured in several ways. For studies with a large number of participants they can be analyzed with quantitative methods. For this study, with a small sample, the various concepts participants included in their maps were reviewed to examine their alignment with the themes that emerged from the focus group and individual interview data.

Focus Groups and Individual Participant Interviews

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) argued that material on conducting focus groups is available, but there is less information on the way to analyze focus group data. According to Charmaz (2006), there are two main phases of coding: initial coding (open coding) and a series of focused coding processes (a priori, inductive, and deductive), followed by a final review of the analyzed data that guided the researcher to apply any relevant a priori codes to assist in making the decisions about the final themes and categories that make the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006).

The same analysis procedures were applied to both the focus group interviews and the individual participant interviews. Initially, the interview transcripts were briefly reviewed to discover which participants responded to each question and the order in which the participants responded (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Next, the researcher began with an initial open coding process of looking at the data line by line for one participant to identify parents' and caregivers' perceptions of the concept of family involvement. With this approach the researcher remained open to the responses and perspectives of the participants, allowing the researcher to detect themes that naturally emerged from the data rather than analyzing based on specific, previously determined categories and discussing relationships among the categories (Creswell, 2015; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Through the first reading, comments and codes were developed briefly in the margins of the transcript pages.

The researcher then used these initial codes when reviewing the responses of the remaining participants. Additionally, while coding each remaining participant, she added new codes (in the margins) that emerged and revisited any previously coded data with the new codes.

This careful process helped the researcher to understand the data and the participants' points of view.

The open coding process was implemented prior to a second review of the data using a priori codes generated from the literature review. Then themes and categories were developed through inductive processes for the focus group and individual interviews. As themes were generated in the coding of interviews, previously coded data were revisited using a deductive approach to ensure earlier coded transcripts were evaluated with any new codes that emerged. Additionally, a deductive process was used to apply codes from the interviews for the analysis of the concept map data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data were highlighted and color-coded during the second phase to develop a visible pattern. Field notes were read during the process of analysis.

Thirty percent of data were reviewed and coded by a research assistant to obtain reliability of the coding process (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). Thus, three of the individual interview transcripts and one of the focus group transcripts were randomly chosen for the research assistant to code using the same coding procedures as the researcher. The two researchers met through Zoom to discuss the codes. They discussed the few disagreements that led to the merging of codes and removed any codes where there was disagreement.

Field Notes

The researcher recorded field notes during and following the interviews. She took notes on the demeanor of the individuals and the group, questions she had about the conversations, the data as she read the transcripts, and ideas about relationships of concepts that might suggest overarching themes. These field notes guided the researcher's first impressions of the interviews

and the data, which prepared her for immersion in the data during the coding process (Patton, 2002).

Summary

This chapter describes the research design for this study. It also describes in-depth the methods, including the instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures. This qualitative study used the concept map, a semi-structured focus group, and a semi-structured individual interview, in addition to a demographic survey and researcher field notes.

Chapter 4. Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Arabic parents in the United States regarding their parental involvement in their children's schools, what their children's schools are doing to involve them, and their suggestions and recommendations for schools to involve families. This chapter presents the data that was discovered throughout the investigation phase of the qualitative study.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences with family engagement from the point of view of Arabic mothers of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?
2. What are the recommendations for parent involvement by Arabic mothers with different cultural backgrounds of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?

A qualitative methodology design was used for this study incorporating focus groups, individual interviews, concept maps, demographic surveys, and field notes. Semi-structured focus group and individual interviews were the primary sources used to derive the study data. The total interviews included two focus group interviews and eight individual interviews. Participants were separated into two groups: four who were planning to go back to their home country and the other four who were planning to stay in the U.S.

Overview of Procedures

Eight Arabic mothers were recruited as participants for this study. Each mother participated in one focus group interview and then in one individual interview. This allowed the researcher to collect more in-depth information regarding the participants' experiences of parental involvement in their children's schools in the U.S. The eight interviewee respondents

produced 224 pages of transcripts from both the individual and the focus group interviews. The individual interviews lasted an average of 43 minutes to 2 hours in length, while each focus group took approximately 3 hours in length. As the participants were from multiple cities and states, each of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Additionally, only six of the eight participants completed the concept maps.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is a critical component of the research process as it helps the researcher understand the data in depth. According to Lester et al. (2020), the possibility of doing qualitative research is commendable, but it is dependent on the researcher's competency in deep analysis and fundamental understanding of the process and meaning of engaging in qualitative data and analyzing them. Creswell and Creswell (2023) state that “a preliminary exploratory analysis in qualitative research consists of exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data, memoing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data and considering whether you need more data” (p. 243). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) outline qualitative data analysis as “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p. 145).

The researcher used an inductive analysis approach to investigate the data of this study. Through thematic analysis, the researcher was able to acknowledge patterns in the data that were crucial or interesting, then use the emerged themes to explicate a research issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). According to Lester et al. (2020), thematic analysis results in more meaningful and relevant analysis for the given topics, which makes it an appropriate starting step for learning and doing qualitative analysis. In this qualitative study, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps to examine the data.

Step 1: Become Familiar with the Data. All the focus groups and interviews were conducted via Zoom, and every session was recorded on video with audio. The transcripts of the focus group and individual interviews were meticulously reviewed by the researcher through reading and rereading.

All the focus group and individual interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher in Arabic as all the participants chose to participate using their native language. Upon completion of the transcription, all were translated to English manually to make sure that the translation was accurate as the participants were using informal Arabic. The researcher listened again to each recording while reading the translated transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the English version of the transcripts. The research assistant then reviewed each transcript for accuracy in relation to the video recordings.

Following the end of the translation, the researcher engaged participants in member checking to confirm the accuracy of the data prior to analysis. The English versions of the translated transcripts were sent to the participants in the study to assure that they approved of the final versions. They were given about two weeks to review their answers in the raw transcribed data transcripts and return them with any modifications if needed. Transcripts that were not returned by the given time were considered by the researcher to be accurate.

Vaismoradi et al. (2016) suggested that researchers' engagement in iterative readings of the transcripts helps them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data and the core themes within the phenomenon being studied. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that during this careful review phase researchers should collect early perceptions and record initial impressions in anecdotal notes. Since the data were collected through focus groups and individual interviews facilitated by the researcher, the researcher approached the analysis with some prior familiarity

with the data. Essentially, Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate for researchers to immerse themselves in the data to grasp its depth and breadth fully. Through this immersion, all research data were reviewed and organized according to the research questions they addressed to identify emerging patterns and initial codes.

Step 2: Generate Initial Codes. The initial coding process involved analyzing the data with careful coding, which required the researcher to meticulously read and examine the information to identify significant patterns and themes. The coding process aimed to condense the data into manageable segments of context, ensuring that the data was organized systematically and meaningfully (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 3: Search for Categories and Themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are no restrictive criteria defining what qualifies as a theme. They elaborate that researchers are not constrained to a particular approach. Nevertheless, they have a responsibility to their readers and the credibility of their research to openly describe the methodology they utilized, referencing established sources within the field.

In this research analysis, a theme was recognized based on its relevance to the research and its alignment with the research questions. Through an inductive approach drawing upon the identification of codes present in respondents' answers, the researcher then evaluated these codes to establish categories and initiated the identification of themes based on the connections among the codes.

Step 4: Review Theme. The researcher gathered relevant and significant data for each category and identified major themes from the grouping of related categories. Ensuring clarity and significance, the researcher assessed whether the themes logically fit the data and if any new

themes emerged during analysis, as well as whether each theme had unique characteristics and were understandable and significant. To validate the research's credibility, all transcripts were reexamined to confirm the themes' alignment with the research questions and the overarching topic under investigation.

Step 5: Define Theme. In this phase, the researcher recognized the message conveyed by each theme, identified subthemes, and established their interconnections. Braun and Clarke (2006) essentially recommend that the researcher determine the fundamental meaning of each theme. In Step 5, the researcher reviewed the coding to acknowledge whether the initial themes that were identified in Step 4 directly corresponded to the two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2).

Step 6: Write-up. This is the last stage of the analysis where the researcher presented the results obtained from the participants and incorporated them into the dissertation. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that the final reported results should be succinct, logical, coherent, nonrepetitive, and reveal an intriguing aspect of the data within and between themes.

Summary of the Coding Process

The three main sources of data used for this qualitative study were focus groups, individual interviews, and concept maps. Focus group data were coded inductively prior to the coding of individual interviews where the researcher approached the transcripts with an inductive coding mindset, while also deductively applying themes from the focus group interviews. Eight themes emerged from the focus group and individual interviews that were found to correlate with the research questions. The participants' concept maps were then analyzed to discover the alignment of concepts with the identified themes.

Demographics

The rich quality of the themes in this study emerges from the shared experiences of a diverse group of Arabic participants. Demographics included information about the participants' characteristics, such as age range, religion, employment status, relationship to the child, number of children, and educational attainment. Additionally, information about the child each participant selected for the focus of this study was collected, including age, gender, number of years in a formal education setting, and number of years in a childcare setting. Participants are identified as planning on returning to their home country (PR1, PR2...) or planning on staying in the U.S. (PS1, PS2...). Descriptions of each participant are reported in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographics for Participants*

Demographic Data	PR1 Return	PR2 Return	PR3 Return	PR4 Return	PS1 USA	PS2 USA	PS3 USA	PS4 USA
Participants' age	34	32	32	35	46	42	45	45
Highest level of Education	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Some college, but no degree	Graduate Degree	HS	BA
Employment status	Employed full-time	Student full-time	Not employed	Employed part-time	Not employed	Employed full-time	Not employed	Not employed
Native country	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Jordan	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt
Religion	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim
How long in U.S.	12 Years	7 Years	7 Years	6 Years	4 Years	15 Years	13 Years	20 years
Stay in U.S. or return	Another 3-4 years	2 years	1 Year	3 Years	Participant says Unknown	Long time	Participant says Unknown	Forever
English language	Mastery	Mastery	Mastery	Sufficient	Sufficient	Mastery	No ability	Sufficient
Reading in English	Mastery	Mastery	Mastery	Sufficient	Minimal	Mastery	Minimal	Mastery
Writing in English	Mastery	Mastery	Mastery	Sufficient	Minimal	Mastery	Minimal	Mastery
Age of chosen child	8 Years	2 Years	7 Years		5 Years	6 Years	4 Years	8 Years
Gender of chosen child	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Child's grade in School	3rd grade	1st grade	1st grade	PreK	PreK	1st grade	PreK	3rd grade
Number of children living at home (if any)	2	1	2	3	5	3	5	3
Ages of the other children (if any)	3	None	2	9,11	7,10, 12,13	14, 11	4, 8, 12, 18, 20	17,15

Findings Related to Research Question 1

RQ1: What are the experiences with family engagement from the point of view of Arabic mothers of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?

The following sections provide perspectives from each case (returning and staying participants), definitions of the themes, a thematic analysis section where the themes with related categories and subcategories are presented with data to substantiate, and a section reporting the findings from the concept maps and their alignment with the themes.

Perspectives from Each Case

The responses related to school involvement from both groups are generally similar and generated themes that are discussed in a thematic analysis section. There are differences in circumstances that define each group, returning participants and staying participants, that are presented in the following two sections. These include similarity of ages in each group with a decade of difference in age across the two groups (44.5 staying; 33.25 returning). The group who will be staying in the U.S. spoke about their concerns related to religion more so than those who will be returning. The individuals within each group are described in relation to demographic data and the aspects of their circumstances that define their experiences with school involvement.

Returning Participant Group

The returning participant group was made up of student mothers who all experienced challenges with time regarding family involvement. All these mothers were living in the U.S. without their husbands. The husbands of two of these mothers were with them in the U.S. for a period of years when the husbands were students. However, upon graduating, these husbands then returned to their home country. The husband of one of these participants would travel back and forth, only staying with the family in the U.S. for short periods of time due to the demands of

his job. This group was not involved in decision-making related to the school, nor were they attending the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings, since they perceived themselves as very part-time in this U.S. and, therefore, not valuing deeper engagement with the schools of their children. Due to attending different higher education institutions for their and their husband's education, this group experienced numerous moves that forced them to place their children in different schools for shorter periods of time. Being frequently new to their children's schools posed challenges for these mothers. Additionally, trying to locate housing close to the mothers' schools of higher education limited their choice regarding the most appropriate schools for their children.

Staying Participant Group

The staying participant group had mothers who had lived in one city for a long period; therefore, they were able to have a longer and stronger relationship with their child's school. Additionally, all participants who are staying in the U.S. are in their forties, a decade older than the returning participants (44.5 staying; 33.25 returning). All had experience with more than one child in the same school. Some of these mothers attended the PTO meetings and other school events. Due to living in the area for a long time, they had a larger Arabic community experience. These mothers know that their children will be leaving them as their children grow older and showed more concern about the religious practice for older girls to wear a hijab. While the focus of this study was on young children, these mothers spoke about enrolling their older daughters in online homeschooling programs due the potential for a negative impact related to religious practices at the local public school. While these discussions are not included in the study data due to their focus on older children, they affect the mindset of these mothers.

Themes

Seven themes emerged from the focus group and interview data to reveal the participants' experiences with family engagement: 1) school community/overview of school traits, 2) benefits of having children at the same school for a long time, 3) parent/teacher roles, 4) communication between home and school, 5) involvement, 6) challenges, and 7) mothers' recommendations. The "challenges" and "involvement" themes were the most complex, with more subcategories than other themes.

Definitions of Themes

The seven themes that emerged from the participants' conversations during the focus group and individual interviews provide a rich view of their ideas about involvement with their child's school. The definitions for each theme are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Seven Themes that Emerged from the Data

Theme	Definition
1 School Community/Overview of School Traits	Positive thoughts on the school in relation to collaborating and flexibility and listening to parents, in addition to ideas about teacher attitudes.
2 Benefits of Child at the Same School for a Long Time	Benefits for the child, the mothers, and for other Arabic families develop with the experience of multiple children attending the same school over time.
3 Parent/Teacher Roles	Teacher roles associated with educating children and collaborating with parents are shared in addition to parents' roles as perceived by these Arabic mothers.
4 Communication Between Home and School	Schools' communication in general, ways of communicating, and mothers' preferences.
5 Involvement	Involvement at home and at school, the impact of having other children, and the benefits of involvement. Homework is discussed in relation to involvement at home. Some comparison of the selected child and previous children are discussed in relation to involvement at school.
6 Challenges	Challenges at home with involvement and solutions for these challenges. These include challenges being involved and feeling connected at school and solutions for these challenges, as well as a section on mothers' concerns about their societal differences with U.S. schools.
7 Mothers' Recommendations	Recommendations for other Arabic parents, for American schools. These include engaging with Arabic families, attending events at the child's school, asking for what you want and need, engaging your child in sports, facing challenges with language and Muslim identity, locating schools, and other recommendations.

Thematic Analysis Related to Research Question 1

The following sections detail the perspectives of the Arabic mothers within the context of the seven themes and related categories that developed from their conversations. Representative quotes are included.

Theme 1: School Community/Overview of School Traits

The school community is a group of people who share a common goal of providing an appropriate learning-teaching environment. A school community may contain parents, teachers, students, and other school employees where all of them are working to enable students to learn

more effectively. A school community's goal is to increase involvement among all parties, including school administration, parents or guardians, the community, and the students themselves. The interactions between them improve learning and teaching outcomes (Grant & Ray, 2023).

The categories that emerged in this theme are the mothers' positive thoughts on the school and teacher attitudes (Table 3). These themes will be described in the following sections with examples from the focus group and individual interviews.

Figure 6

Overview of Theme 1 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

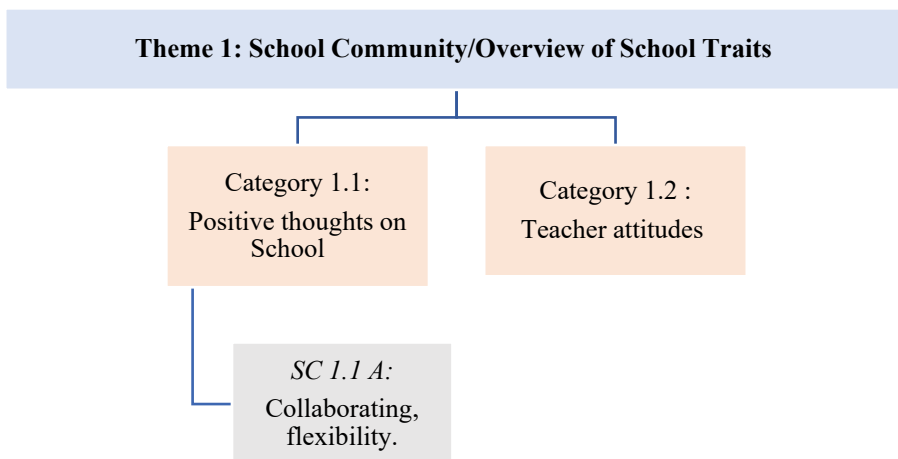


Table 3*Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 1*

Category	# of Statements Coded per Category	G1 Parent Returning	G2 Parent Staying	Sub category	# of Statements Coded Per Sub category	G1 Parent Returning	G2 Parent Staying
Category 1.1: Positive thoughts on School	165 85.49%	35 70%	82 83.32%	SC 1.1A Collaborating & flexibility	73 40.41%	25 34.25%	48 65.75%
Category 1.2: Teacher attitudes	28 14.51%	15 30%	13 13.68%				
TOTAL COMMENTS	193						

Category 1.1: Positive Thoughts on School. The responses across the two cases did not differ greatly, except for the discussions focusing on collaboration and flexibility. Here the mothers staying in the U.S. had more to consider as they have been involved with the American schools for more years and have developed relationships with the teachers. Mothers discussed some of their positive thoughts and what they liked about their children’s schools. They emphasized that schools collaborating with and listening to parents were critical for them, which encouraged them to be involved with the school and can be seen through this statement by PR3:

Honestly, I see that it [experience in dealing with the school] is a very good thing, and I am very satisfied with school ways of treating and interacting with parents, how they are close to them, and that they give full reports.

PR2 agreed with PR3 and added thoughts related to the ease of being able to talk with a teacher, when necessary:

For me, dealing with the school was very, very simple with the teacher. I mean, I did not feel that there was any difficulty if there was any problem or if I needed to go to the teacher herself and talk to her.

Subcategory 1.1A: Collaborating and Flexibility. When it comes to collaboration, the comments centered on schoolwork and the schools working with parents as a team and being open to support them. PR1 started a discussion about the flexibility the school had with family involvement:

Honestly, it is not mandatory. The good thing about the school system here is that it is totally voluntary. It is up to you if you like it, and you have time for it you are welcome to participate. If you were not able it is not required.

PS1 shared a situation when the school her child attends was flexible and collaborative:

The school was collaborating with us nicely...I mean we came in the middle of the school year, and he was able to get the test for the middle of the year and because he passed it, they allowed him to go to a second grade. She added, "I was lucky to have a good collaborative principal who suggested that we keep coming and leaving in specific months so my kids will be able to attend the school year here and not lose anything. We kept going back and forth from 2015 to 2019.

PR2 highlighted that her child's teacher allows her to know most of what her child is doing in the class:

The good thing that the teacher told me everything. Like, for example, if she gets in trouble, or if she did not listen at that day, if she did a really good thing on that day. So, the teacher told me everything.

Category 1.2: Teacher Attitudes. More of the returning mothers spoke about teacher attitudes than the mothers who will be staying in the U.S. The opinions and ideas that mothers have about their children's teachers include the teachers' attitudes, for example, how the teachers treat families with care and respect. All eight mothers agreed that their children's teachers were welcoming and open to help. According to PR3, "She always welcomes me even though I always apologize to her that I'm communicating too much, but she keeps telling me that it is fine, and she's totally OK with that." PR1 added, "She was willing to collaborate with us. She encouraged us to be involved. She always gives us information about the importance of our involvement and its impact on our children's development." PS2 added:

As I told you I am at the school every day during the drop off and pick up. And it took 10 to 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon to talk with the teacher if I need. And the teacher is always there and welcomes the communication between us. So, I feel lucky with this teacher, and I even hear that from other parents when they know that my child is in her class they said, "You are lucky."

PS2 described her experience with her child's teacher as a good experience where she believed that the teacher is not against the child. She said, "As I told you I have a good experience so there is no sensitivity on handling the situations, or the idea that the teacher meant to bother your child." PS4 added that her child's teacher is mostly open to help, which encouraged her to ask for things as needed and that even with her limited English speaking the teachers respect and accept that. She said, "When I faced difficulty, I would ask his teachers. They always understand me and try to help me ... I used to apologize for my limited English. They always respond like, it is OK, and we are happy that you are trying, which is good for us, and we have to help you."

Theme 2: Benefits of Child at Same School for a Long Time

Many participants have lived in one town or city for several years, which has enabled them to experience the local school they discuss in relation to the attendance of the child that is their focus for this study in addition to other children from their family who attended the school previously. Knowing the school through experiences with multiple children has benefits PS1 described:

When you go to school you can meet other parents and other teachers and have a personal interaction and communication with them because, as I told you, we have been in this school for a long time, so we know people there.

PS1 has been in the U.S. for about four years, and before that she was going back and forth with her family, but her children were at the same school from the beginning.

According to PS4:

The good thing [about] my kids' school, it is from preschool to 8th grade. So, my kids were in this school until they go to high school. That means you almost know everybody there, especially that the school does not have a lot of changes in the teachers and the staff. I almost know everybody at the school, especially because my first two kids are very close to each other; they are two years apart. When my little daughter enrolled in the school my first child [had] already left the school, but he has gone through all grades and they still know them. And my second daughter was still at the school, so I know most of the teachers and I already have experiences with them. My experience was very excellent.

PR1 and PR2 did not have this experience because their children were either in kindergarten or first grade, but also agreed that having their children at the same school for a long time will impact their interaction with the school. PR1 stated:

I think yes, I will not be as careful as I am right now. I mean I will be more confident as I already know them and know their system. My child also will know them and know the rules. So yes of course there will be a difference.

Three categories emerged for this theme that refer to the benefits for the child, for the mother, and for attending schools with other Arabic families when having the child complete most of their schooling with consecutive grades at the same school (Figure 7). The number of and percentage of quotes representing each category and subcategory for Theme 2 are noted in Table 4.

Figure 7

Overview of Theme 2 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

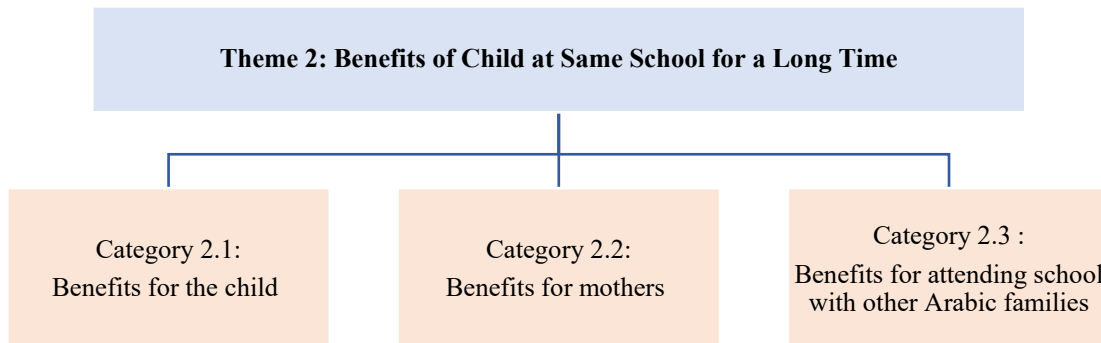


Table 4*Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 2*

Category	# of Statements Coded Per Category	<i>Parent Returning</i>	<i>Parent Staying</i>
Category 2.1: Benefits for the child	17 23.94%	3 17.65%	14 82.35%
Category 2.2: Benefits for mothers	40 56.34%	8 20%	32 80%
Category 2.3: Benefits for attending school with other Arabic families	14 19.72%	3 21.43%	11 78.57%
TOTAL COMMENTS	71		

Category 2.1: Benefits for the Child. It makes sense that most of the responses related to this category are from mothers who will be staying in the U.S. as they have also been in the country longer than the other group of mothers. The mothers who will be returning phrased their comments in an “as if” type of statement, imagining the benefits if they were to stay longer. There are various reasons the mothers reveal in the interviews that it benefits their child to be at the same school for a long time. Some of the participants had more than one of their children at the same school, which they liked and described as a great opportunity. PS5 said:

They will relate my daughter to her older siblings and recognize her through them ... For example, this year she has a new teacher but when I met her, she said, ‘I’m very glad to have your child in my classroom because you have a good reputation in the school.’

PS3 highlighted the good relationship that a child may have with their older siblings’ teachers:

They already know our family. They love them and they greet them when we meet anywhere, at the supermarket or somewhere. My older one already left the school to

middle school, they still greet him, and they told him that your younger brother is in our school and you two are alike in this and that.

PS4 informed the researcher that older siblings are sought out to help with sisters and brothers when there are concerns:

Schools are also used to having the children at the same school for a long time with their siblings. It could [be that] if they have any problem with the youngest in the school, or something like that, sometimes they will go to the older siblings first before they go to the parents. Or, for example, if the youngest is crying at the beginning of the year they would go to her siblings first as it is faster.

Young children who have had other siblings at a school have an easier time entering the school for the first time, as PS2 stated:

My child was very excited as she has visited the school before. She also had her friend from the neighborhood who goes to that school as she was one grade older than her, so it was very easy for my daughter.

Category 2.2: Benefits for the Mother. Having children at the same school for a long time is an advantage for the mother in that they become more comfortable visiting the school over time, and they get to know more parents of other children. PS2 commented on how she became more confident to visit the school and apply for her youngest to enroll in the school when she'd had other children at that school for long time:

The good thing is that when I go to school now, I do not feel scared or something like that ... I mean in terms of applying for them, knowing some people there, and knowing the school building. Everything was easier with them ... It was totally different than when I went to apply for my first child.

Category 2.3: Benefits for Attending School with Other Arabic Families. This category relates to the advantages for mothers of children who have had children in the same school for a long time with other Arabic families. When an Arabic mother's children go to the same school for a long time, it gives her and other mothers opportunities to help other Arabic families. PS4 has been in the U.S. for 20 years and had all her children go to the same school. She discussed that she was able to help other Arabic families:

As I said we have been in this school for a long time. It allowed me to help other Arabic families ... I would be with most of these new families and the school would communicate with me as being in the emergency contact.

PS4 added that:

The school would communicate with me to discuss the problem or sometimes they would meet with the [other Arabic] families, and I will be there as a translator ... The mama will ask me to tell the English language teacher about what she needs, and the teacher always understands and accept the mom's requests. The teacher always says, "Let me know."

Theme 3: Parent/Teacher Roles

This theme centers on the roles that teachers and parents play in the child's life and what each of them is required to do for the child. Two categories were developed from the data for this theme (Figure 8). One focuses on the teacher's role in general, with subcategories related to the teacher's role in educating children and then collaborating with parents. Parents' roles is the second category embedded within this theme. There was little difference between the returning and staying group of mothers in these discussions about parent and teacher roles until the topic of collaborating with parents surfaced (Table 5). The mothers who will be staying in the U.S. had

more to say in relation to collaborating with parents as they will be invested in the schools their children currently attend longer than the returning mothers.

Figure 8

Overview of Theme 3 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

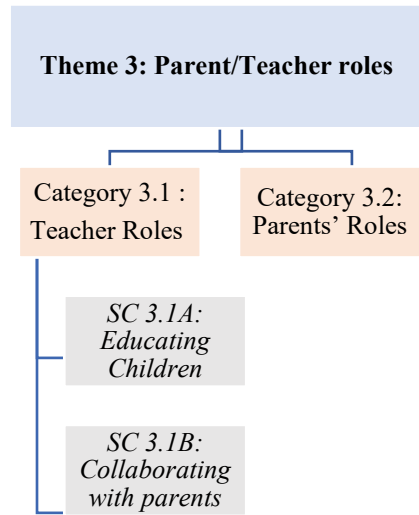


Table 5

Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 3

<i>Category</i>	<i># of Statements Coded per Category</i>	<i>Parent Returning</i>	<i>Parent Staying</i>	<i>Sub category</i>	<i># of Statements Coded per Sub category</i>	<i>Parent Returning</i>	<i>Parent Staying</i>
Category 3.1: Teacher Roles	42 28.97%	19 45.24%	23 56.76%	SC 3.1A: Educating Children	32 22.69%	15 46.88%	17 53.13%
				SC 3.1B: Collaborating with Parents	10 6.90%	4 40%	6 60%
Category 3.2: Parents' Roles	103 71.03%	27 26.21%	76 73.79%				
TOTAL COMMENTS	145						

Category 3.1: Teacher Roles. During both the focus group and individual interviews, mothers discussed the significant roles that teachers play in the child's life as children are with teachers for many hours each day and week and they develop attachments. PS1 stated that teachers have critical responsibilities toward their students: "The teachers' role is very big and as the number of students gets higher in the classroom the responsibility on the teacher gets higher also." PS2 added:

Of course, so they raise a well-prepared generation. I always said when school starts the kids will be better. I mean when I have any parents arguing about their child's behavior, I just told them don't worry, schools will start soon, and their behavior will get better.

Because as I said, kids know that at school everything has consequences.

PS4 agreed and highlighted the teacher-student attachment that she noticed between teachers and their students here in the U.S. She said, "I feel that the teachers have a big part, especially more here than in our country [Egypt]. I feel here [U.S.] the teacher gets very attached to the children, and they get attached to her also." PS3 said, "In regard to my little one, they are doing a lot with him."

Subcategory 3.1A: Educating Children. Mothers explained the impact that teachers have on children regarding their academic and social learning, depending on the effectiveness of the teacher. There is a shared language of understanding in the classroom that mothers may not be a part of. According to PR2:

The teacher's role is really big and important in the child's education. I mean if you explain any information to a child, for example, for me if I try to explain any information for my child, she does not understand it from me like how she does if the teacher explains for her.

PS1 added, “I mean if the teacher is good at teaching the homework it will be easy for the student to do it.” PR2 added:

I mean the homework is of the education that the child gets at school, so if the teacher is teaching him appropriately and child understands it, that will make it easy for you and for the child. But if the teacher does not know what she’s doing, it will be very difficult for the child and for you also to help your child understand.

Moreover, mothers discussed their thoughts of the teacher’s role and what teachers should do for their students. PR4 stated that, “Teachers also need to teach kids social skills not just teach them academic information.” She added, “Kids also need more support in emotional skills.” Some mothers spoke about the need for teachers to develop good relationships with children in order to successfully teach them. According to PS4:

Children in PreK until third grade want their teacher to be kind and compassionate. It's important that the teacher is compassionate and has the skill to discipline them. Any teacher in this life should have this skill to discipline and direct them the right way, and to be compassionate with them. I see that a lot of the teachers in my kids’ school have these abilities.

Subcategory 3.1B: Collaborating with Parents. According to participants, collaborating and communicating with parents are two of the teachers’ roles. PS1 explained, “I mean teachers should understand that they are working with the child from their end and parents are working from their end, so we agree, and they should be collaborating.” She added:

Honesty and attention. Attention. I mean teachers should pay attention to students’ levels, so when they notice any weakness, they tell the family. When teachers notice that the

student is not doing their homework as they are supposed to, she should cooperate with parents and see the reason behind that.

PR3 emphasized that teachers should support mothers to be involved by telling them what they are doing and what mothers must do to support their children. She said, “It is the teacher’s responsibility to let me know and also, to tell me what to do. I mean to help me complete what they are doing at school.”

Category 3.2: Parents’ Roles. Mothers concurred that parents have critical responsibilities toward their child at home and at school and are more significant in their role even than teachers. The involvement of at least one parent in the school is essential for a good parent-child relationship, and parents’ roles go beyond academics to address the whole child. PS3 stated that “The role of both parents is really big. Having a child is a big responsibility and not taking care of this responsibility is not good for the child and for the parent.” PR1 added, “Of course, the parents have a bigger role in their kid's life. It is more than the teacher's role.”

Seven of the participants highlighted the importance of building strong relationships with children. PR1 discussed the critical impact of parent-child conversations and of listening to children. She stated:

So, I feel one of the most important things is to hear from your kids and hear their opinions, but without trying to influence or make the decision instead of the child.

Especially sensitive topics like homosexuality and the period when the girls get older.

Regarding strengthening parent-child relationships, PS1 points out that being involved in the child’s school has great impact in the parent-child relationship. She said, “Your engagement at the school and being there for your child impacts your relationship with them and you need this relationship when you get older, like in your 70s, 80s, and older.” PR4 supports PS1’s idea

that being involved with school is one of the parents' roles. She suggested that either one of the parents should be involved with the child's school. She stated:

The most important thing that I see is that one of the parents should be there. We are not in our country and the life conditions or situation here are different, it is not required to have both of them involved.

PR4 added that parents should also focus on spending time with the child after school and, "at least one of them should be engaged with their kids when they come back from school to ask them about it."

All participants highlighted that parents should help their children with homework and be aware of their educational level. PS4 stated, "It is important to make sure that they bring a book, read, and do the reading test at school." PR1 added:

Yes, of course, the family is responsible for everything that relates to their child. I don't feel that I have the right to put this responsibility on any other person either from the relative, the school, or after school program.

PS1 added that it is important for her to encourage her children to do their homework in front of her even when she is not able to help with that homework. She stated, "Sometimes I do not understand their homework or how they should do it especially in science and math, but I will ask my children to come and do it in front of me." PS3 agreed with that, and she added that she would ask her other child to help teach the younger, but she would not leave them until they finish doing the homework. She said, "I will be sitting with them until he finishes helping his little brother." However, PR3 argued that children should not spend most or all of their time at home doing schoolwork. She said:

I do not know, I mean of course we do have a role as a parent, like directing and helping children study, but it shouldn't be daily. Especially if the parents are already students themselves and have a lot to do. I mean the time is short and we have a lot to do.

All mothers agreed that parents' roles should not be limited to homework and academic areas. As PR1 stated, "I see that the parents need to care and focus on everything, not just the homework. I mean they need to focus on how the child acts, behaves, and how he even thinks."

PR4 said:

Give them love, care, and support. It is important to take care of their sleep, eating, and entertainment on the weekend. Physical movement is very important for children, so parents need to focus on providing kids with different activities. It could not be that the child sits the whole day. Pay attention to the difficulties that your child has and start trying to improve them step by step. Focus on your child and strengths. His personality is different.

PR2 also explained that parents should focus and be aware of their child's behavior:

Of course, the teacher and the school will be guiding the child, but the father and mother should be there. They should guide and give suggestions to the child. I mean the teacher has from 15 to 25 students in the classroom she teaches and gives discipline to all of them. Sometimes she gives individual attention, but it is not like what is at home. At home the idea is bigger and clearer. We all know that kids spend a long time at school but it's your responsibility to focus on their behavior when they came back. I mean they have a lot of interaction at school and they always show how they are behaving at school when they are at home. I mean when the child tries to bully some other kids at school, you could see that through his behavior if you focus on his behavior at home. Then it is your

responsibility to explain and advise your child. Also, in the other way if your child has been bullied you could notice that.

Theme 4: Communication Between Home and School

Communication is the interaction and connection between school and mothers. This theme focuses on the many factors related to communication between the home and the school (Table 6). It includes mothers' comments on what makes communication easier, what the teacher communicates, when teacher/school communication occurs, when the mother initiates communication with the teacher, and preferences. There were many comments about the diverse ways that schools and the participants share thoughts, opinions, problems, decisions, and other things that relate to the child that are discussed in a subcategory. The mothers who plan to stay in the U.S spoke more about the variety of ways to communicate with teachers and the school, whereas the returning mothers who are busier with their current higher education focus had less time and therefore discussed their preferences for communicating with teachers.

Figure 9

Overview of Theme 4 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

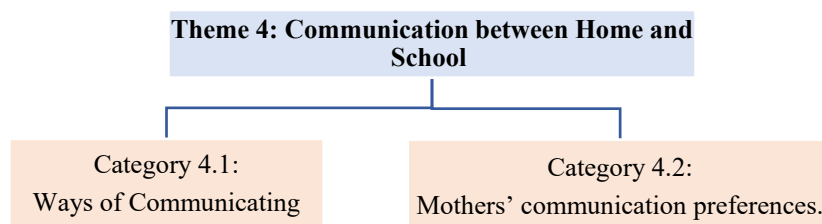


Table 6*Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 4*

Category	# of Statements Coded Per Category	Parent Returning	Parent Staying
Category 4.1 Ways of Communicating	63 55.26%	24 38.10%	39 61.90%
Category 4.2 Mothers' Communication Preferences	51 44.74%	40 78.43%	11 21.57%
TOTAL COMMENTS	114		

Category 4.1: Ways of Communicating. PR2 shared that the welcome feeling she gets from school is a motivation for her to communicate with school. She said, “Here when you enter the school here [U.S.], they welcome you. If you come angry about something, they calm you down, absorb your anger, they understand you, and what is happening.” She added:

I did not feel any problems, but what I felt from them was the welcome. Indeed, I feel that when I enter the school, I will get the solution to any problem that occurred, whether for my daughter’s education or anything related to the school. I will get a solution for it.

Eight of the mothers agreed that family-school communication is critical and has multiple advantages. Each participant mentioned a situation when they communicated with the school or the teachers. They mentioned that they would communicate with the school when they face difficulties helping their child doing their homework. PS4 said:

As I told you, I have some difficulties doing the homework with my oldest child. Like, for example, some difficult assignments in math that I cannot help with. So, at that time I would send [a text] to the teacher telling her that he did not understand this, and he cannot do this assignment and I cannot help him with it. In this point the importance of

communication comes, as we all said about communication. So, I will try to communicate with her to explain it to him. And sometimes I try to understand it to be able to help him.

Category 4.2: Mothers' Communication Preferences. All participants mentioned more than one way that their children' school and teachers communicate with them. The many forms of communication mentioned by the participants include apps, face-to-face at school, notes, newsletters, daily reports, teacher-parent conferences or meetings, and text messages. Some mothers preferred certain ways of communication more than others. Email is a form of communication that was mentioned by the eight mothers. PR2 said, "We started receiving a lot of emails with very detailed information which is very good." PS3 said, "I like that teachers here are communicating with parents through emails and apps." PR4 mentioned that "Most of it [communication] was thorough the school's email, like the newsletter and the weekly report." While most of the mothers like to use email and apps, one mother finds that a hands-on look into her children's backpacks or communicating with notes is easier, which contrasts with the opinion of the other mothers. All value in-person meetings for discussions of serious issues.

All participants agreed that communication and family-school involvement is critical but different for everyone. PS1 believes that communicating and being involved with the school is essential, and mothers should try to be involved. She said:

The mom, and if anybody needs to communicate, [get in] contact with the mom. So, the mother is the foundation. So, you have to go and be with your kids at the school even when your English is not good, the school needs to see you.

PS2 highlights the fact that there are different preferences for communicating, “Each one has their different way that they can communicate and participate. So, you need to know your good way and share it with the school and be sure to be there [when necessary].”

All mothers felt that teachers of young children were easy to contact, but this access becomes more difficult for the teachers of their older children. During the focus group, PR1 said:

It is not difficult to reach the teacher. I mean, she is available. I can go to school, by email, or by phone, or I can send her a text message on her mobile phone. And above all that, she has an app.

Some mothers preferred personal communication as it is easier for them. There is also a perception that email and apps are best unless the communication relates to a bigger issue, like a behavior problem. In the focus group, PR2 said:

For me, I love in-person, meaning the way to communicate if there is a problem or something I want to talk about, I prefer going to school in person. As for other things, I can get them by email, by app, or by text. But as the best way for me, when I talk about my daughter or about a problem or something I want to talk about it with the teacher or with the school, I prefer frankly, personal communication or a Zoom meeting.

She reiterated the same preference in the individual interview:

Honestly the most thing that I rely on is personal communication. I mean, you know, as a student and mom when I come home, I don't have time to open and send messages and communicate like this, so I prefer personal talk. So, when I pick her up from school I like to talk with the teacher and ask about what my daughter did that day.

It's somewhat similar for PS4:

I would say face-to-face, especially in specific situations. For example, if they are discussing something big like behavioral or other problems, a personal meeting is better in certain situations. Other than that, emails will be good or through phone. Talking on the phone is not difficult. Cell phones and emails are the easiest way to communicate with parents. Let us leave the personal meeting for the bigger things because most people in our country are really busy. It becomes harder to leave your job and go.

There were different opinions about the use of the app. PS4 explained that the app she has she likes to use to communicate with all her children's teachers. She said:

So, for my Reminder [the app] is a very good and fast way to communicate with the teachers. I use it with all of my kids and in their education or other activities like sport or anything else. The good thing is that when you send it, you know nobody else will see it. So, for me I see this as an effective way to communicate more than text messages and email. Except if there is something important that the future needs to be sent in the email, like if they need you to come to school.

However, PS1 said that she does not focus on the app, and she prefers to go through her children's backpacks looking for the teacher's notes. She said:

This school posts on the app or on Facebook. I mean it is there, but for me I do not look at it because I prefer looking through my kid's backpack. So, it's very important for me to look through all of my kids' backpacks every day and see what the teacher sent with them. Also, if your child has an appointment, it is enough to write a small note for the teacher and that's it. I mean it is easy, not hard.

Theme 5: Involvement

The discussions included two types of involvement, home and school involvement, in addition to the impact of having or not having other children, and a focus on the benefits of involvement (Table 7). There was more focus on supporting children’s learning at home among the group of returning parents, which may be due to their situations of being in school themselves and therefore having less time. However, the mothers who will be staying in the U.S. had a lot to say regarding the differences in their experiences with the first and the child selected for this study as they had more children in school over time in the U.S.

Figure 10

Overview of Theme 5 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

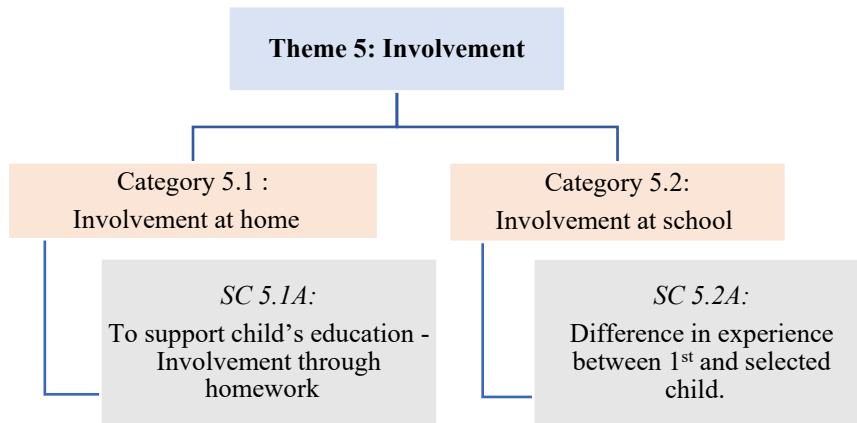


Table 7*Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 5*

Category	# of Statements Coded Per Category	Parent Returning	Parent Staying	Sub category	# of Statements Coded per Subcategory	Parent Returning	Parent Staying
Category 5.1: Involvement at home	36 21.30%	16 44.44%	20 55.55%	SC 5.1A: To support child's education - Involvement through homework	25 14.79%	16 64%	9 36%
Category 5.2: Involvement at school	133 78.70%	58 43.61	75 56.39%	SC 5.2A: Difference in experience between 1 st and selected child	38 22.49%	6 15.79%	32 84.21%
TOTAL COMMENTS	169						

Category 5.1: Involvement at Home. This category centers on the strategies mothers use to be involved with their children at home that are apart from assisting with homework. In addition to supporting their child's education, mothers highlighted that they aim to spend time with their children as much as they can. PS1 said, "I tried hard to make sure that we spend time with our kids every single day which is after sunset." Many participants are concerned about too much time with homework and not enough family time. Some say that too much time is focused on one subject so that other subjects get less attention. As stated by PR4:

We always spend the whole time at home studying. I mean, he came back from school at 3:00 or 3:30 PM. We start studying from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM, which is almost sleep time. So, what's the benefit? I feel it is not fair that he spent all his time studying this spelling list. What about when he gets to have other subjects?

PS1 likes when homework is completed in the after-school program. She said:

Of course, I definitely like it [homework is completed in afterschool program]. You know the school hours are long, but the family hours are shorter. During the growth stage, the child needs his family and at the same time he needs education, but the family is the foundation. I mean it is not fair that they spend 8 hours at school and spend 4 hours doing homework at home. Not fair! It is not fair to make children spend most of their time at home doing homework.

PS4 also emphasizes that beyond her being the one helping with homework, there is also the need for family time at home apart from homework in relation to how her husband is with the children. She stated:

As I told you, because of the nature of my husband's work he spends most of the day outside the home. He tries to spend time with them as much as he can after he comes back from work. He definitely does not have any relation with their homework. He talks with them about their day and what they did at school. But in terms of homework, I'm the one that takes care of it.

Additionally, PR4 has difficulty engaging her child with homework because she is pressured with her own schoolwork in a PhD program as she was graduating the following summer (2023). In the past, she has always worked with her children on homework, so this year it is different due to this stress. She says:

My young child also likes to play a lot and I don't have patience, so I'm letting him do what he wants. I have the power to give love support and a good feeling, but I don't have the power to spend my day with him fighting over homework ... I have enough to stress myself out and I have a lot of pressure, so what I'm trying to do is to be calm with them and have a good time with them. Even with my older child, I'm not focusing as I used to

before. Like last year I used to sit with him when he did his homework, but this year I just try to remind him verbally ... I decided at the beginning of this year that I will not force or punish them for homework. The most important thing for me is to have a good relationship and time with them ... The most important thing is their level in the classroom. They are doing very well during class time, so this is the important point.

Subcategory 5.1A: To Support Child's Education and Involvement Through

Homework. Participants all shared that they've been involved with their children at home to support their education and to help with homework; it is of great value to them and their child. PR2 reads with her child at bedtime. Even though the teacher says her child can read very well, she reads with her daughter to help her build confidence with reading.

I tried with her every day. For example, instead of me reading the bedtime story, I let her read part of it and I complete the rest, or for example, she reads the page and I read the rest. I felt that she had confidence but needed more support.

PS1 stated that she likes when her child brings homework like coloring sheets and word puzzles where she can be involved with her child and the other family members as well. She said:

Sometimes the teacher asked the child to color pictures with specific colors. Sometimes I print these sheets for the number of my children, and we do a group activity. Sometimes I would engage everybody, even the older kids and sometimes I do it with them. Like if it's coloring, I would color with them. I like coloring so I do it with them. Sometimes I would involve their dad. I like when the teacher provides these types of activities for the children. Children get tired of homework, so this is better for them especially if you try to make it fun.

PR4 stated that prior to her enrolling in a doctoral program she tried to be with her child while he was doing his homework and to review it with him. She said:

I like to be with him when he is doing his homework. I check with him his class work and if he had any mistakes, we would go over it and do it together again, especially the math.

For reading I make sure that he has a specific time to read during the day.

PR2 added that she does her child's school projects with her. She said:

For the Seesaw app, some of the activities use voice instruction, so she does not need me to be with her. But there were some activities that needed me to sit with her and read her the instruction on what she should and shouldn't do. Also, if she has a project we sit at home and do it together.

Category 5.2: Involvement at School. This represents the mothers' involvement and interaction with their children and the school community at the school. PS1 stated that she likes to be active and involved with her child's school; for example, "I like to go to his school very often and to participate in his classroom." However, according to participants in both the focus groups and the interviews, they were not as active in involvement at school as much as they are at home due to multiple reasons that will be discussed under the category of challenges.

PR2 says she is "at the school every day during the drop off and pick up." If it takes 10 to 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon to talk with the teacher and if she needs to, she will. She considers these times with the teacher to be sufficient involvement, and according to her:

Regarding school, I wasn't that much [involved]. I was donating. I helped with decoration stuff for some party... volunteering at the classroom has never happened but I make sure to attend all the meetings and activities, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day,

Thanksgiving, and all of them ... I make sure to attend the events that will have all of the parents.

While PS4 says she doesn't go to school that much, her statement below shows that she values involvement in the school:

I would love to have more opportunities in our schools to volunteer and be involved in this school. That is what helped me make good relationships with teachers and other parents. Volunteering and involvement in this school creates a very good environment for the children. Children will feel very good if they see their parents at school with them. So, I would say communication and being involved in the school are the most important.

Subcategory 5.2A: Difference in Experience Between First and Selected Child.

Mothers of more than one child agreed that their school involvement experience with the selected child has some differences than school involvement with the first child. PS2 related these to the amount of experience that she got from her older children:

Now I have more experience. Seriously I have more experience, so you become aware of when to take action and you know that you do not need to be sensitive about everything. I mean you get to the point where you don't need to get upset every time your child gets a punishment. Of course, with your first child, you're always like, my child is always right. Now you are more looking at the situation, listening, going to your child, and hearing the story from him, and understanding more before you go to the teacher.

PS4 indicated that she faced more and different challenges in family-school involvement with her first child than with the current child. She related that to the improvement in her English abilities:

When I started with my first child of course there were some challenges ... When I came here in the beginning, I knew some English. But the English that we use and communicate with people is totally different than what we learn at school, especially what we learn, which was a long time ago.

On the other hand, PR4 stated that the differences appeared for two reasons, the school, and the fact that she was not a student with her first child, so she had more time to be involved.

She said:

Maybe with the first child the information was more because we were in a different school. They have more activities and parties. Another reason might be me as I was not a student at that time, and I had more time.

Mothers of only one child at school determine that their family involvement experience with their second child would have some differences as they will have more information and will be more confident. PR1 said:

I will know more, and I will expect what will happen especially if we were staying here [U.S.]. I would be more confident and comfortable. I would improve my involvement with the school and do with my second child what I wasn't able to do with my first child. I mean I didn't have time because I'm a student and I have a job right now. I mean, right now I'm trying to do it, but I don't have this strong relationship with the school or even with the teacher now.

Theme 6: Challenges

The difficulties that mothers face through their family involvement experiences either at home or at school are highlighted as related to their limited English, issues with time, or knowledge about how to do the homework. They agreed that the challenges are not related to the

teacher or the school. PR3 said, “I haven't faced any challenges on communicating with the school or the teacher.”

Several categories embedded within this theme articulate the challenges at home with involvement, solutions to those challenges at home, challenges to be involved and connected at school as well as related solutions (Table 8). The mothers who are staying in the U.S. had the most to say regarding challenges and solutions as they will continue to be working with the American schools their children attend and schools at higher levels (middle and high school) in the future. A final category addresses mothers’ concerns about their societal differences with U.S. schools. The returning mothers spoke more about their thoughts on how they will not have to address societal issues regarding things like the way their children dress, time in school for prayer, and acknowledgement of Muslim religious celebrations. The mothers who will stay are concerned about school and peers’ views of the hijab their girls will need to wear as they get older, the schools allowing prayer time for their children, and the differences with American societal norms their children will hear about that do not align with their Islamic values.

Figure 11

Overview of Theme 6 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

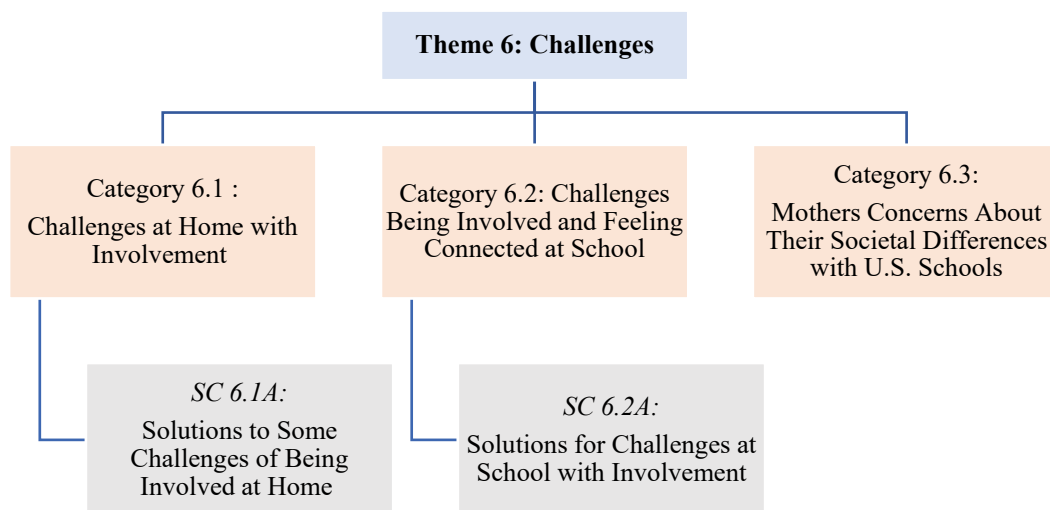


Table 8*Case Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 6*

Category	# of Statements Coded Per Category	Parent Returnin g	Parent Staying	Subcategory	# of Statements Coded Per Subcategory	Parent Returning	Parent Staying
Category 6.1: Challenges at Home with Involvement	70 38.89%	19 27.14%	50 71.43%	SC 6.1A Solutions to Some Challenges of Being Involved at Home	37 20.56%	8 21.62%	29 78.38%
Category 6.2: Challenges Being Involved and Feeling Connected at School	90 50%	36	54	SC 6.2A Solutions for Challenges at School with Involvement	21 11.67%	7 33.33%	14 66.66%
Category 6.3: Mothers Concerns About Their Societal Differences with U.S. Schools	44 11.11%	19 43.18	25 56.82%				
TOTAL COMMENTS	180						

Category 6.1: Challenges at Home with Involvement. All the mothers discussed the different levels of difficulties that they face while helping their children doing homework due to their limited English and the fact that the materials, the ways, and what children are learning here is different than what the mothers learned in their countries. As PR4 said:

It happened with my oldest child when I was not able to help him with his math homework. As you know they have different ways to do their math than what we know, so I told him to go to his teacher and understand from her.

PS4 stated, “I am trying to help as much as I could. What they learn is different so I'm trying as much as I could. Sometimes I would ask the teacher about what I cannot help with.”

According to the demographic data, PR2 described her English abilities as mastered; however, she also mentioned a situation when she was not able to help with homework due to her limited English:

...but there were some activities in Seesaw app I was not able to solve. English is not my first language, especially when they were talking about the syllables of the word and its sounds. I learned it in the English school, but it was harder for me than for my daughter.

Subcategory 6.1A: Solutions to Some Challenges of Being Involved at Home. Mothers discussed some of the solutions that helped them to be more active with their children at home, which included having the husband or older siblings at home to help with other children, asking the teacher for help, or after-school programs, and, as explained above, each mother faced different challenges related to involvement with their children at home. They had multiple supports and ideas to deal with these situations.

When PS1 was asked if she had difficulty helping her child with homework, she answered “Yes,” and this was in relation to when she first came to the country. In relation to her oldest child from that time she said, “It happened to me once in the beginning when I was here without my husband. Then after that, the school suggested an after-school program for my children.” PS3 said in relation to her youngest child presently, “They give him two story books every day [one] in Arabic and [one in] English. I read the Arabic with him, but because I am not good at English,

I would ask his older brother to read with him.” PS4 said, “when I faced difficulty, I would ask his teachers. They always understand me and try to help me.” These are examples of mothers trying to help as much as they can while asking for support when they face challenges.

Category 6.2: Challenges with Being Involved and Feeling Connected at School.

Limited time and English were also the challenges that mothers faced in relation to involvement with their children at school. When PR4 was asked about her opinion about visiting her child’s classroom, she answered, “I mean I really like the idea and I totally agree with it, but it is very hard for me to do it... Definitely, it's because [of] time.” During the focus group meeting, PR1 shared that her time is limited. She said:

When she was in the kindergarten we were in a different school and volunteering could be for an hour. That was good as it was flexible for my schedule. I mean, I can free up an hour in my schedule.

During the individual interview PR1 provided more details about the limits on her time: “I did not have time because I am a student and I have a job right now. I mean right now I am trying to do it, but I don’t have this strong relationship with the school or even with the teacher.” Thus, the lack of involvement with the school leads to less opportunity for developing relationships with the teacher.

More than once in the focus group and the individual interview, PS3 stated that due to her limited English, she lacked confidence when dealing with people at school. She concluded with the statement, “So I am away from the idea of being involved at the school because I am afraid of embarrassing myself.” She added:

If I had good English, I would go and [become] involved with the school because they like that. Most of the teachers are in our neighborhood so they know me, and we see each

other at school and outside the school a lot. So, they know me, and they want me to be involved with them but I say no because of my English.

PS4 stated:

So mostly the challenge is the language. Always the most challenge that faces us is language. As I told you, even if your education was really good, when you go to interact with people it is very different.

When it comes to feeling connected at school, PS1 was able to ask to visit the school before classes started, ask for her child to be able to pray in school during the required times for her religion, and to bring halal snacks that are appropriate for her religion to share with children in her child's class. These opportunities were available because the principal of her child's school was welcoming. She said, "Because this is one of the family rights. There are some families who do not know their right or what they could ask for." This mother is determined to ask for anything that will support her child, and she would do so even if her principal was not so supportive.

In many cities in the United States where Saudi families settle for educational purposes or for work, they seek out others to create a Saudi community. PR4 describes her feelings when such a community does not exist: "Like for me right now my city does not have a Saudi club, so I feel disconnected."

This story from PS3 illustrates the ways that covert biases from other families, not teachers, make it difficult to want to attend school functions, which leads to a feeling of being disconnected:

Not from the teacher at all. Sometimes it will be there but from other parents. Sometimes when we get together and your eyes come to their eyes you feel that there is something in

how they look at you ... Yes, it happened with me. I am not sure why we were there, but the school invited all the parents. I was there by myself without my husband. he was coming but I went before him, so I was standing by myself. We were standing outside waiting for the door to open, so we could get inside. There were two parents in front of me and they were talking and looking at me. It was obvious that they were talking about me. During that a woman came to me ask me about something but I could not understand her, so she went to them, and they keep laughing. This was one of the reasons that I prefer to not go to school. I don't want to put myself in a situation where someone could laugh at me or make joke of me. It is not weakness or that I am weak, but for me I either learn and be with them in the community or avoid such situations.

PS3 also shared a story about feeling biases toward her and her son from a child making fun of them. The boy on her child's bus pulled off his t-shirt and wrapped it over his head like a hijab and said he was like my son's mom. In that situation "I felt when the boy put his T-shirt on his hair, making fun of me, it makes me very sad, and I cried a lot."

Subcategory 6.2A: Solutions for Challenges at School with Involvement.

There were several creative ways that some of the participants made adjustments when their involvement with the school might be a challenge. For example, PS1 said that she could ask her mother-in-law and her child's father to attend events at school or take care of the other children while she goes to school events. Another mother, PS3, sometimes sends a friend to school events because she doesn't have time, and the school recognizes that she is supporting her, knows that she cares and wants to be there but relies on her friend's support when she is not available. Also, it was noted by more than one mother that working to improve their English language skills would help a lot with school involvement.

Category 6.3: Mother's Concerns About Their Societal Differences with the U.S.

Schools. Mothers discussed the values that children may learn from their peers or the school in general. PS4 highlighted the critical need to develop a friendship with their child to create a good space for children to talk and have discussions with their parents on different topics instead of letting them go to their friends who might have different values. She stated:

I don't have any problem if they go and talk with their friends, but you know in the end we have different beliefs. What we can or cannot do is different than what they can or cannot do. We should consider that and I'm trying to teach my kids that. I am OK with them talking with their friends about different stuff, but they should have limitations, especially when it is related to beliefs and what we can or cannot do.

PR2 shared her consideration of what her child may learn when she goes to public school. She said:

As I told you, my child was in a private school, and most of the students were international, and the teacher was American, but from Indian origin. I felt that my child did not lose the values that she learned at home. However, based on what I heard from mothers of public schools' students here, I have some concerns ... this year will be her first year in public schools ... So, I am not afraid of it that much. But still, I have some apprehension about what children take from schools, for example when talking to some American families here, their children learn some different values such as homosexuality ... By telling them that it is their body, that it is their choice, and that they have freedom of action and do what they want in their bodies. And that they have a choice in determining what their gender is ... I am honestly afraid of public schools because of this issue.

PR2 and PR3 opened a discussion about homosexuality, whether any of the participants have faced it and how they should deal with it. PR1 talked about a situation when her daughter had a classmate with homosexual parents and how she dealt with it. When PR1 was asked whether she discussed that with the teacher or not she responded:

No, I did not try to contact with the teacher. I only tried to work on my daughter. I used to tell her that there are those who have two moms or two dads. We are in a big world, and you will see many different things.

As PR3 said, “they see such things on YouTube and Netflix. For example, Netflix publishes about homosexuality. I am sure that she saw it here and there, and what added to the matter was that she saw the child at school.”

PR2 agreed and added:

At the same time, I feel it is difficult to talk to the school about this because it will be understood as a racist. So, it is difficult to go to school and say you do not want your child to face this thing at school, and you would be the wrong. God help us until we finish what we are doing here.

The researcher asked PR1, “If your child has been involved in a discussion with that child and you felt that it got a little deeper, would you go to talk with the teacher?” She answered:

No, I would not talk to the teacher because it is something that is allowed here, and it is the law of the country here where I am at. But I am working with my daughter to constantly teach her what is not acceptable in our religion or in our society. And I tell her stories in our religion about this topic.

In relation to societal differences with holidays and celebrations PR2 added:

I am okay with her knowing about some holidays and different religions. Actually, they celebrated different holidays in her current school, even holidays of other religions that I was not aware of. I just let her participate. It is okay. They also celebrated Ramadan and Eid as they talked about them and did activities.

On the other hand, PS4 stated:

We don't need to make our kids celebrate and we should teach them that we do not celebrate what they are celebrating, but that does not limit us from engaging with them in a way that is not in conflict with our religion.

By the end of the focus group, PS3 highlighted that she learned more confidence from this discussion with other Arab mothers about participating more within her child's school. However, this statement shows where she is still limited: "I still feel that I cannot ask for the chance for my kids to pray at school." According to Islam, children are beginning the practice of praying when they are seven years old and are expected to pray at regular intervals throughout the day, like their parents, when they are 10. However, the mothers in this study reveal how complex it is for Arabic families to request the right for children to pray during school hours. During the individual interview she mentioned this point again:

I wish something that other participants said during the focus group. I know she is lucky that their principal worked in an Arabic country before, so he allowed her children to pray at school. Not one of my children is praying at school.

When she was asked whether she discussed this with the school, she answered:

That's what I was talking about. I wish they let parents to talk about that. For me, my children are the only Muslim at the school, so I have not tried to talk with them. I mean, where would they put him to pray and from where would they give him time to do it.

PS4 also mentioned the same concern, yet her child represents those who might feel uncomfortable without a private space, which might make him feel different from others. She said:

Yes, I have asked, and they told me that he could do it, but my son does not want to do it because he does not feel comfortable or motivated to do it because they do not have a specific place for them to pray in.

Themes and Categories Related to Research Question 2

What are the recommendations for parent involvement by Arabic mothers with different cultural backgrounds of children enrolled in U.S. schools or in early childhood education programs?

This section presents the themes related to participants' recommendations for schools. The majority of recommendations for other Arabic families (Category 7.1) were from the mothers who will be staying in the U.S. Only one subcategory had 100% of returning mothers and no comments from mothers who will be staying. That subcategory centers on ideas for assistance in locating schools as this was a concern for this group on arriving to a new city in the U.S. There was equal input from both groups of mothers when making recommendations for American schools.

Theme 7: Mothers' Recommendations

Two categories emerged from participants related to family engagement recommendations. There are recommendations for other Arabic parents and for American schools. Seven subcategories provide insights regarding participants' recommendations for other Arabic parents (Table 9). These findings are shared in the following sections.

Figure 12

Overview of Theme 7 and its Related Categories and Subcategories

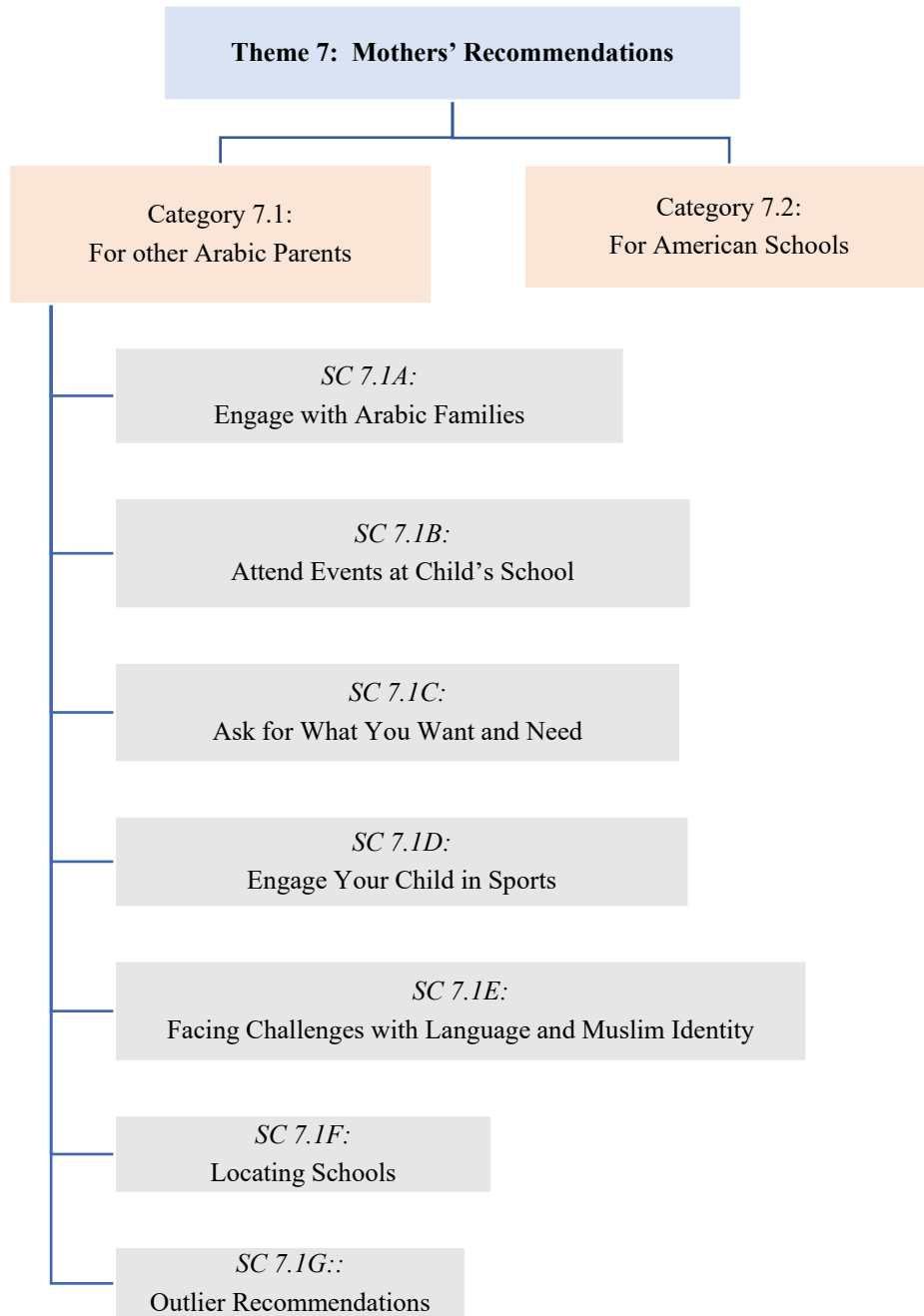


Table 9*Number & Percent of Comments by Participants for Theme 7*

Category	# of Statements Coded Per Category	Parent Returning	Parent Staying	Sub category	# of Statements Coded Per Sub category	Parent Returning	Parent Staying
Category 7.1: For other Arabic Parents	116 65.52%	41 35.34%	75 64.66%	SC 7.1A: Engage with Arabic Families	21 12.07%	7 33.33%	14 66.66%
				SC 7.1B: Attend Events at Child's School	28 16.09%	6 21.43%	22 78.57%
				SC 7.1C: Ask for What You Want and Need	19 10.92%	10 52.63	9 47.37%
				SC 7.1E: Facing Challenges with Language and Muslim Identity	19 10.92%	5 26.32	14 73.68
				SC 7.1F: Locating Schools	10 5.75%	10 100%	0
				SC7.1G: Outlier Recommendations	20 11.49%	5 25%	15 75%
Category 7.2: For American Schools	73 41.95	37 50.68%	36 49.32				
TOTAL COMMENTS	174						

Category 7.1: For Other Arabic Parents. Due to their personal experiences with schools and teachers, the participants had recommendations they think would be valuable to share with other Arabic families, particularly those who are newcomers to schools in the U.S.

Subcategory 7.1A: Engage with Arabic Families. All participants suggested that Arabic families should be engaged with other Arabic families around them. Moreover, PR3 encouraged Saudi families to contact Arabic families from different countries: “The other Arabs always know more, they are more interconnected than us the Saudis.” Multiple ways of knowing other Arabic families were suggested by the participants. For example, PR4 said, “I suggest new Arab families to be connected with the mosque and to visit Arabic stores... You could even ask your doctor if they know any other people.”

All mothers also recommended sharing situations of concern with other Arabic families and asking them for their advice, as PS4 said, “I mean if you have people around you, go and ask them. It's OK to ask in the beginning until you get stronger and until you become able to help yourself.” PS2 speaks about lack of awareness of teachers in the United States for the diversity of Arabic families which leads to the recommendation for getting information about schools from the greater Arabic community. She said:

So, it's important to go to the Arab community and ask about the best approach or way to deal with this experience. Because the fact is that the school sees all of us as the same. I mean they have one category for Arab family, and we are all included in it. So, for me if I have any problem with my kids especially the young kids I would go to other family and ask how they deal with it when they have their kids at the same age as my child right now.

Subcategory 7.1B: Attend Events at Child's School. As explained by PS4, mothers agreed that parents should try to be involved with their children's school and attend their events even if their education, language, or lack of time makes it a challenge because parents' involvement is important to the child:

My suggestion for all parents is that they should attend all events and trips at school, which is very important. As I said, my child will be sad if I do not go. I mean it should be something established, and we need to take care of that more.

PS1 added to this same point stating that mothers should find their way to be involved with their child's school, but if they can't be due to time or some other reason, a parent should "explain to your child and tell him that if you could do it you would do it, so he might understand your situation. Even with that, you still need to make it up and go to his school on another day." PS2 highlighted that "School here has multiple opportunities, so you need to look for the one that is good for you."

PS1 stated that she was fortunate by having a school principal that has been in an Arabic country before, which improves her family involvement experiences. However, she concluded both the focus group meeting and the individual interview with recommendations that all "parents should create the opportunity even if the school did not provide it. I know that there are some schools that do not have this social and community feeling. Families need to try to create one."

Subcategory 7.1C: Ask for What You Want and Need. PR2 emphasizes for parents who are not confident to ask for what they want, or need should work to do so anyway. She says :

... parents who do not prefer to talk ... if they don't feel that they have the ability to speak up for themselves or explain their idea or point ... my belief is if my child is at this school, the school has to listen to me. Communication between family and school is very important. This is my perspective.

Along those lines, PS3 shared how she did not ask for her child to pray at school. She said:

For me, my children are the only Muslims at the school, so I have not tried to talk with the school. I mean where they would put him to pray and from where would they give him time to do it.

In the individual interviews, more so than in the focus group discussions, mothers spoke about asking the school for what they need. PR2 included ideas for reaching out to the county or the school. She states:

My main suggestion is to ask the school. Like just ask them if they would provide me with this and this. Also, to ask the county or the district school. I mean like the presentations that I talked about before which is for the parents. It could be done by the county or the school district so parents from more than one school would attend this meeting at one location. This way we will have larger number of parents than if we look at each school by itself. I mean the communication could include the county public school also not just the school itself.

One area of need for Arabic families is to ask for children to be excused for religious celebrations that are important for their family. PS2 stated:

What I always recommend Arabic families to do is to ask for an excuse and take Eid day off from school. Our children need to celebrate and have fun on that day and understand that it is a big day for us.

Subcategory 7.1D: Engage Your Child in Sports. According to the participants' demographic survey, two have been in the U.S. for the longest period: PS4 (20 years) and PS2 (15 years). They both mentioned sports as a critical way that opened more opportunities for them to be closer to the school community and to have more interaction and relationships with people there.

In the beginning, I did not enroll my child in any sport, but after a while, I started putting them in sports. It helped me know and have more interaction with more people.

Especially with the fact that our town is small, the community is small, so you know more people. I like that. I had chances to move to bigger cities, but I prefer to stay because I know most of the people here ... I like to know my kids' friends and with whom they spend time, which I was able to know in this small community. I mean in our town you meet people multiple times during the day in different places. So, I learned all of this with my first child, and I started applying it to my second then with my third child I was much better. I enrolled her in sports from the beginning and volunteered more with the school. (PS2)

Through her rich conversation, PS4 goes deeper into the ways sports helps parents and children.

She said:

Sport helps me communicate more with the school, especially if that sport represents the school. It helps me communicate with the school more because my kids become part of the school's activities. You will be part of the conversations and preparations. ... You

would know more about the families and that would provide good opportunities for the kids to make friends ...That will also help you as a mother to see the students in a different way than in the school. Sometimes there are differences between how the kids act at school and outside. They try to act appropriately and follow the rules at school, not like how they act outside the school. So, you will have a better view of them, and you could advise your kids about who they could be friends with and who they should not.

Subcategory 7.1E: Facing Challenges with Language and Muslim Identity. All mothers recommended trying to overcome the challenges and limited English. They encouraged mothers to talk and be involved. PS2 stated:

Do not be scared [to] just communicate with other parents be open and tell them a little bit about yourself and the fact that your English is not that good. It is OK because people here are willing to understand and they are good at understanding imperfect English.

PS4 mentioned some challenges related to language that she had faced, and she explained what mothers should do to deal with challenge:

So, you need to overcome that challenge and not be ashamed of it and keep trying. You are great that you are trying to speak another language that is different from your language. They all speak one language only. I got this support from the school and from my surroundings. You should not be ashamed, and you should keep trying as you will learn through it. It's good to try to improve your language which will help you and makes you able to support your children even if you don't want to study here.

Regarding the people she encounters in the U.S. who show biases, PS4 added:

For me, since I came to this country, I learned to ignore them. So, I don't care and that would not impact me. So, I don't care about this type of people, and I always advise

everybody to just ignore them and act like nobody is looking at them. I mean this would not stop me from doing what I'm doing for my kids.

In addition, PS2 recommended that most people here are willing to accept Arabic families when these people perceive that you are respectful and acting nicely. She said:

I hear from my Arabic friends that when they go to volunteer as teachers, they give them the look in the beginning but once they know them, they are fine. I mean once you talk and act nicely and they know you they will accept you and welcome you including the student.

This participant, also considered that by strengthening her child's Islamic identity her child would be accepted in a school community in the U.S. She said:

It also should be on the parents to teach their kids how to respond to others when talking about religion. It's important to help your child to be proud of his Islam and be a good representative of Islam.

Subcategory 7.1F: Locating Good Schools. Mothers in one focus group (PR group) discussed the importance of searching for information about schools in the area and asking about the school and its neighborhood before enrolling children in it. They mentioned the same recommendations during their individual interviews. PR1 said:
Ask about the schools, the review, and rate of each school. I did that and it made a big difference. They should not go to any school randomly. And it shouldn't be the school itself, sometimes the problem is in the school's neighborhood, students, or parents... we need to choose a good school academically and socially.

PR3 said, "So always families, especially, Saudi mothers, try to live in apartments that are close to schools, that we know that it has good people." Adding to this idea of locating the schools for

their children, PS4 recommended her school to the other mothers because she knows it is good for her children.

Subcategory 7.1G: Outlier Recommendations. A serious topic surfaced at the end of one focus group, so there was not an opportunity for follow up. PS1 highlighted the idea of asking for a psychologist when needed, and she shared her experiences:

It is difficult for our kids when they come from their Arabia environment to this new environment with a new language, new culture, and new life system. So, they face some challenges, and they might not accept it. ... I had this experience with my child when the school tried to work with us on his anger. [One day] the school suggested to us to let the psychologist see him, but I totally refused that when we were at the school. When we got home my husband tried to talk with me about this, but I did not accept the idea. So, he told me just let us try and ... let them know that we are agreeing with their decision, but we need to be with him on the 1st meeting with the psychologist... these three sessions that he took when he was in 3rd grade impacted his behavior and how he deals with others positively. Even on how he deals with his siblings and with us. So, I advise all moms if you see any misbehavior or something like that don't be afraid to discuss that with the school and ask about help from psychologist if needed.

A recommendation by one participant, PS1, was valuable to note as it supports what research states about the importance of family involvement. She believes it is important to engage with children in relation to their education at home even if they complete homework in an after-school program. She said:

... I learn that it's important to do something educational with your kids even like some educational activities to have a connection between you, them, and their education. Either

during the school time or during the break. The good thing is that the school gives you the packages if you want to teach your kids during the break.

PS1 suggested that fathers should be encouraged to be involved. She said:

I mean mostly the mom has the biggest part, but we must try to push the dad to be part of the experience or the process. I mean the kids mostly listen to the dad and there are other things that the mom cannot do, so we need the dad to be there.

Category 7.2: For American Schools. Expanding cultural awareness to incorporate more knowledge and awareness of Arabic culture, as well as the language needs of Arabic children and families, was the prominent focus of the recommendations for American schools. There was also a valuable recommendation for schools to engage with Arabic families who currently have children in their schools and to ask these families to help develop resources that the school can have available for newly arriving Arabic families.

The most frequently mentioned recommendation from all participants was for schools to provide an Arabic translator. PS2 said, “I think having translators will be very helpful.” As explained in the challenges section, PS3’s limited English prevented her from being at school. Therefore, she stated, “I would talk about the translator as I said my English is not good so this could provide me someone who could translate for me.”

PR1 described her English skill as “very good.” However, she suggested schools “make email lists based on these languages. In the emails, since Google translate is not the best for translating from English, schools might use words more easily understood by foreigners or “they [schools] need an Arabic person to translate it [emails, messages, and some notes from school].”

PR2 suggested schools provide Arabic parents with educational presentations. She said:

If there is a group of parents who need to know more about what their kids are learning at school, it will be nice if the school provides them with little presentations to help them. I mean there are parents who have limited education and there are some grandparents who are taking care of the children. In general, the educational level is diverse, so if the school was able to, provide presentations or something like that to help these parents catch up and be able to help their children. I mean there are some parents who were not able to learn English like my sister-in-law, for example, who is facing a challenge in communicating with her child. Her child is in preschool and when he came back from school, he will talk with her [in English] but the mother is not able to understand.

All mothers discussed that they want more support from schools in relation to their religion. As discussed in the challenges section, mothers were facing various difficulties regarding religious differences. To respond to these obstacles, mothers suggested that schools and teachers focus on fostering cultural awareness and responsiveness. Participants want schools to allow their children to pray. PR4 said, “The most important thing is acknowledging that we pray, and we need time and space to pray in,” rather than “act like they are stealing something or doing something wrong by trying to hide in the library or other areas.”

In addition to providing a separate space and time for Muslim students to pray, participants like PR1 called attention to the point of introducing and celebrating Ramadan and other Muslim religious holidays: “We need schools to celebrate them [Ramadan and Eid].” PS2 compared her school in northeast Tennessee with schools from larger cities at the U.S. and said:

In the big States and cities, the schools focus more on Ramadan and Eid. I mean the schools there acknowledged Ramadan and Eid but here they are not. I wish they do that

in our school here. Like even the teacher of the classroom said something at the beginning of Ramadan or during Eid.

Mothers argued that schools are doing a lot for other holidays so they should acknowledge and appreciate Muslims' holy month and days, which are culturally and religiously significant for participants' families. As PS2 said, "They are doing Christmas, so they need to do something for us." PR4 agreed that the Muslim holidays should at least be introduced to others in the school during Ramadan and Eid. PR4 said:

I expect that the teacher should at least send an email saying Ramadan Mubarak or Eid Mubarak. I feel that there is a great distance from other people. I mean they said happy holy day for the rest of the holidays in other religions.

On the other hand, PR4 debated this by stating, "I cannot ask school to celebrate my holidays while they are not celebrating other people's holidays. They should either celebrating everybody's holidays or no holidays."

PR2 highlighted that due to the increase of the Arabic and Muslim community in the U.S., schools should focus on Muslim holidays. She stated:

... like what they do with Thanksgiving. So, I wish schools in the United States would add this [celebrating Muslims' holidays], especially that the Arabic and the Muslim community keep growing. I mean, mentioning it is not enough especially because they celebrate most of the holidays. So, why they do not celebrate our holidays, which is very important to us and to our kids.

PR4 concluded with, "We exist, and our children are present in these schools. I mean please put us in the list [of celebrated holidays]." PS4 suggested American schools have more discussion with teachers and students about diversity stating:

Engaging the kids with each other will be helpful. Schools need to try to improve their students' awareness of diversity and how to interact with them. They need to find an appropriate way to teach students the importance of accepting others. They need to provide multiple activities to support this idea. As I said it is all from the school administration. They need to teach the teachers so that then the teachers will teach it to their students.

PR1 supported, “As I said before, schools here need to recognize us. Let other kids learn about our culture as our kids are learning about their culture.”

PS4 has the idea that the Arabic families with good English skills who have been in the country for a while can create resources for new Arabic families based on their experiences with schools or early childhood education centers. She emphasizes that, “When we have the language and we are able to help, we need to offer that help and be willing to support others.” Many ideas for this sort of support are provided by PR4:

My suggestion to the Arabic families that are already here is to provide the school with Arabic resources such as names and addresses for some Arabic stores, information about Arabic doctors and other business' names and contact information for other Arabic people, or any resources and information that would help the new family. And I wish the school would allow that and start sending these papers [home] with Arabic students in their school. It will be great also if they volunteer to be a translator at the school. And the most important thing is making a community for all Arab families to get together and know each other.

This concludes the discussion of themes from the focus group and individual interviews. The next section looks at the alignment of words and phrases in the concept maps with these themes.

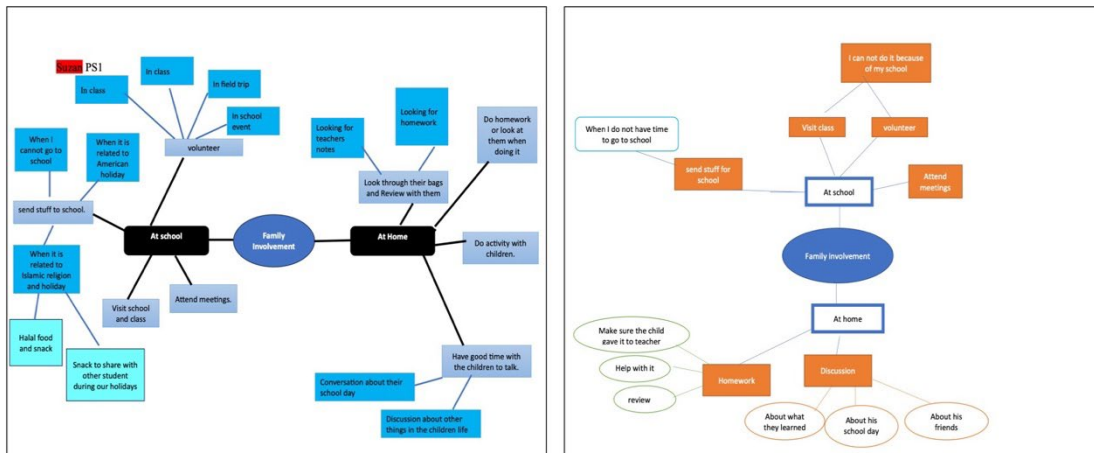
Concept Maps

All participants were asked to complete concept maps that make visible their perspective of family involvement. It took a few months to get all concept maps returned, and only six of the eight participants completed them. Several participants were unfamiliar with and unsure of how to complete a concept map even though the researcher provided guidance in a presentation with an example during the focus group interviews.

In the concept map, participants included the terms that related to family involvement from their perspective. The goal for the concept map data is to discover if the terms identified by mothers align with the themes that emerged from the focus group and individual interviews. Not all the themes from the focus groups and individual interviews are represented strongly in the concept maps.

Figure 13

Examples of Two Concept Maps from Participants



There were no words or phrases related to the theme of benefits of having children at the same school for a long time, parent and teacher roles, or mother's recommendations. This is likely due to the way that the prompts (what are your experiences with family involvement with

your child's school, and what does family involvement mean to you?) in the concept map guided or limited their thinking. Most of the words and phrases described what participants do in relation to involvement at home and at school, which can be seen in the way that all participants divided their concept map into two sections: at home and at school. This also led to less differentiation between parent roles and involvement that, in the interviews, centered more on beliefs about roles and engagement. Almost all participants' concept maps have a similar list of words/phrases in each at-home and at-school section. Words and phrases related to each theme as represented by participants are highlighted in the sections below.

School Community/Overview of School Traits

Only one participant included phrases that relate to attributes of the school like those discussed in the focus group and individual interviews. Her concept maps refer to schools having multiple communication platforms and easy communication with fast responses, and that new ideas, suggestions, and school policies are always welcomed and taken seriously.

Benefits of Having Children at the Same School for a Long Time

No participants considered this experience in their concept maps.

Parent/Teacher Roles

In the concept maps, parent and teacher roles were not addressed. The parent roles participants spoke about in the interviews focused on building relationships with their children, the responsibility of preparing their children for life by having conversations, and supporting their education; and these were not addressed in the concept maps.

Communication Between Home and School

Five of the participants noted information about ways they can communicate with the school or teacher, many of which were referenced in the interview discussions (Table 10).

Table 10

Categories for Communication Between Home & School

Category	# of participants coded for category	Participants' Words or Phrases
Ways of Communicating	5 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website• phone call, text, phone applications.• email• Weekly newsletter• Meetings• Attend activities.• Daily log and teacher notes.• Drop off and pick up time.

Involvement

This theme had the most representation of terms of the concept maps and included ideas from all six participants who completed the concept maps. The phrases focus on what participants do in relation to involvement at home and involvement at school (Table 11) and align with much of what was discussed by all participants in the interviews.

Table 11*Categories for Involvement*

Category	# of participants coded for category	Participants' Words or Phrases
Involvement at Home	5 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for teacher notes. • Create conversation with children to learn about a child's day and solve what needed about his friends and about wat they learned. • Discuss other things in the children's life. • Support homework by making sure the child gives it to the teacher, helping with homework and review, and looking at their children when they are doing homework. • Provide good food and care. • Engage with child in making and doing activities. • Encourage the child in applying his roles & responsibilities at home and school.
Involvement at School	6 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend PT) meetings and activities. • Be active in the school's communications platforms. • Donate and send stuff to school. • Engage. • Volunteer. • Visit class. • Volunteer in class. • Volunteer in field trip.
Communication Between Home and School	5 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple communication platforms • Easy communication with fast responses • New idea, suggestions, and complaints are always welcomed and taken seriously.

Challenges

Participants' terms about challenges in the concept maps are representative of three of the categories that emerged from the interviews. These are highlighted in Table 12 below. The prompts for the concept maps did not guide participants to consider solutions for involvement at

home or mothers’ concerns about their societal differences with U.S. schools, ideas that were discussed in-depth in the interviews.

Table 12

Categories for Challenges

Category	# of participants coded for category	Participants’ Words or Phrases
Challenges at Home with Involvement Challenges Being Involved and Feeling Connected at School	2 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time • Having more than a child in the family
Solutions for Challenges at School	5 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time. • Limited English. • The Nature of the parents’ work. • Having school. • Related to American holiday. • Related to Islamic religion and holiday. • I cannot go to school.
	2 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donating and sending stuff to school.

Summary

This chapter presented the procedures for coding the data, the demographics of the participants, the perspectives, and situations of the two cases (returning mothers and mothers who will stay in the U.S.), the themes that emerged from the data with representative examples, and a section on the findings from the concept maps. Chapter 5 will summarize and interpret the findings in relation to the research questions, discuss the limitations of the study, and introduce ideas for implications and future research.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of school-family involvement as perceived by Arabic mothers of young children attending school in the U.S. In addition, this study identifies some recommendations and suggestions from participants about parental involvement to help schools, teachers, and other Arabic families that have effective school-family involvement.

While the focal point in Chapter 4 was to present the seven overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data, the current chapter will be directed to the interpretation of the research findings. In addition, this chapter will incorporate a discussion of the findings, the connections of the findings to the theoretical framework, the limitations of the study, implications for future research and practice, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

This research was prompted by an extensive body of literature, as outlined in Chapter 2, indicating that parental engagement greatly benefits children's academic achievement, educational goals, and feelings of belonging in school, among other factors. (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). For the current study, a qualitative approach was an applicable method as its design captures the experiences of Arabic mothers of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs.

According to Maxwell (2005), because qualitative research produces linguistic data that states meaning at the individual level, it is appropriate for accomplishing goals connected to comprehending meaning from a particular set of people in a particular context. This research inquiry acknowledges several resources and research studies to identify the gap in knowledge.

Despite extensive research over the years demonstrating the importance of parental involvement in their children's education, numerous educators and scholars continue to highlight the constraints and difficulties associated with parental involvement in schools (Epstein et al., 2018; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Effective adoption of collaborative home-school partnership strategies is crucial for establishing significant parental engagement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019; Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Yotyodying & Wild, 2019). There was a lack of research that focused on Arabic parents, specifically mothers of children who are enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood programs. Therefore, Arabic mothers of young children in U.S. schools was the specific criteria for participant inclusion for this study.

The following sections provide interpretations of the findings in relation to each of the study's research questions.

Research Question 1

RQ1 What are the experiences with family engagement from the point of view of Arabic mothers of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?

The first research question in this study focused on the Arabic mothers' experiences, which was answered by the first six themes: 1) school community/overview of school traits, 2) benefits of having children at the same school for a long time, 3) parent/teacher roles, 4) communication between home and school, 5) involvement, and 6) challenges. All participants showed that they understand family involvement and its importance for children. However, as mentioned previously, each mother is involved in a way that is applicable to her and her circumstances. Mothers' experiences had many similarities as most of the participants came from similar backgrounds.

Theme 1: School Community/Overview of School Traits

Teachers' communication efforts can make families feel welcome and more comfortable talking with teachers about their hopes, concerns, and questions. Importantly, these partnerships between teachers and families can help teachers better support children's development at school by using parents' insights to help guide instruction (Forry et al., 2011).

Theme 2: Benefits of Having Children at the Same School for a Long Time

The findings showed that mothers of the PS group have more than one of their children attend or had attended the same school, which allowed them to know and have relationships with more people at that school. These mothers stated that they became more confident to interact with the teachers and be involved with them when they previously had that same teacher with their older children, which also appears to lead to good relations that a child may have with their older siblings' teachers. Moreover, the benefits of having children at the same school for a long time also includes relationships with other Arabic families.

Mothers of the PR group did not have the same experience of having their children at the same school for a long time. However, they stated that having such opportunities would improve their involvement level as they would know more about the teachers and school.

Theme 3: Parent/Teacher Roles

Mothers attempted to assist their children by assigning time for homework and discussing their school experiences. They actively organized the home environment to facilitate their children's learning in addition to supporting their children in preparing for school activities and celebrations. Regarding family-school collaborations, these mothers perceived their main role as providing support at home. This could show some contrasts with prior research suggesting that family-school partnerships should involve shared efforts between families and

educators at school. These collaborations can take various forms, including volunteering at school, participating in school activities, accompanying children to the library, joining them on school trips, engaging in discussions with them, and inquiring about their school day (Epstein, 1996; Henrich, 2013; Hilado, 2013)

Bronfenbrenner (1989) explained that the microsystem involves several individuals that have an immediate effect on a child's life, such as peers, teachers, schools, siblings, and neighbors. The participant mothers were aware of the significant impact of peers on children, and they aim to have discussions with their children about their friends. Moreover, mothers emphasized the different concerns that they have regarding their children's friends and classmates (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

Theme 4: Communication Between Home and School

The results of the current study showed that all participants acknowledged the importance of communication and parental involvement in school, recognizing that it varies for everyone based on the situation and preference. Mothers prefer to have in-person meetings as they discussed that they feel more confident talking with teachers in person, such as during the drop-off and pick-up time. They like to have small conversations with the teachers during that time. Mothers mentioned diverse ways teachers communicate with them such as email, messages, teacher notes, and others.

The findings of this study showed that feeling welcomed by the teachers and school was a critical motivation for mothers to communicate with the school and be involved more. These findings corroborate the ideas of Jeynes (2011), who emphasized the critical need for a loving and supportive environment to move family involvement to the next level. All mothers who

participated liked to stay informed and be aware of what was going on with their children at school through the pictures and videos that teachers send via apps.

Theme 5: Involvement

The subcategory “involvement at home” shows the efforts of mothers to support their children at home. It represents a microsystem within ecological theory—the child in the home environment—which underscores the significance of home as the primary environment where mothers engage with their children providing crucial support across social, emotional, cognitive, and academic domains (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Participants highlighted what they are doing at home for their children, and they underscore the significance of home as the primary environment where mothers engage with their children’s education and other aspects of their lives. However, an argument was raised by most of the participants concerning the spending of excessive time on homework, which detracts from valuable family time.

The findings of the current study showed that Arabic mothers value involvement in school, and they are trying to be actively involved with their children’s school. However, not all of them were able to be involved frequently due to different factors and challenges that limited them. Most challenges for the returning mothers were related to a lack of time as they were all involved in graduate studies in addition to one holding a job. The mothers who are staying stated that their major challenges were their English language skills and societal differences.

Theme 6: Challenges

The findings of this study showed that Arabic mothers want to participate in their children's schooling at home and school, and they are working toward that; however, various obstacles, circumstances, and other factors often prevent their involvement. Moreover, for schools aiming to increase parental engagement among minority groups, it is essential to become

aware of the needs of these students and their parents and work toward serving all families equitably (Premo et al., 2023). The interview data showed that the mothers' limited time prevents them from attending some of the school events, especially the working and student mothers. Mothers' jobs and school are parts of the child's exosystem, which affects mothers' involvement in their children's education, subsequently influencing child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Additionally, mothers reported struggling with time management. They encountered difficulties in attending school activities due to the conflicting demands of their jobs, schooling, and their children's school events.

Despite encountering challenges that limited their involvement, the mothers were noted to possess flexibility and care, enabling them to overcome these barriers. Mothers discussed different solutions that can help them overcome their challenges. Seeking out other Arabic families who have been living in the area to get advice about locating a good school, how to deal with various situations related to schools, and to be a translator for the newly arriving Arabic families were recommendations for overcoming challenges based on the experiences of these mothers. Also, these mothers learned to ask for what they needed from the teachers and the schools related to helping with understanding the homework, school rules, and ways to be involved. Areas where they think that more guidance is needed for American schools are related to acknowledging and supporting the religious practices of Muslim families, which can also apply to the practices of other ethnic groups.

The NAEYC (2019) position statement on developmentally appropriate practice acknowledges and encourages the individuality of children and families. Establishing relationships with families and having knowledge about them is critical for schools to gain insights into and understand their concerns. According to Arabic mothers, they may find it

challenging to express their concerns and communicate them to their child's school. Findings from this study also reveal that mothers had some challenges sharing their concerns with teachers or schools because they did not want to be misunderstood, and for these participants, the challenges were often particularly related to societal and religious differences. Focusing on knowing families' cultures, beliefs, and traditions could offer schools valuable information to achieve and facilitate a successful family-school engagement practice. The macrosystem was reflected in the mothers' concerns: values, cultures, and religion. Bronfenbrenner (1995) stated that the macrosystem is constructed of a variety of cultural components, such as values, culture, ethnicity, and religion that influence a child's development. Mothers' focus, views, and concerns were shaped by the cultural norms, religion, and traditions of their society, prompting them to prioritize instilling the values of their culture in their children.

The findings of this study showed that existing school-family involvement practices do not particularly address the needs of Arabic parents, and additional resources and services are needed for schools to fully engage these students and their families.

Research Question 2

RQ2 What are the recommendations for parent involvement by Arabic mothers of children enrolled in U.S. schools or early childhood education programs?

Smith (2020) investigated the practices of Head Start teachers in relation to family communication and engagement with non-English language families, specifically Latino migrant workers. The research highlighted the significance of offering families written materials in their primary languages and providing interpretation services. However, teachers noted that these practices are only effective when materials are translated accurately, and even so, there is a potential of excluding families who are not proficient readers (Smith, 2020). The current study

emphasized a fundamental need of providing interpreters, in addition to the input of the mother participants revealing that programs like Google Translate may not be helpful enough for schools' translation of important school communications. These mother participants suggested that Arabic families who have had children enrolled in a U.S. school for several years serve as interpreters and support for other Arabic families, particularly for those new to the school. The general need for interpretation services was significantly stressed throughout the focus group and individual interview portions.

This led to the need to provide new Arabic families with orientation sessions to support them and foster their adaptation processes to the school environment. Equally important is preparing existing students to be open to new cultures. Recognizing and rewarding those who offer assistance and support establishes a positive example for others to emulate. Additionally, schools and school districts should implement strong anti-bullying rules.

Limitations of the Study

Although this qualitative study provides an opportunity to explore the perspectives of Arabic mothers about their experiences of family involvement with their children's education, some limitations are acknowledged here. Limitations are factors identified by the researcher as potential weaknesses or issues with the study (Creswell, 2015).

Arabic families in the U.S. have diverse situations and reasons for living in the U.S. for different lengths of time, which impact different understandings and perspectives about the experiences. These variations were accounted for minimally through demographics and conversations, yet not explored in-depth in this study. Future studies that group participants according to these differences can learn how they might affect the results.

Another limitation of this study is the limited sample size. Although the researcher demonstrated thoughtfulness and strategy in gathering data from eight Arabic mothers coming from different countries and with different plans of going back or staying in the U.S., the constraints of reliability and generalizability that may result from the small sample size are aspects that need to be addressed in future research. This constraint limits the chance to compare responses or generalize findings to the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Moreover, all the participant mothers in this research are Muslims, whereas there exist Arabic students and parents from diverse religious backgrounds. It is imperative to incorporate such parents in forthcoming studies, which might impact the results. Additionally, two of the PR mothers did not complete their concept maps, which poses limits on the cross-referencing of data that are important for rigorous study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Finally, while the researcher identified her personal stance and bias, it is impossible to remove bias from research (Creswell, 2015).

Implications and Future Research

Premo et al. (2023) suggested schools and preschool programs work toward serving all families equitably. Emergent bilingual children and their families have unique experiences, which should be acknowledged by schools as these families face additional barriers related to school involvement, including linguistic, social, economic, and cultural factors. The results of this current study indicate that Arabic mothers seek opportunities to actively engage in their child's education. They value many methods provided by schools and their child's teachers for communication and involvement, yet they identified challenges and recommendations for addressing those challenges that can be applied to future research.

For example, schools can develop processes for learning and understanding families' cultures, beliefs, and traditions, including specific societal and religious differences and needs. This could offer schools valuable information to achieve and facilitate successful family-school engagement practices with these populations. Schools can call on Arabic families, or other families of ELL students currently enrolled in their schools to serve as supports and translators for other Arabic and immigrant families. The culture of community among the Arabic families reported by the mothers in this study could be researched further to discover ways that this existing community collaboration outside of the school can align with the schools to support improved family involvement. Schools could create Arabic family clubs where families and children can gather for events, collect information related to homework, ask for what families need concerning their time and religion, etc. These clubs could apply to other immigrant groups as well.

There are many avenues for future research inspired by this study of Arabic mothers' experiences of school involvement, as noted in the following list:

- Replicate the study with the intention to investigate two groups of participants to compare differences in experiences from higher diversity and lower diversity locations.
- Gather a cross-sectional sample from various locations across the U.S. Investigate the culturally and linguistically responsive school-family involvement programs from the perspective of the program, their reports on their success (or lack of), and reports from participating families. This could lead to the development of a scale that assesses Arabic mothers' level of satisfaction with current schools' family

involvement programs and practices and whether they are culturally and linguistically supportive for diverse families.

- Use a grounded theory approach to develop a cultural framework designed to equip teachers and all school communities with cultural proficiency for effectively navigating diverse cultural contexts.
- Examine American students' knowledge of Arabic and Islam cultures.
- Investigate and determine the factors that influence the resilience of Arabic parents who have negative emotions concerning their own past school experiences.

Conclusion

According to research, a family's level of involvement in their children's education significantly affects the achievement of their child or children (Grant & Ray, 2023). Research indicates that when instructors and parents collaborate and operate as a team, it is beneficial for teachers, children, and parents alike (Grant & Ray, 2023). Furthermore, studies have repeatedly shown that children's education is improved when parents, students, teachers, schools, and the community collaborate (NAEYC, 2022).

The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) was one of the theories chosen to serve as the foundation for this investigation. It emphasizes the ways in which a child's diverse circumstances impact their developmental processes. According to Bronfenbrenner (1995), the idea clarifies how a person's relationships with their family, friends, and school affect their development as well as how these groups interact with one another.

The United States Office of English Language Acquisition (2023) presented the most commonly spoken languages in the United States among English learners during the 2019–20

school year. It highlighted the fast increase in the Arabic-speaking population, which appeared to be the second most spoken language after Spanish.

This qualitative research project aimed to investigate the experiences of Arabic parents in the United States with parental involvement in their children's education. The purpose of the study was to determine parents' thoughts about the family involvement programs in their children's schools, as well as to investigate ideas and suggestions they had for schools and other parents. The findings showed that there is a significant cultural gap that must be addressed. Schools can facilitate this by offering interpretation services, such as translating documents, forms, letters, and voice messages and providing these families meetings upon request. Additionally, including some translated information on the school website can increase Arabic families' accessibility. As suggested by participants of this study, other Arabic parents who have been in the U.S. before could be involved in these processes as experts. These Arabic parents could also serve as cultural navigators to assist new arrival Arabic families to learn about the U.S. education system and understand its differences compared to what they are used to in their home country.

The findings of the current study demonstrate and highlight factors that impact Arabic mothers' involvement in their children's education. Additionally, the study highlights potential areas of development for teachers, school staff and family-school involvement programs with a concentration of diversity. Finally, evaluation instruments that support researchers and school involvement programs in examining and investing the level and effectiveness of the involvement programs diversity can be considered and developed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions for the survey:

Please choose one child as a focus for this survey and for our discussions with you as a participant in this study.

1. Participant name

2. Age of child

3. What is the child's gender?

Female _____

Male _____

Other

4. Child grade in School

PreK (3-5 Years).

Kindergarten

1st grade

2nd grade

3rd grade

5. The type of school your child is enrolled in currently

Private PreK

Public PreK

Private elementary

Public elementary

6. The number of years a child has been enrolled in informal childcare (if any)

7. Relationship with a child

Mother

Father

Other

8. Number of your children

9. The ages of other children

10. Your gender?

Female _____

Male _____

Other (specify)

11. What is your age?

12. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Less than high school

High school

Some college but no degree

Associate degree

Bachelor's Degree

Graduate Degree

Other

13. Employment status

Not employed

Employed part-time

- Employed full-time
- Enrolled in higher education program part-time
- Enrolled in higher education program full-time

Other

14. What is your native country?

15. How long have you been in the United States?

16. For how long are you planning to stay in the United States?

17. Ability with the English language:

A. Spoken English

- Minimal English in need of support to communicate with and understand English speakers
- Sufficient English for communicating and understanding English speakers
- Mastery in English at a high level for communicating and understanding English speakers

Other

B. Written English

a. (Reading)

- No ability to read in English
- Minimal ability to read in English and need support to read in English
- Sufficient ability to read in English
- Mastery with a high level of reading in English

b. (Writing)

- No ability to write in English
- Minimal ability to write in English and need support to write in English
- Sufficient ability to write in English
- Mastery ability to write in English

Appendix B: Potential Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

Definitions

Refer to the following definitions when answering questions.

PARENTING: Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.

DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent / family organizations.

1. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about collaborating with your child's school regarding their learning and development? If yes, please elaborate.

2. How does your family involvement experience with your selected child differ than your experience with your first child? If this is your first child, what would you change in your family involvement in the future? (State the ages of the children now)
3. How does having or not having other children impact your family involvement in your child's education and school.
4. Since when did your children start enrolling at that school including your older children if you have? How do you think that impact your experience?
5. What do you like about your child's school?
6. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about whether your child's teachers or someone at the school helped you understand your child's stage of development or education needs?
7. What does the school need to do well to serve your child?
 - For example, does the school explain how to check your child's homework?
Please elaborate further.
8. What ideas do you have that might help you be more involved as a volunteer or supportive in your child's classroom or school?
 - Can you be involved to help outside the school day, outside the classroom, other?
Elaborate on ideas.
 - What is lacking for your child due to your inability to participate as a volunteer or visitor during school hours?
 - Would you recommend these to the school/teacher?
9. What role do you think teachers should have in your child's education?
10. What role do you think parents should have in their children's education?

11. Whose responsibility is it to help the child understand homework?
12. How does having or not having your husband with you impact your involvement in your child education and school?
13. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about factors that prevent you from feeling connected to the school?
14. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about what should the school do to make Arab parents feel more connected and involved?
15. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about whether Arab parent have the same opportunities as parents from other ethnicities to
 - To volunteer?
 - To make decisions about your child's learning and education.
 - Are there any types of biases you experience as an Arab parent either from the school, teachers, students, and other parents?
16. Describe your experiences helping your child with his/her education.
17. Does the school assign homework that requires your child to discuss with you things that he/she learned in class? What types of learning experiences would you like the school to value as relevant for you to facilitate with your child at home?
18. Is there anything you want to say that you didn't get to fully express about challenges you are experiencing while helping your child? And how you deal with these challenges?
19. What suggestions do you have for schools to better support Arabic families? Please elaborate even if discussed in bits in other questions.
20. What suggestions do you have for new Arabic families?

21. What are the highlights of American schools you've experienced that would benefit children in your home country?

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and share your thoughts.

Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide better protocols and support for other Arabic parents.

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

Definitions

Refer to the following definitions when answering questions.

PARENTING: Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.

DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent / family organizations.

Opening

18. The facilitator introduces herself and the process for this gathering.
19. Share a bit about yourself as an international parent.

Introductory

20. Can you describe what you do to support your child's education at home and at school?

21. Have you gotten suggestions from your child's teacher or someone at the school about helping him/her **with homework**?

22. Have you gotten suggestions from your child's teacher or someone at the school about helping him/her **with behavior**?

Transition

23. Describe your experience when collaborating with the school regarding your children's learning and development?

24. How do you feel at your child's school? Do you feel welcome at your child's school?

Explain

Key

25. Describe the different ways that you and the teacher can communicate? Elaborate with examples, please.

- Which is most successful for you?
- Would other methods be better for you? Explain.
- Did your child's teacher ask you the best way(s) to communicate?

26. Describe your experiences with volunteering at your child's school.

27. As a diverse parent, do you think you have the same opportunities as parents from other ethnicities for:

- volunteering?
- making decisions about your child's learning and education?

28. Describe a different experience when you wanted to participate in your child's school.

- Were you able to participate? Explain.
- Were you not able to do it? Explain.

29. Describe your experiences with helping your child with their education at home.

Elaborate on challenges, available resources, and others?

30. What are your opportunities for participating in decision-making regarding your child's education at his/her school?

31. What barriers are you experiencing when contacting your child's teacher or school?

Ending questions

32. What should the school do to make diverse parents feel more connected and involved?

33. What are your recommendations for other diverse families that would help make their experiences with their child's school and education successful?

Moderator summarizes the discussion points.

34. Is there anything of significance you did not get a chance to say?

Summary by the facilitator and thank you.

VITA

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