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Parental Engagement of Families Living in Colonias: Engaging in Their Children's Education

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OF FAMILIES LIVING

IN *COLONIAS:* ENGAGING IN THEIR

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

EUGENIA HERNANDEZ-MORENO

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ABSTRACT

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Family engagement has been identified as a factor that influences the academic achievement of elementary children. *Colonias* are low-income neighborhoods who lack the infrastructure and whose residents struggle with the accessibility of everyday necessities to survive. Parents living in *colonias* are faced with unique challenges that influence the extent of their family engagement in their children's education. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent of family engagement of families living in *colonias* in elementary children's education in two school districts in South Texas. Interviews, photographs, and surveys were analyzed to determine the different factors that hinder and/or promote families living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education.

DEDICATION

Thank you God for giving me the strength to keep going. The completion of my doctoral studies would not have been possible without God and the support of my wonderful family. I dedicate my dissertation to my two beautiful and smart daughters, Victoria and Samantha, and our baby Angel up in heaven, who were my fuel to finish this dissertation. To my wonderful and supporting husband, Eliud, who encouraged and walked beside me reminding me that I could complete this journey. Thank you for always being so patient, drying my tears, and giving me the strength to keep going during those long days I had to write nonstop. To my wonderful parents, Arturo and Tomasita, for their unconditional love and support who always helped me so I could dedicate time to my studies. They instilled in me the love and value of education; I am forever grateful for that. *Gracias Apa y Ama, por toda su ayuda, por siempre confiar en mí en que podía terminar, y por motivarme a seguir adelante. ¡Este doctorado es de ustedes, lo logramos!*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Colonias

Colonias began developing in the 1970s along the Mexico-Texas border. By the 1980s there were about 1,100 *colonias* along the southern border of the United States (Olmedo & Ward, 2016). *Colonias* are low-income neighborhoods who lack the infrastructure and whose residents struggle with the accessibility of everyday necessities to survive (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015; Texas Secretary of State, 2016; Olmedo & Ward, 2016). *Colonias* can be described as subdivisions that consist of low-income households "along the Texas-Mexico border may lack … potable water and sewer systems, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing" (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015; Olmedo & Ward, 2016; Texas Secretary of State, 2016). The majority of residents living in *colonias* are Mexican or Mexican-American, and their income is below the state poverty level (Texas Secretary of State, 2016). These families tend to "lack some of the most basic living necessities" (Texas Secretary of State, 2016), which ultimately affects the family's engagement in their children's education. Families in *colonias* often live in dangerous and inappropriate living conditions where necessities such as safe drinking water and electricity are absent (Strickland, 2016). Families living in *colonias* are at risk for health issues due to the lack of cleaning running water and sewage systems (Galvin, 2018; Nemawarkar, 2016; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012).

Colonia housing is poor; many of the homes are built in phases and include trailers due to families' lack of financial resources to secure and maintain better housing (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Galvin, 2018; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). This type of building process, called "housing consolidation" (Olmedo & Ward, 2016), might extend over several years until the house is finished and the lot is paid off. It is also common to see water hoses or electricity cables run from one house to the next because neighbors tend to share these living necessities (Barton et al., 2015).

The majority of the families living in *colonias* have no health care or health insurance. If health issues occur within the family, parents are unable to miss work to take care of their children or their own health needs. In most situations, only one parent in the home is employed. This financial burden also limits the family to one vehicle, which creates more hardship. Although conditions have slightly improved, many families continue to face difficulties. Approximately 40% of *colonia* families earn an income less than the federal poverty threshold (Barton et al., 2015; States News Service, 2015; Strickland, 2016). The unemployment rate of *colonia* families is eight times greater than that of the Texas unemployment population (Texas Secretary of the State, 2016). However, many *colonia* residents are also involved in entrepreneurship, which helps create more jobs within their own *colonia* (Barton et al., 2015). For example, some *colonia* families create a mechanic shop, convenience store, fruit stand, flea market, or small restaurant.

Living in *Colonias*

Children who live in *colonias* are from families whose income level is considered at or below the federal poverty threshold for 2016 which, according to the U.S. Census (2016) is approximately $24,339 for a household of two adults and two children. The U.S. Census (2016)

reported approximately 40.6 million individuals living in poverty, 13.3 million of which are children under the age of 18. Although data indicate that the number of children living in poverty has slightly decreased from 22% in 2010 to 18% 2016, a large number of children still live in poverty (U.S. Census, 2016). Of the children living in poverty, one in five lives in a low-income household and one out of six is Latino/a (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Koball & Jiang, 2018; Marschall, 2006). In Hidalgo County in South Texas, there are approximately 121,167 children under the age of 18 living in poverty (U.S. Census, 2016). Amatea and West-Olantunji (2007) explained that poverty does not only mean the lack of financial means, but also the "lack of power … and a sense of exclusion" (p. 81).

In some poverty-stricken households, multiple generations or relatives live under the same roof. Several families might live in the same household to save money on expenses (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012; Strickland, 2016). Parents living in poverty are focused on surviving and providing food and shelter for their children, which means they may have low engagement in their children's schooling (Strickland, 2016). In some cases, children drop out of school to help financially support family (Strickland, 2016). Engagement in school is not a priority for parents whose obligation is to provide their children with the tools to survive.

The emphasis on survival leads to low parental engagement in school events. (Strickland, 2016). Parents of children who attend high-poverty schools remain distant or do not converse with school staff, including their children's teachers (Barone, 2011). These statistics are even gloomier for children living in *colonias.* Goldenberg (2001) noted that only about 30% of poverty-stricken parents attend school events; however, Barone (2011) cited research from Delgado-Gaitan (1992) indicating that the same parents do support their children's education at home.

Statement of the Problem

Studies have shown that children who come from low-income families have struggle academically (Mayo & Siraj, 2014; Neville et al., 2013). When parents are engaged and present in their children's schools, there are great benefits. Some of these benefits include an increase in academic achievement, internalized motivation to continue with their education, positive attitude toward school, and increase in student self-esteem (Marschall, 2006; Mayo & Siraj, 2015). However, the problem is that there is a lack of family engagement coming from parents who reside in *colonias*. Educators must be informed on how they can help increase family engagement and foster academic success of *colonia* children.

Several barriers hinder the engagement of parents in their children's education (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Walker et al., 2011). The culture of families is a major influence on how engaged the parents are in their children's schooling. One of the prevalent beliefs some parents have is that they do not want to be perceived as disrespectful by intruding in the schools (Hollinger, 2001). Even if they do not attend school events, parents who help their children with school work in the evenings, can demonstrate strong support for their children's education. Educators often perceive that parents do not care about their children's education because they are not present at school events, when, in fact, they are showing their care in other realms of their children's lives (Barone, 2011; Hollinger, 2001; Marschall, 2006).

Many parents might be also distance themselves from school functions due to their anxiety toward school, language barriers, beliefs, lack of transportation, or poverty (Barone, 2011; Hollinger, 2001; Marschall, 2006). Many of the parents who do not participate in education or attend school events often lack education themselves (Marschall, 2006). This is why educators must be able to understand the different factors that detract from or promote family

engagement. Numerous studies outlined different strategies or models to help increase family engagement (Epstein, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2011). However, it is essential that educators first know the characteristics of the parents they work with to see if educators can identify models that work for those distinct groups. It is important to keep in mind that not all models work for all groups of parents (Hollinger, 2001).

Need for the Study

There is a need to study how engaging parents living in *colonias* can effectively engage in the children's education. It is imperative that parental engagement in school is studied to determine what factors detract from or promote family engagement of *colonia* parents. Statistics show that schools who serve students from *colonias* are faced with the challenge of low academic achievement. One of the factors that can increase the academic achievement of students is family engagement (Driessen et al., 2005; Neville et al., 2013; Hong & Ho, 2005; Epstein, 1984). Family engagement contributes to students' academic achievement in some manner (Driessen et al., 2005; Hong & Ho, 2005; Neville et al., 2013). Numerous researchers have described that parents who become involved in their children's education can create numerous positive effects that will endure throughout their children's academic life (Cedeño et al., 2016; Clayton et al., 2004; Gonzalez-De Hass et al., 2005; Neville et al., 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Detrimental effects of children's education may occur when schools do not engage parents (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). There is a need to study how engaging parents living in *colonias* can effectively impact children's education (Driessen et al., 2005). Parental involvement in a child's education can create numerous positive effects that will endure throughout the child's academic life (Gerard & Prior, 2007; Nye et al., 2006; Renth, 2015).

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Purpose of the Study

Low family engagement is evident in families who reside in *colonias.* This qualitative study examined the lives of parents who reside in *colonias* to understand the extent of family engagement present elementary children's education in two South Texas school districts. The study focused on the extent of the family engagement from parents who live in *colonias.* The study identified which factors promote or hinder family engagement.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do parents who reside in *colonias* participate in their elementary children's education in two South Texas school districts?

2. Which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this study, promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?

3. What are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study, that hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?

Significance of the Study

Family engagement models have been in place for many years (Epstein, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Studies have explored how children from low-income families are affected academically (Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Neville et al., 2013). It is important to study the lives of families living in low-income households such as those from *colonias* in order to help children from such areas succeed.

Furthermore, educational leaders will also benefit from this study because they will be able to know what factors in the lives of parents who reside in *colonias* help to promote family engagement in *colonia* elementary children's education. There are many misconceptions among educators regarding minority family engagement. Many educators believe that minority parents

do not get involved in their children's education because they simply do not care (Barone, 2011; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). This deficit theory of thinking must be challenged, and educators need to understand the culture of minority parents and how they do participate in their children's education (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). Family engagement can occur in nontraditional ways that are unfamiliar to educators. Educators should become acquainted with the factors that contribute to a decrease in family engagement at school events and understand that parents can still be engaged even though they might not be following traditional forms of family engagement. For this reason, it is crucial that educators have an understanding of the culture of their students.

Family engagement can help students gain more pride in education, increase self-esteem, create a stronger bond between the children and their parents, and instill a greater love for education (Marschall, 2006). Educational leaders can help parents become more involved with their children's education by providing them with opportunities at school functions or offering presentations that will help the parents acquire more knowledge about family engagement. Validating the culture of the students' parents can foster a significant advantage in increasing family engagement within the school (Menchaca-Ochoa et al., 2012; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). In essence, "teacher awareness of cultural and community issues" and school "efforts to engage parents" play a significant role in increasing family engagement (Marschall, 2006, p. 1069). When teachers reach out to parents, parents feel more confident about helping their kids at home (Epstein, 1984). Seeing more parents involved with their students causes teachers to ask parents to implement learning activities at home. The more this cycle continues, the more benefits children will receive (Epstein, 1984). Parents will feel a more collaborative effort in

supporting their students' education, understanding how to help them at school, and how to make a better home-school connection (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009).

Definition of Terms

It is important to note the definitions of terms that were used throughout this study and appear in this dissertation.

At-risk students. Students in Texas are identified at risk of dropping out of school by falling under one of the 13 types of criteria as per the Texas Education Agency (2010). Some of the categories include: (a) students in prekindergarten, kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, or Grade 3 who did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instruments; (b) students who failed a grade level for one or more school years; (c) students who were placed in alternative education program or expelled; (d) students who are English Language Learners (ELL); and (e) students who are homeless or under the custody of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Colonias. *Colonias* are subdivisions that consist of low-income households "along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack … potable water and sewer systems, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing" (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015; Texas Secretary of State, 2016). The majority of the residents living in *colonias* are Hispanic with a household income below the "state average of $16,717" (Texas Secretary of State, 2016). Hidalgo County is the county with the most *colonias* in Texas (Texas Secretary of State, 2016).

Low-income households. A low-income household is a family household that has an annual income of $22,050 or less; low-income households are considered the below the poverty level (Texas Secretary of State, 2016).

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Low-income schools. Schools are considered low-income schools if they receive Title I funds due to the majority of the student population receiving free or reduced lunches. Qualification for the free or reduced lunch program is determined by the student's family income (Bright Hub Education, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018).

Parent. For the purpose of this study, a parent is the child's legal guardian who is responsible for taking care of the child's primary physical, emotional, and educational needs.

Family engagement. Family engagement is defined as any type of engagement by the parent in their child's education both inside and outside of the school (Baker et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2009). According to Bowen and Lee (2006), family engagement can take the following forms: parents attending the school, parents discussing school-related activities with their children at home and at school, instilling a love for learning, and parents helping their children with homework at home. The engagement can be in different forms, both at school and at home (Smith et al., 2011). The parents interviewed also defined family engagement as engaged in their children's education both at school and at home.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation in this study was the number of parents who were willing to participate in the parent interviews. Family engagement was one of the focus areas of this study. There were low numbers of parents who are willing to participate in the interviews, this can also indicate the lack of or low family engagement level at the schools. Also, the fact that only parents from *colonias* were represented in the study limits the generalizability of the findings to all schools with minority populations and/or low-income populations. The limited understanding on the part of the parents related to family engagement is also a limitation. Another limitation is the way the

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schools were selected. One school from each school district was selected based on the ease of access to get permission from each of their Principals.

Assumptions

An assumption from this study was that parents would respond truthfully to the interview questions. Another assumption was that the parents would conduct themselves as they would naturally do so at all times during the study.

Conclusion

Parents living in *colonias* are faced with unique circumstances that might promote or hinder their engagement in their children's education. Having high family engagement is beneficial in various areas of a child's life. Children who have parents involved in their schooling tend to have a greater increase in academic achievement, social-emotional development, among other positive areas. This study on family engagement was important to help increase the academic achievement of all students, but specifically, those who reside in *colonias*.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the research that is available regarding family engagement and *colonias.* The history of family engagement helps to understand how it has evolved in the schools over the years. Policies regarding family engagement were being passed decades ago to increase the family engagement in schools (Texas Secretary of State, 2018).

Theoretical Framework-Parent Involvement Continuum

The theoretical framework for this research study will be guided by the Parental Involvement Continuum. This framework, created by Cervone and O'Leary (1982), views parent involvement on a continuum ranging from parents as passive participants when they receive information to parents as active participants when they are part of the learning process of their children (Figure 1). The continuum can be read both horizontally and vertically. This continuum was selected over other family engagement models because of how it views parental engagement as a continuum. Parental engagement is defined as engagement by the parent in their child's education both inside and outside of the school (Baker et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2009). The engagement can be viewed in different situations, both at school and at home (Smith et al., 2011). The participants of this study defined family engagement as engaged in their children's education both at school and at home.

Across this continuum, there are four categories which range from having parents as passive to active participants. The first category is called "Reporting Progress." This is the

category where parents can be the most passive participants because they are simply receiving information from the school. However, under this category, there are different activities in which parents can participate passively or actively. For example, some of the more passive activities include teacher notes and newsletters. Then the activities can then progress to more active activities such as phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, and home-school notebooks. The second category is called "Special Events" and this too includes activities that range from passive to active. Some examples of passive activities are open house, talent shows, and festivals.

On the other hand, parents can be more active in special events that include parents as part of the organization or facilitation of the events. The third category is "Parent Education" which is more active than the first two categories. This category includes passive activities where parents take part of committees that make small decisions to committees that make more complex decisions. The fourth category, in which parents can participate in is "Parent Teaching." Although this is the most active category on the continuum, it also includes activities in which parents can be passive participants. Under this category, parents are more committed and engaged in their children's education through learning different activities that support the content and materials that the students are learning in the classroom.

**Parents as Passive
Participants**

↓

**Parents as Active
Participants**

| Reporting Progress | Special Events | Parent Education | Parents Teaching |

**Parents as Passive
Participants** →————————————————————————————————————→ **Parents as Active
Participants**
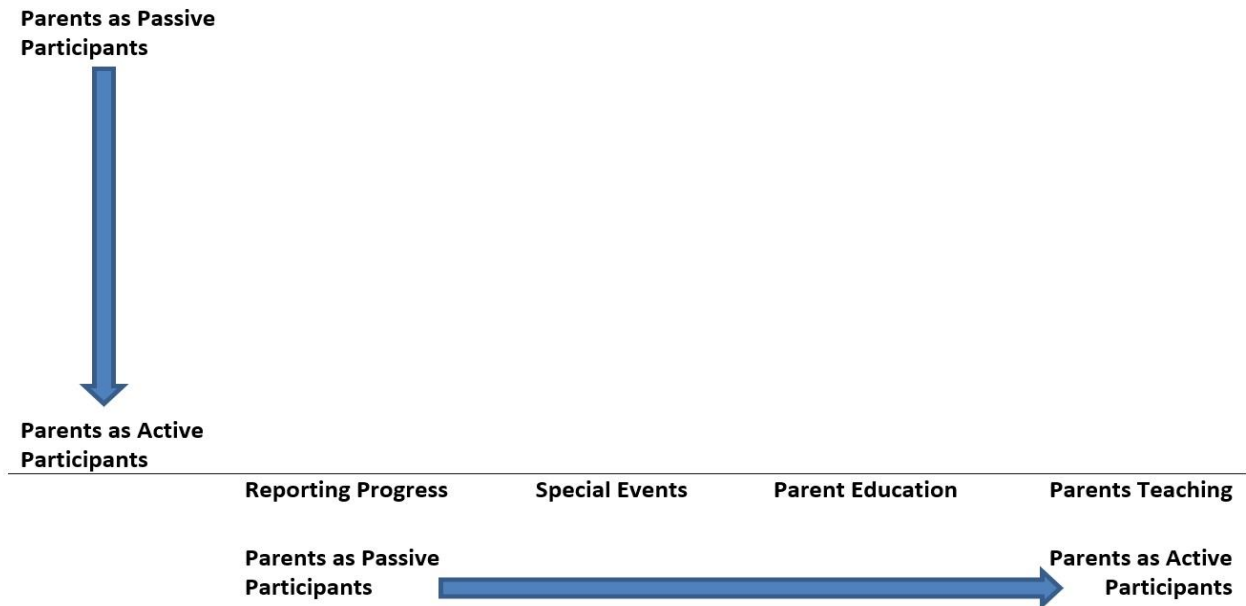
Figure 1. Parent Involvement Continuum

Note. Adapted from "A Conceptual Framework for Parent Involvement," by B. T. Cervone and K. O'Leary, 1982, Educational Leadership, 40(2), p. 49. Copyright 2002 by EBSCO Publishing.

This continuum is affected by different factors such as "cultural and language barriers, family situations, or economic conditions" (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982, p. 49). Some of these factors are what hinder or promote parent engagement. There are some parents that might be able to start in the most active category of "Parents Teaching." However, there might be some parents that need more encouragement and/or support to achieve that level of parent engagement.

Historical Perspective

Parent engagement has been an issue since the beginning of the creation of the school system. For this reason, the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) was created in 1897 to help support education through the communication between the school and home (Cutler, 2000; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). By the 1900s, the parent-teacher organizations began to emerge and their concepts begun to change towards strengthening their partnership between the home and school (Cutler, 2000). The National Congress of Mothers (NCM) was later expanded to include all parents, students, and teachers. The NCM concept evolved to be called

the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) in 1924. However, some educators continued to be against these organizations because of their beliefs that parents could be equal partners in the students' education (Cutler, 2000). The associations began to grow, and eventually, there were various versions of the parent-teacher associations across the schools (Cutler, 2000; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The purpose of these associations was to include parents and see them as important contributors to the education of their children. During the 1960s, the concept of family engagement changed by having parents participate in school activities (Watson et al., 2012). Policies started to emerge after the 1960s to ensure schools were addressing the issue of family engagement.

There have been several federal policies and programs in place to address family engagement from parents of school children. The Department of Education has passed legislation to address family engagement since 1965, after Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title 1 Section 1118 (Brenchley, 2015; Cutler, 2000; Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2020). This ESEA required the local education agencies (LEA) to improve family engagement and provide parents with written policies (Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2020). Furthermore, the strategies required by policies would also be used in conjunction with other programs. For example, the 1965 Head Start program, among other programs, was designed to include parents in the education of their children by viewing them as important contributors to their children's education (Cutler, 2000; Epstein, 1984; Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2020). Programs such as *Follow-Through* and *Follow-Through Planned Variations,* from 1967-1971, continued to require schools to include parents in schools from Grades 1 through 3 (Epstein, 1984).

The ESEA of 1965 has been continuously updated to include additional policies to increase family engagement (Cutler, 2000; Epstein, 1984). The Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) were created in 1974 and 1975 as an amendment to Title I of the ESEA (Epstein, 1984). The PACs were created to provide Title I funds to improve parental involvement (Epstein, 1984). In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed and included four principles that families, schools, and the community could follow to work together and improve the teaching and learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Watson et al., 2012). In 2015, Obama signed the updated act called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which continued to include the requirement of having schools promote family engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Family Engagement

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the government mandated a federal policy for the school to address parent engagement in disadvantaged communities (Smith et al., 2011). There is limited research regarding the reasons why parents choose to participate in their children's education (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Walker et al., 2011). Studies show that minority parents tend to be more involved in their children's education at home than at school (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Walker et al., 2011). It has also been observed that when parents have limited resources, they still could find different methods to be involved in the children's schools. For example, parents might not attend school events, but they could assist their children with homework (Walker et al., 2011).

Latino parents' engagement in their children's schooling may not typically be what is expected by school leaders or staff (Barone, 2011; Marschall, 2006; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Riojas-Cortez & Bustos Flores, 2009; Walker et al., 2011). Their form of parent engagement

might not be as active participants at school because they do not want to "disrespect" "teachers'

roles, knowledge, and expertise" (Walker et al., 2011, p. 412; Marschall, 2006). Their

engagement in schools might also be hindered by their job schedules, time, socioeconomic

status, language proficiency, negative experiences at schools, and extended family needs

(Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson &

Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011). Olivos and

Mendoza (2010) state that the unaddressed social equities by the schools can also be a reason

that might contribute to low family engagement. As noted by Riojas-Cortez et al. (2003), "when

a community's language and culture are valued, families are likely to take a more active role in

their children's education" (p. 78).

Teacher's Perspective on Family Engagement

Teachers must have a positive perspective on family engagement. A positive perspective

can lead to increased family engagement (Cammarota et al., 2012). There is a common

misconception from teachers that parents can assist or teach their children at home because they

do not care or have the resources. In reality, the reason is that they do not know what they are

expected to teach or how to assist their children (Riojas-Cortez & Bustos Flores, 2009). In

addition, teachers perceive parents as not caring when they do not attend school events (Smith et

al., 2011). However, although they are interested in attending school events, they may not be

able because they lack transportation, have job obligations, or feel a level of intimidation.

(Barone, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Educators might also overlook the types of family

engagement the parents use to support their children at home. When parents are not valued at

school, parents will not be involved in their children's education (Riojas-Cortez et al., 2003).

Barriers of Family Engagement

There are different factors that act as barriers to the engagement of parents in schools. One of the barriers parents confront is having to attend work during the times when schools have parent meetings or activities (Baker et al., 2016). Parents of low-income households cannot afford to be absent from work, and many times they have to two jobs and are also unable to attend school activities (Baker et al., 2016; Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Communication between the teachers and families is important. Poor communication can include not communicating with parents often, not speaking the same language as the parents, and not being able to reach the parents (Baker et al., 2016; Vera et al., 2017).

Renth (2015) explores the perceptions of low-income parents regarding their children's academic success in connection to their family income. High-income students tend to perform better academically than low-income students (Renth, 2015). One of the reasons is the cultural capital that high-income students bring to school that allows them to have a stronger academic background in school readiness (Egalite, 2016; Renth, 2015). The lack of resources affects the academic achievement of low income students. Family engagement is also lower in low-income families. Studies show that there is a positive correlation between family engagement and student achievement, especially for those students who come from low-income families (Araque et al., 2017; Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018; Park et al., 2017).

A study by Araque et al. (2017) revealed that low-income parents understand the importance of family engagement. They know it was essential to their children's academic success; however, many acknowledged they were not engaged and present in schools (Araque et al., 2017; Renth, 2015). Parents stated that some of the factors that hindered their engagement

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were lack of knowledge, language, work duties, lack of resources, or not feeling comfortable attending school events (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018; Renth, 2015; Vera et al., 2017).

<center>**Models of Family Engagement**</center>

It is important to see the different models of family engagement that have been created by researchers. Family engagement can be studied in different ways. Therefore, there are different models of family engagement that tend to be found in the literature. However, two well-known models are Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parent involvement and Epstein's (1984) framework of six types of involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) developed a parent involvement model in 1995, which they modified 10 years later. The model includes five different levels of the process of parental involvement and how it leads to the academic success of their children. It addresses the major questions of why parents are involved and how the involvement affects the students (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Level one includes three categories that influence the parents' involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). One of the categories is the personal motivation of the parent to be involved in the children's education. The second category is the invitations the parents receive from the school to the events on campus. The last category includes factors in the life of parents such as their knowledge, skills, time, and energy. There is a level between one and two that defines the types of parental involvement. This level includes four different groups. The four different groups are values/goals, home involvement, school

communication, and school involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Level two is the learning mechanisms used by parents during involvement activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 2005). Encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction are the factors that influence their children's academic success. Level three is the students' perceptions of the learning mechanisms that are used by their parents. The way the children react to the four factors (encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction) used by their parents is what leads to the academic success of students. Level four includes four student attributes that lead to the students' academic success. These four attributes include academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation to learn, self-regulatory strategy knowledge and use, and social efficacy for relating to teachers. Level five is the student achievement. The student achievement is the outcome that is influenced by the rest of the levels (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Epstein's Framework of six Types of Involvement

Epstein (1984) developed six different types of parent involvement for educators to assist parents to become more involved in their children's education. Type one of Epstein's framework is "Parenting." This type describes how educators can assist parents to increase their involvement in their children's school. Epstein suggests some practices that educators can implement. Some of these samples include parent education, family support programs, home visits that will help parents have a greater understanding of schools, and other workshops (Epstein, 1984).

Epstein (1984) also delineates the benefits or results this type of parenting will have on students, parents, and teachers. After implementing this type of involvement, students should

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have greater respect for their parents, by valuing school, increasing attendance, and developing positive characteristics as recommended by family. Parents will benefit from having a greater understanding of the school and having a stronger connection to the school. The results for teachers will include a greater understanding of families' home culture and will develop a greater respect for the parents and students. This type of involvement might confront challenges along the way because it might not be possible to reach all of the families. Another challenge might also be to ensure that the information to parents is clearly understood (Epstein, 1984).

Type two of Epstein's (1984) framework is "Communicating." This describes how educators need to communicate with parents regarding what occurs in their children's school (Epstein, 1984). Some practices educators can use to implement the second framework is to have constant parent conferences, send feedback about student's progress home on a weekly or monthly basis, and inform parents about the school's decisions on policies, programs, courses, and other activities. There must be strategies in place to address families who do not speak English. Written communication can be in the families' home language. Interpreters can also be present when needed. Students would benefit from this because they will be more aware of their progress and parents will also be informed about their child's progress on a regular basis. Parents will also benefit from this type of involvement because they will be more in contact with the school. The challenges that this framework could confront is when parents speak another language other than English. This could lead to having communication go in only one direction.

Type three of Epstein's (1984) framework is "Volunteering." This is the educator's effort to recruit parents as volunteers at the schools. Educators can recruit parents through a classroom volunteer program and create a parent room on campus that will be inviting to parents. When students see their parents volunteering at school, they are able to acknowledge how important

parent contribution is to schools. Parents will be able to see firsthand what the teacher's do in the classroom, feel more welcomed at school, and develop self-confidence and skills when volunteering at the school campus. Bringing parents as volunteers to schools can help teachers in the classroom and increase family engagement. It can become challenging if parents do not have the time to attend school events to volunteer. One solution is to provide a flexible schedule for volunteer work and communicate to parents that all are welcome (Epstein, 1984).

Type four of Epstein's (1984) framework is "Learning at home." This type of involvement consists of having educators offer different resources to parents so they can help their children at home with homework and other school activities. Teachers can provide parents with the skills that the students will be learning in the classroom. Parents who have the skills needed to help their child with the learning process will have a greater understanding of how to help their children. This will help the parents know how to reinforce the skills and how to help their children with their homework. The homework schedule can also include different work that will require the parents to be involved in ensuring their children complete it. Some challenges might be to provide parents with all of the learning objectives that will be taught at school. However, students will benefit by having their parent help them with their homework, increase their self-confidence, and see their parents as a partner in education (Epstein, 1984).

Type five of Epstein's (1984) framework is "Decision-making." This type of parenting includes empowering parents to make decisions at their children's schools. Schools can create parent-teacher organizations at the campus or district level in order to involve the parents in the decision-making process of the school's policies, activities, events, etc. Parents should feel empowered, and this will create a sense of ownership because their voices are heard and supported during the decision making. Teachers will be able to make a more informed decision

based on the parents' perspective. A challenge would be to have a diverse parent organization in order to have a representation of all parents (Epstein, 1984).

Type six of Epstein's (1984) Framework is "Collaborating with the Community" through different resources and services for the parents and community. This includes informing parents about summer programs, health agencies, and other services to support families. On the other hand, the families and schools can also support the community by serving them through volunteer work. This will help students become well-rounded students through the community programs. It will also help parents become aware of the different resources available to them. Furthermore, the collaboration with the community can help teachers by integrating the resources with their curriculum in the classroom. It can also benefit teachers by providing them with the information needed in case they need to provide information to parents about certain services (Epstein, 1984).

Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislative system (Texas Secretary of State, 2016) passed numerous initiatives since 1987 to help improve the lives of families living in *colonias*. The first bill was signed in 1987 during the 71st Texas legislative session in an effort to help the *colonias* by providing them with grants and loans to help with the water services. Several others bills continued to be signed in the 72nd, and 73rd sessions as an effort to improve the water system in *colonias*. These bills help *colonia* residents to ensure they had water and wastewater services, sewer services, and water quality standards. The 74th Texas legislative session included the creation of *colonia* help centers where residents could attend to receive guidance about finances and other resources. The 75th Texas legislative session provided *colonia* residents with educational and social service programs in partnership with the Texas Department of Housing

and Community Affairs and the Centers for Housing and Urban Development. These initiatives have also included a bill signed by the 76th Texas legislative session in 1999 that assigned *Colonia* Ombudspersons to advocate for the residents living in their assigned *colonias*. This bill also helped lessened the water and wastewater issues in some *colonias*. The 77th Texas legislative session in 2001 also continued to help some *colonias* by providing funds to improve the unpaved roads (Texas Secretary of State, 2016).

Colonias

The Texas Secretary of State (2018) defines *colonias* as community or neighborhood located in the Texas-Mexico border that "may lack some of the most basic living necessities such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing" (Nemawakar, 2016; Strickland, 2016). The majority of the *colonias* can be found in Texas with a population of approximately 400,000 (Texas Secretary of State, 2018). About 64.4 percent of *colonia* residents are Hispanics. Hidalgo County has the most *colonias* and is the poorest county with the most *colonia* residents (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Strickland, 2016; Texas Secretary of State, 2018). *Colonias* emerged and the land was being divided into plots in the 1950s. These plots were sold to low-income families sold for at an affordable price. The families would make a low payment to the land owner. Most of the *colonias* have been divided into approximately 40 to 300 plots. However, only about 7 percent consist of 300 units (Barton et al., 2015).

The infrastructure of border *colonias* began improving in some areas between 2006 and 2014 (Barton et al., 2015; States News Service, 2015). In particular, the border *colonias* found in Cameron, El Paso, Hidalgo, Maverick, Starr, and Webb Counties have been monitored for their progress by the Colonia Initiative Program Progress project for the Texas Office of the Secretary of State. A number of *colonias* have increased with "access to drinkable water, adequate

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drainage, wastewater disposal, solid waste disposal, paved road, and legal plats; access to all

forms of infrastructure" (Barton et al., 2015). Some of the older *colonias* have paved roads and

basic infrastructure. However, challenges in the infrastructure continue to exist for families

living in *colonias* (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012; States News Service, 2015). The infrastructure varies

from *colonia* to *colonia*. Garden hoses and extension cords extend from house to house as they

tend to share water or electricity (Barton et al., 2015).

Health Issues of *Colonia* Residents

There are different issues that *colonia* residents face on a daily basis. The Texas

Secretary project also helped monitor the health of *colonia* residents from 2006 to 2014.

Although the number of *colonias* that were classified a high health risk dropped from 442 in

2006 to 337 in 2014 (Barton et al., 2015). However, there are still many *colonia* residents that do

not have access to clean and safe water (Nemawarkar, 2016; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012).

A major concern is on access to water and sewer service. Due to the lack of sewer

systems, families are forced to rely of septic tanks that may not meet the water necessities of the

families (Strickland, 2016). Septic tanks come with additional health risks when are not well

taken care of or cleaned regularly (Nuñez-M Nuñez-McHiri, 2012; Strickland, 2016). Although

some *colonias* might have access to sewer systems, they might not be able to use the water lines

because their homes do not pass the county building codes. Homes built in *colonias* are usually

built in phases, as families can only afford to make minimal payments (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012).

This can also be attributed to how much money the families make.

The living conditions in the *colonias* add to health issues and illnesses (Nemawarkar,

2016; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). The Texas Department of Health indicates that there is a higher

number of *colonias* residents with Hepatitis A, salmonellosis, dysentery, cholera, tuberculosis,

and obesity (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Strickland, 2016). Many of these illnesses such as diabetes can result from a lack of healthy food choices (Barton et al., 2015; Strickland, 2016). A great number of *colonia* residents have to rely on food stamps and purchase unhealthy foods which are less expensive (Barton et al., 2015). A study regarding food insecurity was conducted to in households in *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border (Sharkey et al., 2011, 2012). Food insecurity refers to individuals not eating enough or not receiving the appropriate nutritional value in the foods they consume (Sharkey et al., 2011). For children, food insecurity can lead to problems with their health, academic work, and development (Cedeño et al., 2016; D'Angiulli et al., 2012; Sharkey, et al., 2011, 2012).

D'Angiulli et al. (2012) reported that the attention and cortisol levels tend to vary in low income children and high income children. Low income children tend to have more attention problems than children from higher income level families (Cedeño et al., 2016; D'Angiulli et al., 2012). The attention span of the low income children tends to be affected by the daily stress that they might be exposed to due to the different challenges that their parents are faced with (Cedeño et al., 2016). The study reported that 78% of these homes had food insecurity and 49% of households reported child food insecurity (Sharkey, et al., 2011, 2012). Although the children participate in the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs, they still have food insecurity (Sharkey et al., 2012). In addition, to not receiving the adequate nutrients, these children are consuming food that is high in fat and sugars (Sharkey et al., 2012).

Due to the lack of health insurance, transportation, or resources, *colonia* residents might not seek or get medical treatment. Health issues can also affect the whole family due to lack of transportation. Nuñez-McHiri (2012) found that kids tend to be absent from school when one of their siblings gets sick. The lack of transportation makes it impossible for the parents to take the

sick child to a clinic, while also not being able to take the rest of their children to school (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). The majority of hospitals in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas are private; therefore, *colonia* residents have to rely on private hospitals or other local clinics (Barton et al., 2015).

Economic Factors of *Colonia* Residents

About 35% of the people living in *colonias* are Mexican immigrants, and 96 percent of *colonia* residents are Hispanic (Barton et al., 2015; Strickland, 2016). Although they live minutes away from the Mexican border, they are unable to cross and see the rest of their families that reside across the border because of either their financial circumstances or undocumented status.

Families living in *colonias* are faced with numerous challenges, which include financial struggles (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). Despite all of the issues they face, the *colonias* serve as a "safety net" (p. 114) for low-income families. The families work odd jobs that include housekeeping, babysitting, and selling crafts. Since income is a major concern for families living in *colonias*, families have to save up money and build their houses in stages (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012; Strickland, 2016). Many families might start with a small trailer and add to it as they earn money and as their family grows (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). Another common trend is for families to obtain the building materials so they can start adding a little at a time to their initial home. *Colonia* families might help each other build them homes, depending on the skills each has. For this reason, homes in *colonias* have great value because much pride goes into building their homes (Nuñez-McHiri, 2012).

According to the US Census survey, the median household income for families living in *colonias* was $28,928 for 2015, which includes 40% of *colonia* residents living under the poverty line (Barton et al., 2015; Nemawarkar, 2016; Strickland, 2016; U.S. Census survey). Families

living in *colonias* have to rely on government assistance in order to make ends meet, in addition to working more than one job (Barton et al., 2015; Strickland, 2016). According to Barton et al. (2015), 43% of adults in *colonias* are not officially in the labor force and work the "informal economy" where they are paid in cash for the work they do. The wages are very low, and job security is a concern. A common workplace is the flea market, where *colonia* residents sell handcrafted goods to others, goods they can resale and make a profit (Barton et al., 2015). Flea markets are extremely beneficial for *colonia* residents as they can network with other families (Barton et al., 2015). This social network is extremely valuable for them as they develop friendships with one another and provide help if needed.

Family relationships are strong among the families living in *colonias* (Barton et al., 2015). As a result, homelessness is not seen in *colonias* because families take care of each other by bringing any family member struggling into their household. Households with three or four families living together can be found in *colonias* (Barton et al., 2015).

Education of *Colonia* Residents

Parents who reside in *colonias* generally have lower educational attainments. This, in turn, affects how they view the education for their children and also how they interact with the school systems. Barton et al. (2015) explains that a lack of knowledge about the school system makes "it difficult for them to be advocates for their children in school" (p. 17). Parents who do not speak English and cannot converse well in English are not to be involved in their children's schools. Approximately 59% of the adult population has a high school diploma, and less than 22 percent of the *colonia* residents have some college hours or a college degree (Barton et al., 2015).

Colonias have a high number of immigrant families, which has also been increasing in the United States (Antony-Newman, 2019; Turney & Kao, 2010). Research shows that minority immigrant parents face greater obstacles when it comes to family engagement (Turney & Kao, 2010). The low family engagement is attributed to obstacles that occur in addition to the low education level, home language, and low-income level of immigrant families (Turney & Kao, 2010). Furthermore, the way that immigrant parents and educators perceive family engagement is different (Antony-Newman, 2019).

Conclusion

The review of the literature presented indicates how unique the lives of families living in *colonias* is. Families living in *colonias* are faced with different issues that affect their daily lives. One of the things that are affected is the extent of their family engagement. Parents of children living in *colonias* are faced with unique circumstances that take priority. However, family engagement plays a huge role in the academic achievement of students. There are different factors that contribute to family engagement and different models that help increase it.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted to investigate the lives of parents from *colonias* and the

parental engagement in two South Texas school districts utilizing three research questions. The

chapter will provide details of the research design, research questions, site and participant

selection, and gaining access. Additionally, the researcher will describe the study's

instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and provide a summary of

the chapter.

Research Design

This research study used qualitative methodology in order to thoroughly explore the lives

of parents living in *colonias* and the engagement in their children's education. Qualitative

research design is used when a problem needs to be explored in a comprehensive manner by

interviewing people and/or observing them where the phenomenon or issue exists (Creswell,

2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2011). Qualitative research emerged in the 1900s and has gone

through eight different time periods: traditional (1900–1950), modernist or golden age (1950–

1970), blurred genres (1970–1986), crisis of representation (1986–1990), postmodern (1990–

1995), post-experimental inquiry (1995–2000), methodologically contested present (2000–2010),

and the future (2010–present; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Denzin and Lincoln

(2011), qualitative research is conducted in their natural settings in order to interpret the

phenomena. Different types of data are collected in order to understand the world that the

researcher is trying to explain. The researcher can also be called a "bricoleur" because they bring together different data and methods used to represent the final "montage" (p. 16). Using different types of methods to help produce a clearer understanding of the phenomenon is called triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Triangulation refers to the process of using different methods to help explain the phenomenon that is occurring (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Triangulation is the process that is obtained when more than one method is used to collect data. This ensures there is validity for the data that is obtained, as different methods will demonstrate and explain the same phenomenon. When different methods are used to obtain data, the phenomenon can be viewed from different perspectives. This not only ensures validity but also adds a deeper understanding of what is occurring. For example, in this study, the researcher used individual interviews, documentation, and a survey questionnaire in order to achieve the triangulation stage. Qualitative research includes five different components: researcher, theory, set of questions, methodology, and analysis of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The researcher's job in a qualitative study is to guide the process serving as a bricoleur who seeks to bring light to what is being studied. While connecting all of the pieces of data, the researcher must keep a set code of ethics in mind. The researcher must offer informed consent to the research subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research subjects must be informed about what the research will consist of, the consequences of the research, and they must agree to participate voluntarily (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher must also keep the subject and the subject's data confidential by protecting the date and assigning pseudo names to the participants (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the researcher must also guarantee the accuracy of the data being collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To ensure that a code of ethics is being followed,

institutions require research to be approved by institutional review boards. The researcher conducts the research by following a certain paradigm or framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Based on the direction of the study and the research questions, the researcher then chooses a research design. Based on the research design, the researcher chooses the methods of collecting data. The methods usually consist of more than one method in order to achieve triangulation help in the validation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data collection range from interviews, focus groups, documents, observations, photographs, and videos. The final step is to interpret the data collected, analyze it, and answer the research questions.

Qualitative research was used to conduct this study in order to gather the perspective of parents and to understanding their family engagement. Parents were empowered to share their stories of living in *colonias* and how that connects to their family engagement. The data collected consisted of parent interviews from two different elementary schools of a South Texas school district. The data gathered from multiple sources, such as parent interviews, surveys, and photographs, helped interpret and make sense of the different factors influencing their family engagement. Different themes were generated in order to determine the factors.

The qualitative research approach used in this study was the phenomenological approach. Creswell (2007) describes a phenomenological approach as the method used to describe the experiences of the phenomenon occurring with all of the research subjects of the study. There are two types of phenomenology: hermeneutical and transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses more on the researcher. The researcher selects a phenomenon and looks at the themes that resulted from the experience (Creswell, 2007). The researcher then interprets the themes and writes the meanings behind the phenomenon.

In contrast, the transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to detach themselves from the phenomenon. This type of approach requires the subjects, who share the same phenomenon, are to be the center of the research (Creswell, 2007). The data collected from the subjects is then analyzed. The researcher must develop both a textural and structural description of the subjects' experiences. The textural description are statements of examples that helped explain what the participants experienced. The structural descriptions helped explain "how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context" (p. 60). In addition, textural and structural descriptions was used to help clearly explain the phenomenon to the reader and give them a sense of what it would feel like to be experiencing that same phenomenon and the locations of where they occurred (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the type of phenomenology used was transcendental, where the researcher detached from the research and focused on the subjects.

In this study, the phenomenon was family engagement. This approach was chosen because family engagement is best understood through analyzes of shared experiences of stakeholders. The experiences of the parents living in *colonias* were shared and analyzed to see what common responses were elicited among the parents interviewed. In order to achieve a clear understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher "bracket[ed] out" (Creswell, 2007) their personal experiences. Parent interviews were conducted, surveys and photographs from the school's social media were collected.

The parents were given a survey questionnaire in which they answered demographic information. The survey questionnaire contained six questions that will help to determine which participants do live in *colonias* and therefore met that requirement to be able to participate in the interview. The survey questionnaires were passed out to one classroom per grade level in each of

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the schools. The survey questionnaire was passed out on a Tuesday and the deadline to return it was on Friday. The survey questionnaire was turned in to the students' teacher and the researcher passed by to pick them up from each of the teachers.

Based on the responses from the survey questionnaires the parents were selected if they lived in a *colonia*; the researcher then contacted to participate in the interviews and to schedule an interview. The parents were informed about the time and date of the interviews and invited to attend. The researcher facilitated the scheduling of the interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher facilitated the scheduling of the interviews via phone or email in order to accommodate the parents' schedules.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that allowed the participants to communicate more freely in the group. These unstructured interviews helped the participants to elaborate on their answers as they chose. Hearing the responses of the other participants helped trigger any additional comments that they might think about and would want to share. This helped enrich the responses of the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do parents, who reside in *colonias,* participate in their elementary children's education in a South Texas school district?

2. Which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this study promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?

3. What are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study that hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?

Population and Sample

The individuals invited to participate in the interviews were selected through purposeful sampling. In this type of sampling, the selected individuals share experiences of the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Suen et al., 2014). Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select a sample with certain characteristics that would help answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling is selecting participants who meet some certain predetermined criteria. For example, in this study, the individuals selected included single mothers, married parents, full-time working parents, and stay-at-home parents who lived in *colonias* and had experienced the phenomenon of family engagement.

After the approval by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, permission was attained from a South Texas school district superintendent, two campus principals, and parents. A school district and their two elementary schools were selected from the South Texas region along the border of Mexico and the United States. Two elementary schools were selected based on the number of students they serve who live in *colonias*.

It is recommended to interview from three to 10 individuals who share the same phenomenon (Dukes, 1984). Letters and emails in English and Spanish were sent to the parents requesting their participation and follow up interviews. The letters contained the description of the study, the purpose, and goal of the study. In addition, the parents were asked to answer a survey questionnaire regarding demographic information. The demographic information was used to group the participants and select those who met the following criterion. Participants had to be parents of students who attended the elementary school and they must live in a *colonia*.

An audio recorder was used, and consent forms for the participation and consent were provided to participants. The consent forms to participate in the interview and be audio-recorded

were completed after the demographic surveys were collected. Individual interviews were followed for those parents who provided their consent forms. Parents selected to be interviewed were presently living in *colonias* and had children attend the selected elementary campus. A summary at the end of each individual interview was conducted in order to provide the participants an opportunity to add any additional comments. If any comments or questions were to arise after the interview, the researcher's contact information was given to participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The dissertation study proposal was submitted to the institutional review board (IRB) of the Texas University Rio Grande Valley for approval. Once the study was approved, permission was first obtained from the school district's superintendent in order to gain access to the school campuses. Once the permission was granted by the school district's superintendent, permission was requested from the campus principal before any surveys were sent out to parents.

The data collection procedure was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of distributing a demographic survey to parents through letters and emails sent to parents from one classroom per grade level. The survey included a letter indicating the purpose and significance of the study. The surveys ask parents a series of questions and if they would be willing to participate in the individual interviews.

Phase two of the study required the participants to be part of individual interviews. The interviews ran from 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted at each of the school campuses. Ten individuals were interviewed based on recommendations from Polkinghorne (1989) about the number participants needed for qualitative inquiry. Open-ended questions were used in order to allow the participants to delve deeper into their responses. All of the interviews were audio-recorded. Once the interviews were conducted the interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

Instrumentation

The types of instruments used in a qualitative study need to be chosen accurately in order for them to help with the validity of the study. The validity of the study is achieved through a process called triangulation. The process of triangulation is created by using various instruments to collect data, which will explain the phenomenon of family engagement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For example, for this study, the researcher used individual interviews and surveys to provide a clearer explanation of the phenomenon.

Interviews were the main instrument used as the instrument for this study. However, in order to achieve triangulation, additional instruments were used, which included surveys and photographs obtained from the school social media page (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The demographic surveys included closed-ended questions. The results of the surveys were used to help narrow the number of parents who were chosen to be part of the interviews, which was the parents who lived in *colonias*. The demographic survey provided the researcher with background information about the parents. The researcher also analyzed photographs posted as public on the school's social media of events where there was parental engagement.

A second component of the instrumentation included interviews. Creswell (2012) stated that open-ended questions used for interviews are ideal for qualitative studies because they provide more information for the study. Having open-ended questions allows the participant to provide more information, elaborate, and share their experiences more freely (Creswell, 2012). The open-ended questions were essential during the individual interviews so parents could feel more comfortable in expressing their perspectives. Creswell (2007) recommended using Moustakas' (1994) two general questions in order to achieve textual description and structural description. Moustakas' questions are: What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon?

What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? The researcher prepared an interview protocol with the open-ended questions beforehand. A consent form was obtained before the interview. The participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study, what the interview would entail, and how the interview would be used, in alignment with Creswell's recommendations.

Data Analysis Procedure

Once the individual interviews were conducted and recorded, the transcription process began. The researcher manually transcribed each interview in order to become familiar with the interviews and identify common phrases, patterns, and relationships among the interviews and participants. In order to ensure the transcription process was reliable, the researcher listened to the interviews once again and transcribed them. The transcriptions were inputted into NVivo software, which helped with the organization of the files, where they were coded and analyzed (Creswell, 2007). This program also helped with the security of the documents by having all of the transcriptions in one database and allowing the researcher to search it all at once (Creswell, 2007).

The interviews were read and analyzed to find common themes and patterns that could be found throughout the different interviews and observations conducted during the interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The different themes found in the interviews were categorized by using NVivo. The categories created elucidated the different factors that promote parental participation and the obstacles that hinder family engagement of parents from *colonias.* The transcripts were bookmarked within the NVivo software to keep track and have access to the categories created.

The themes were analyzed and interpreted to help answer the research questions through the *thick description* of the data that was achieved from the interviews and observations conducted. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), thick description is needed in order to provide the reader with a rich description of information that helps them see what the participants are experiencing. The themes collected were written to provide a textural and structural description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The themes were categorized and examined to find the connections across the categories.

The researcher provided a description of the phenomenon by analyzing all of the themes and how they connected with the literature (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), this description helps the reader understand what the subjects experienced through the shared phenomenon. Member checking was used in order to add the credibility of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). The researcher had the participants review the data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure everything was correct as recommended by Creswell.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is an important aspect to consider when conducting research since this can occur in every phase of the research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In order to maintain the ethics of this study, the participants were informed about the logistics of the study and their informed consent was required (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The participants' identity was kept confidential, their rights were protected, and they were treated with respect throughout the research process. The participants were also notified that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Trustworthiness

In order to establish the trustworthiness of the study, the research must include the following criteria: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher used member checking, triangulation, and thick description in order to achieve credibility. Member checking provides credibility by having the participants review the data and its analyses to check if its accurate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants also checked the data analyses for anything that might be missing. This process avoided having the researcher's bias influence what the participants discussed in the interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Triangulation is the process of using different instruments and data collection methods that will help to explain in depth the phenomenon that is occurring (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Triangulation was achieved by using different sources that contributed to the same phenomenon and provided a rich description of parental involvement (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, the data gathered included individual interviews, surveys, and photos. In addition, the thick description achieved from triangulation were used to describe in rich detail the participants and where they lived.

Dependability is a second criterion that was used to achieve trustworthiness in the study. The researcher explained in detail the different processes that were used to collect and analyze the data. This description allowed the study to be transferable if another researcher applies the findings to a similar setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Having a thick description in the study allowed transferability of the study to occur with greater ease.

Potential Bias

My personal bias is that I come from *colonia* parents. Therefore, this might have affected the way I perceive the parents in the study. I detached from my personal experience and focused on the unique experiences each parent brought to the interviews to avoid my personal bias influencing the interpretation.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the number of parents who were willing to participate in this study. The number of parents willing to participate may have indicated low family engagement in those particular settings. Therefore, the data obtained might not be sufficient. A constraint considered was that although parents were willing to participate in the interviews there might be factors that halted them from participating in the interviews.

Conclusion

This research project was conducted to explore the lives of parents living in *colonias*. Collected data helped answer the three main research questions regarding the different factors that contribute to the increase and decrease of family engagement of parents living in *colonias*. The parents were selected based on a set criteria and were interviewed one-on-one. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were coded and analyzed. Chapter 4 contains the findings of this research, followed by Chapter 5, which is the conclusion of the research study.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Research has shown how imperative family engagement is for elementary children's education. Literature indicates there is a low percentage of family engagement coming from parents living in *colonias* (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011). The purpose of this qualitative research was to examine the lives of parents who reside in *colonias* and their extent of family engagement in their elementary children's education from two elementary campuses in two different South Texas school districts.

It is imperative to explore the factors that promote and hinder family engagement from families of elementary children. This research will help educators better help parents engage in their children's education and as a result, impact the student's overall education experience. To help explore these factors, data was collected from ten parents from two elementary campuses in two different South Texas school districts. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the ten participant interviews were conducted separately through phone or email. The phone interviews were audio recorded and the email responses were recorded digitally on a MS word document. The audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software. Documents and photos from the two school districts were also analyzed and organized using NVivo software. The transcriptions, documents, and photos were analyzed for codes and themes to better

understand and explore the lives of the participants who were interviewed. Photographs of events from both elementary campuses were collected and analyzed to further achieve triangulation with the information regarding family engagement. The photographs of different parent events helped support the data from the parent interviews. Triangulation was achieved through these different data sources to better explain the phenomena that was occurring (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The study followed a phenomenological approach to study the phenomenon of family engagement through the analyzes of the parents' interviews, surveys, and photographs (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994).

The study focused on two elementary schools from two different South Texas school districts who serve families residing in *colonias.* The parents were selected through purposeful sampling and the interview was done voluntarily. Creswell (2007) indicates that purposeful sampling is a type of sampling based on selected participants who share the same experiences and phenomenon. Some parents decided to participate while others did not respond back or did not answer their phones for the interviews. The interviews used were of the first five parents who responded from each of the elementary campuses. The survey consisted of six open-ended questions. The participants consisted of ten female Hispanic parents who lived in a *colonia.* Eight of the parents interviewed are married and two were single parents. All parents had children who attended the school districts and school campus in the study. The number of children per family ranged from two to five children each.

I categorized recurring codes during the first cycle of coding of the interviews and documentation. During this cycle, the codes were descriptive codes with little inferencing beyond what the words indicated. It allowed me to group similar segments of the interview statements. The codes, during the first cycle of coding, allowed me to further analyze and create

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pattern codes, which appeared during the second cycle of the coding process. Pattern codes on the second cycle helped in connecting different pieces of information (Miles et al., 2014). Pattern codes can be themes, causes, explanations, or relationships (Miles et al., 2014). The pattern codes that I developed from the transcripts of the interviews were more descriptive and detailed from the ones found on the initial code of the first cycle. The pattern codes were more detailed and helped explain what the parents were going through regarding family engagement.

The categorization of themes found in the interviews helped in determining the factors that promote parental participation and the obstacles that hinder family engagement from parents living in *colonias.* Miles et al. (2014) referred to this type of component as drawing conclusions and verifying. The data analysis used "thick description" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that helped visualize what the parents were experiencing. The themes were categorized in the NVivo software to examine the different connections across all categories. I also used the process of member checking by which the participants reviewed the data, interpretations, and conclusions to verify the outcome (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative data process consisted of individual interviews from the ten participants. During the interviews, I asked a set of nine questions to address the research questions, which can be found in Appendix A.

According to Moustakas (1994), there are two different types of phenomenology: hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. As was mentioned in Chapter three, my research focused on transcendental phenomenology, which required me to detach myself from the phenomenon and focus on the participants' feedback (Creswell, 2007). To do this, I had to first "epoche" or "bracket" from the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I had to leave my own experiences of the phenomenon of family engagement aside to achieve a true perspective of what the participants experienced and how they experienced it.

Moustakas (1994) indicates how as a researcher, I must "bracket" out my personal experiences and views of the phenomenon before being able to analyze the participants' views. Family engagement has been a huge part of my life from the time I was a student to the present time as an educator. During my childhood, I lived in a *colonia* and my parents were highly involved in my education. As an educator, I was a teacher in an elementary school in South Texas who served students living in *colonias.*

Results

The qualitative data analysis helped to answer the three research questions of the study. The three research questions are:

1. To what extent do parents, who reside in *colonias,* participate in their elementary children's education in a South Texas school district?

2. Which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this study promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?

3. What are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study that hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?

The extent to which parents, who reside in *colonias,* are involved in family engagement was explored. In addition, the factors that help promote and hinder participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education was also explored. Using the qualitative methodology, I was able to review data that helped explore the family engagement of families who reside in *colonias.* Four themes appeared in the research after coding the participants' responses. The themes are as follows: Parents' Access to Resources, School and Home Communication, Parents' Perspective of Education, and Family Background. Furthermore, these four themes were divided into the following subthemes: Transportation, Knowledge and Skills of

Pedagogy, Living Conditions, Teacher and Parent Relationships, Events at School for Parents, Validation of Parents and their Culture, Value of Education, Children's Best Interest for Academic Success, Number of Children, Work Schedules. The subthemes helped with the analysis of the interview transcriptions, documents, and the photos.

Theme One: Parent's Access to Resources

The parents who participated in the interviews spoke about the resources they had available and whether those were accessible to them. This theme was further broken down into several subthemes: Transportation, Knowledge and Skills of Pedagogy, and Living Conditions. Although, this theme was prominent in most of the interviews, it was mainly seen as a factor of hindrance for family engagement. The parents discussed these subthemes as factors that became obstacles in allowing them to engage in their children's education.

Under this theme, I can see how there is a strong connection between the parent's access to resources and how it affected their family engagement. Eight out of ten parents reported that they perceived family engagement to be low. However, it should be noted that the two out of the ten parents interviewed who stated they saw high family engagement responded with "I think about maybe, maybe about…a lot of parents. Um, yeah, I'll just go with that" said by Parent J and "I do see a lot of parent involvement in both the elementary and in the middle school level. The campuses do many activities to bring the parents in" said by Parent G.

The responses above were simple and did not include detail or further explanations. The responses from the parents who indicated low family engagement were more specific. Those parents interviewed who indicated there was low family engagement stated in their interviews they saw from 5% to less than 50% of family engagement. They also used phrases such as "parental involvement is limited," "not much participation," and "low rate" when asked to what

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extent they thought the parents of that school participate in their children's education. Overall, they concurred that they saw less participation when the schools had informational meetings versus when it was an event in which the children participate. Parent H summarized it well by indicating the following, "Parent participation is very limited. Parent engagement is motivated by student recognition and participation (parades, festivals), but lacking when dealing with issues of our child's academics (literacy, student accountability)." Parent A also agreed that parent engagement was triggered more when there were celebrations, "I think they get more involved only like if they have like little um celebrations or anything like that, but that should be like maybe the least of their worries."

The parents who were interviewed were evidently the ones who were constantly engaged in their children's education. Similar to what Parent A stated, some other parents stated how they also try to encourage their fellow friends (parents of other children attending the same school) to participate. However, the parents indicated there were numerous reasons and factors why parents were not able to participate in their children's education. The lack of resources is one of the reasons connected to low family engagement, and this theme can be broken down into Transportation, Knowledge and Skills, and Living Conditions.

Transportation. Parents mentioned that transportation was an issue for many families attending events or meetings at school. "Transportation is a big one," declared Parent B. "Some parents just have one vehicle and that vehicle is being used to, um, like go to work." Many mentioned that they only had one vehicle or knew families who lived close to them that only had one vehicle. Parent E mentioned,

> Not a lot of parents are engaged into their child's studies reason being, they don't have
> either a vehicle or they don't have a working phone or they just don't know what, like

they're supposed to be like helping with. A lot of the parents lack um, uh, they don't know English.

Some found it difficult to ask for rides from neighbors or other family members simply because they did not want to ask or because they did not have any family close by to ask. In addition to only having one vehicle, parents also discussed how many must work. They mentioned that since they had the need to work and only had one vehicle, neither parent could attend the school events or meetings. Parent B stated, "And I can say from experience and that I know, I know that some parents just have one vehicle, and that vehicle is being used to, um, like go to work." Parent D also noted that, "I think sometimes it's hard, or some parents that maybe have like one vehicle and one person goes to work. So, it's hard for parents to get around to go." On the other hand, Parent E mentioned,

Um, from what, from what I've heard and what I've seen a lot, people have, people can ask a neighbor. Can you, can you please take me here? I need to go pick up my child, even when you're their child is sick, right. Like, it takes them a while to find somebody to take them to the school. And like I said, it's either a neighbor or sometimes it can be like, Oh, my neighbor's going to send a friend or, you know, they struggle because they don't have a lot of family members here. That's what I've noticed.

Although their intentions of being engaged in their children's education was obvious, the fact of owning only one vehicle prevented them from their obligation of family engagement at school events. Some undocumented parents who did have transportation avoided taking trips other than the most necessary ones, due to fear of being stopped by Border Patrol Agents. The families mentioned that the proximity to the U.S./Mexico border caused a sense of fear due to the high surveillance from the Border Patrol Agents. This was a constant struggle for the families

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since they tried to avoid being stopped on the road in fear of being deported to their home country.

The participants agreed that although the parents would want to be engaged in their children's education, transportation played a big role. There was one parent, Parent G, who did mention that parents do not "…let anything hinder them. If they don't have transportation they walk there or find a way to get there. For example, riding a bike, catching a ride. They find a way to get there." The rest of the nine parents agreed that "transportation is a big one" when asked what they think hinders the parents from being involved in their child's education.

Knowledge and Skills of Pedagogy. The interviews also revealed that many of the parents felt they did not have the necessary knowledge and skills to be engaged in their children's education. Parent A indicated,

> So they won't feel like, okay, I have to learn this and I have to figure it out on my own and stuff like that. But, um, we're, I would think that would help them want to come in more and get involved.

They did not feel they could adequately help their children at home and felt that the teachers must do everything. Parent C discussed how many parents were not aware of things and felt that teachers had to do everything, "They don't know. They, they think that, oh, you know, the teacher has to do everything, but it has to do with the teacher and the parents also." Parents also mentioned that many households did not have technology to be able to support the education of their children. Therefore, if the kids needed help, parents could not simply look up the information online. When Parent B was asked if she saw parents involved, she responded with the following:

I don't see it much. I, I don't see it very much because I think, uh, our parents, because of where they come from or where they're from or where they live or whatever, because of that, they do not have a lot of knowledge and technology or another knowledge of how to help the children, or they don't have the English language, um, which becomes a barrier because some of the homework that is sent is in English and they're not able to help them out or it requires technology. So they're not allowed they don't know too much of technology. So that also is a barrier for them to, to try to be in, in their students' education.

In addition, many of the parents did not have much formal education and many had only attended grade school. This also hindered them from having the knowledge that would help them feel more confident in helping their child with their education. One parent mentioned that although parents did not know certain things, they did not accept the help from other parents. Parent A reported, "they don't want to, they don't let us help them or anything. They get really insulted, but we're not insulting them. We're trying to help them." Parent A referred to trying to help the parents translate forms in Spanish because some did not know English.

The sub-theme of Knowledge and Skills of Pedagogy also referred to the parents knowing about school events and meetings. Several parents mentioned how the information did not get to them. Therefore, the parents would not know that a certain event or meeting was occurring at school. Parent H stated, "Parents are unaware of what is going on at school; most do not receive notes sent home; lack of awareness is sometimes a choice that parents, sadly, make."

The participants agreed that the lack of their own education contributed to the lack of family engagement. Many felt intimidated to enter the school because of fear of not knowing what they are supposed to do or how to instruct their children with their homework. This added

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to the lack of knowledge of what their kids were doing at school and how they could help them at home.

Living Conditions. The families' living conditions was a vast topic of discussion for them. Living in a colonia is a unique situation, from the construction of the house, to the household size, which impacted their work schedules. The location where they live in is a "very low-income area" as stated by Parent B. It all revolved around ensuring they prioritized the living necessities first, and unfortunately, that took most of their time. This caused parents to focus more on their work to be able to provide their families the essentials necessary to survive.

The houses are small, and many family members live in the same house. The houses are built in phases; as the families earn more money, they add sections to the home. The participants mentioned how it took months, and sometimes several years, for the houses to be finished. Parent E added, "Over here, the community is like mostly, um, like material homes or trailers or things like that" and "when money comes in, they do one part and then another part." They lack some of the necessities such as electricity, drainage system, or running water. Many share electricity with their neighbors using extension cords connected from one house to the next. This is done until they can afford to connect their own electricity. Parent E mentioned the following,

> I mean, ours, we, we come from my, my dad has been a hard worker. He works in the refineries. Our houses. It's an okay house. We, they manage to rebuild a year or two ago. I mean, they made it bigger, nicer, but other houses around here are either falling apart. They're not done. They're made out of wood. I mean, not all of them are made out of block. Um, what else. The, they don't have a lot of, a lot of people from here…they don't have running water or, or, or the electricity or what kind of like the AC a lot of these

homes don't have AC and they either pull down a window, pull up a window, I mean, um that's pretty much it. I mean, it's, they're not, it's a very low economy here.

Therefore, they must take every opportunity they can get to work and earn money since they must provide for their families. Working parents usually must miss the school meetings that occur during the day. When asked what difficulties they had encountered when trying to engage in their children's education, Parent H responded with the following, "Living a busy life, as a single mom, filled with commitments, appointments, and long commutes to and from work." Parent F responded as follows to the same questions,

> Um, mainly no, mainly is that, um, mainly is my job because both of us, like both of us, we work my husband and myself, and, uh, it's mainly that. And during the day we know we're busy and when we get out when it's already, you know, my, my child is already out of school and everything.

These factors were also tied to transportation, as several stated that they only had one vehicle available. If one of the parents was using it for work, the other parent could not use it to attend school functions. Requesting time off from work to engage in their children's education was not an option. Parents shied away from requesting time off because that would reduce their paycheck, and most are living paycheck to paycheck to provide for their families.

The single parent families also mentioned how important work was for them. Usually, families had several generations or relatives living under the same roof. Living in a household and attending to other family members made it difficult to be supportive of all their children. Parents mentioned how they needed to be able to manage their time to provide the required attention to all their children equally.

On the other hand, some of the large families also relied on each other as their support system. For example, one of the parents mentioned that when she was not able to attend school events or meetings due to her health, her mother stepped in to help. She mentioned how she also saw a lot of other grandparents, from nearby families, support and help each other when needed. Parent A mentioned,

> Like we usually me and my mom, we always go to the meetings. Reason being, because my mom, she was a parent volunteer and all of that when I went to school and when my sister went to school, so she said, we need to, we need to get involved now that you have kids. So we started getting involved in everything.

Parent E shared a similar comment,

> If I'm not available to do something, I can always ask, um, an aunt or my sister if they're available to, to be there for my son, whatever I can, or if I need help with something, the same I'll ask anybody else. It's always support me, basically the support the support system that you carry.

The culture of families living in *colonias* is to rely on their relatives as a support system when they need help. When families have other relatives living in the same household, this can definitely be beneficial. This was a positive attribute to have relatives live in the same household.

Theme Two: School and Home Communication

The communication between the parents and the school staff was also a prominent theme throughout the interviews and documents analyzed. This theme was broken down into several subthemes: Teacher and Parent Relationships, Events at School for Parents, and Validation of Parents and their Culture. The School and Home Communication was seen as an important

concept that affected family engagement. Participants expressed how essential this communication was to the overall success between school staff and parents.

Teacher and Parent Relationships. Parents commented how important it was for them to be able to have an open communication with the school staff and teachers. The school staff mentioned by the participants was mainly teachers, but one parent did mention the parent educator, school counselor, and the principal. The parents mentioned how the school staff was available to them when requested. It was also mentioned how they believed it was important for the school staff to have that open communication with parents. Parent A mentioned how discouraged she felt after she did not receive a response from her child's teacher, "Just that point or sometimes like the teachers, we, I messaged them or they took like a while to message back. And by then I'm like, okay."

The interview transcripts and documents analyzed indicated that school staff communicated with parents through emails/letters, phone calls, school application software, and through meetings. The teachers' communication dealt with letting the parents know how their child was doing at school and events that occurred at school. Participants mentioned if they ever had any questions, they knew the teachers would be available to answer any question they might have.

During the time of the interviews, the school had transitioned to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One parent mentioned how during that time, her child's teacher told her to feel free to contact him no matter what time if she had a question about her child's education. The parent said the teacher added that during virtual learning, the teachers were making every effort to get as many kids as possible and parents involved. It was harder for kids to remain focused on their schoolwork during virtual learning; therefore, the teachers were going

above and beyond their usual work hours. A parent mentioned that if she would text the teacher even at 9:00 pm, he would respond. She said this kind of commitment also motivated her to give her best to her child's education because she was seeing how dedicated the teachers were. Parent J added,

> We have always had this support from the school to do the projects. I'll tell you if I don't understand, I'll talk to them and they will explain to me what is going to be done or the task that they have sent.

The parents interviewed noted that the open communication that the teachers had with the parents encouraged them to be engaged in their children's education, both at home and at school. Parent C, who is both a parent and a teacher living in the nearby *colonia,* stated how valuable communication was between teachers and parents.

> When you communicate with your parents and let them know how important it is that they're involved in their child's education. That's when it's an eye opener for the parents. When you explain to them, when they get involved, that means that their child's going to be more successful.

Parent D concurred by saying "I think pretty much, there's a lot of communication with the parents. I think that helps a lot."

The constant communication that teachers had with parents helped to start the two-way communication between home and school. Many times, parents did not feel comfortable going to the school to ask questions about how their child was doing or about a certain assignment they needed to do. However, if the teachers contacted the parents, the parents tended to reach out to the teachers. Parent C mentioned,

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Calling parents and reaching out to them and making those home visits Ms., also. Those

one to one connections and, uh, just making them feel comfortable and welcome them.

You know, they're, they're not going to be intimidated with everybody else, you know,

and just go down to their level and make them feel needed and wanted and part of the

family, part of the learning family.

One parent mentioned something very powerful when she said that teachers helped them

with the tools necessary to help their kids, "they are not leaving us alone to do things." She also

mentioned how as parents, they needed to take "more responsibility ourselves" to reach out to

the teachers if they had doubts. She stated "the teachers are there" for the parents. Throughout

the interviews, several parents mentioned how many parents did not have an interest to know

what was occurring in their children's classroom and school. They often attended the

celebrations at school, but not to the informational meetings the school offered to parents on how

they can help at home. Parent J mentioned how the school was providing the support to them, but

parents did not support the school.

So where is the support of a parent if the school is offering it to you. If the school is, it is

giving the study plan online, through the apps that they have for the students ... through

Messenger, that is, by all means it is offering it to you. I mean, it's not like you say there

is, I didn't receive it. I don't have it. Is that where I find it. In other words, you are

receiving everything, but you are not supporting the school as you should.

Some parents might not reach out to the school staff due to a fear of language barrier.

However, the parents mentioned that all of the teachers know how to speak Spanish. One of the

English-speaking parents, Parent A, mentioned how she felt that the school events focused more

on Spanish speaking parents.

I feel that maybe the school needs a little bit more effort, not just, um, by… because the times that I have gone, I feel like they've only focused on like certain types of parents. Only reason being, because like I said, there's more Spanish parents that go than English parents. There's maybe only like four English parents that have gone in that whole entire school, everybody else is Spanish.

From the interviews, it was evident that the school had done their part in communicating to the parents' home language. However, from the comments discussed, it seemed that many of the parents did not take advantage of this because they did not attend the school events or meetings.

Another staff member that was mentioned was the parent educator at each of the school campuses. Both elementary schools were fortunate to have a parent educator available. The parent educator facilitates the use of parent volunteers at the school campus. In addition, they are also responsible for coordinating different events and activities for the parents of the school. The staff member mentioned how few parents took advantage of the opportunity, and it was usually the same group of parents who attended the different events planned by the parent educator. The parent educators hosted events such as English classes, Zumba classes, and cooking classes among others to entice parents to attend the school campus. These events usually happen during the day.

The communication between parents and teachers also included discussing how to best help their children, especially if the child was struggling. Two of the parents mentioned that their children were struggling. One child was struggling with virtual learning while the other child was rushing through the assignments and finishing very quickly. Both children's parents discussed some ideas they had with the teachers on how to address their children's struggles. The

second parent stated how she informed the teacher that all the child needed was to be given more work to keep his mind busy. The parent also stated that the teacher did follow her suggestion, and the issue has lessened. She mentioned she had been using that strategy at home too, and it was working.

That openness between the parent and the teacher is necessary for the child's success. As partners in education, both the parent and teacher can work together for the best interest of the child. For example, the participants mentioned that if the teachers were not aware of the needs of the students, it was harder for them to understand what the child was going through at home.

During the pandemic, the students had to rely on the internet to attend their classes. Therefore, if the students did not have reliable internet, it was not feasible for them to attend their virtual classes. Both parents and teachers had a more challenging time trying to contact each other. Parents and students were challenged with knowing what they needed to do to complete the homework assigned. The parents who were more engaged in their children's education found it easier to communicate with their children's teachers.

Events at School for Parents. The second subtheme of the parent and home connection was events that occurred at school for parents. The parents mentioned how the schools hosted different events throughout the school year to invite parents to participate. This is also evident in documents and photos of numerous events the school campuses had all year. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when part of the school year was conducted virtually, the schools had several events that were hosted virtually. The school events included celebrations, student awards, and informational meetings. However, several parents mentioned that there was more participation during celebrations than with informational meetings. Parent J admits the following,

But in events that are like [*clausuras*], on Mother's Day, on Grandparent's Day, there is, they go more. More than those who go when they are the parents' meetings. So then I say what is the excuse? Only going to the celebrations and not going to find out about the school system that your children are receiving.

Parents' engagement during the school events seemed to be influenced by whether their child was participating in the school event or not. This could possibly stem from the following as Parent H expressed:

Knowing that my child is doing something or participating in something makes me want to be a part of what they are doing. I love going crazy chasing after my kids, prepping stuff for my kids because I know that kids really do love when parents are involved. They know their parents do care. They also know when they don't care because of lack of participation.

The participants concurred that there was more parent attendance in school events when their children took part in the event. The parents wanted to see their children in the spotlight, and they tended to go to these events more often versus events where the school staff were the only ones presenting.

Validation of Parents and Their Culture. Parents expressed how they felt validated and appreciated by their children's teachers due to several reasons. One of the reasons was because the teachers communicated with them on how they can be reached at any time with questions they might have about their children's education. They felt validated because they felt teachers would hear them out when parents reached out to them. Another reason is whenever the parents did reach out to the teachers, the teachers always had a response and were always willing to help. Parent H mentioned that "parents are always welcomed by the teachers." Another parent

mentioned how teachers helped by always encouraging them to get involved and volunteer. When teachers validated the parents and saw them as a support system, the parents continued reaching out to teachers and school staff. Parent B discussed how important teachers made parents feel when they showed their appreciation,

So all those practices like feedback and, um, sending out visuals and, and showing and just, just having the kids themselves, do something for their parents and how grateful they are to do it. I feel that that, that, uh, really like brings out how it makes them feel how it makes the students feel, you know.

Teachers and school staff at these elementary school campuses did a great job in validating the parents' culture. Parents mentioned that the school staff hosted events that they could relate to and that were part of their everyday life. For example, one of the popular events was *Loteria* Night. During this event the parents were invited to play *Loteria*, which is a type of Mexican bingo. *Loteria* is an iconic game for many of the families in the South Texas region. Close relatives and friends get together to play this at their houses, and everyone from the children to the grandparents, play. Therefore, it was something that the families were used to having in their everyday lives. "When it's something about [their] culture, I think that they, they come more often," was stated by Parent B. The promotion of these events was also seen in the photographs analyzed. The children, alongside their parents, were seen participating in this school wide event. Parent B added,

Because they feel more comfortable and they believe in it, it's something that, that they, that they believe in and it's something that they celebrate. So they're, they just want to come, you know, it's just in their nature to, to want to be, uh, to want to celebrate.

All participants came to the consensus that the home and parent communication played a huge role in continuing family engagement. According to the parents, this communication occurred through the Teacher and Parent Relationships, Events at School for Parents, and the Validation of the Parents and Their Culture. All parents discussed at least one of those subthemes occurring at their school campuses. The majority of the parents indicated more than one subtheme was present at their school campus.

Theme Three: Parents' Perspective of Education

The interviews also indicated that the importance parents placed on education influenced family engagement. For some parents, education was more important than for other parents. Under this theme, there were two subthemes that developed: Value of Education and their Children's Best Interest for Academic Success. These were important to analyze because they ensured to school staff how much parents cared for their children's education.

Value of Education. The parents stated that they highly valued an education. Although all parents expressed how important education was for their kids, this was particularly prevalent in three of the parents. Most of the parents expressed how they valued their children's education by stating they reached out to the teachers, attended events, and ensured they made time at home to help their kids with homework. Three of the parents went into much detail with anecdotes that depicted their value for education. For them, instilling the importance of education at an early age was key to having their children continue their education and earn a college degree. This was also seen by Parent A, who was once taught the value of education by her mom and has practiced this with her own children.

Because my mom, she was a parent volunteer and all of that when I went to school and when my sister went to school, so she said, we need to, we need to get involved now that you have kids. So we started getting involved in everything.

Parent J stated, "…as a parent we must take responsibility to help and support them." She mentioned that although she has five kids and worked the whole day, she came home and divided her time to assist her children with homework. She utilized a plan she created to be able to give her attention to each child and helped them finish their work. She also encouraged her children to read every day, even on the weekends because she believed "every day there is an opportunity to learn." Parent D also concurred that many parents did help their children with their homework.

I've seen a lot. Um, for example, when they say, when they send like a science project, I mean, there is a lot of projects out there. Um, so everyone can see, I seen a lot…I think that there it's a good outcome.

Similarly, another parent empowered her children to achieve their goals through education. Even at their young age, they were encouraged to start thinking about their future careers and how they could achieve them. Parent I stated, "we have planted in his head that we have to study to be someone in life." The mother empowered her son to think about his future, which helped him mature and evaluate his future. His mom was surprised that he was concerned about paying for college, since during the COVID-19 pandemic, both of his parents lost their jobs. His mom replied by stating that his dad would work three jobs and take out loans if necessary, but they, as parents, would ensure he attend a university. All parents concurred, that as parents, they must instill motivation in their children, and the importance of an education "… and it is the motivation, that as parents, we have to give them."

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On the other hand, Parent B, who is a teacher and a *colonia* parent mentioned the following statement,

> I live all my life in front of this school, en la *colonia*. All my life, and yet I became a teacher. So sometimes I really don't think it has anything to do with parental involvement or anything to do with where you come from, because I mean, I made it, you know, and it came from me like from me, wanting to get out of there. I think self-motivation has a lot to do with if they're going to make it or not.

Children's Best Interest for Academy Success. The participants stated they had their children's best interest for academic success in mind; they want the best for their children. The parents tried to attend all the school events that were occurring; however, there were times that they were not able to attend for several reasons. The main reason was usually because they had to work and could not request the day off. Nonetheless, the parents did have the intention of attending the school events and would if they could. For example, one of the parents mentioned how much it hurt her when she had to miss the Mother's Day Program at school due to not being allowed to miss work. What hurt her the most was how her absence at the event affected her children. She mentioned it was not so much her having to miss the event, but how her children reacted about her not being able to attend. Since her children were going to participate in the Mother's Day Program that was specifically for the mothers, the children were looking forward to having their mom attend.

In addition to attending events at school, the parents also demonstrated they had the children's best interest for academic success in mind by how they spent their time at home with their children. Parents mentioned that they ensured all their children completed their homework and they were constantly monitoring their progress. One parent said, she has five children, would

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come home from work, and had them turn in their completed homework. Parent J mentioned how important it is to be interested in their children's education: "It is about one being informed of what they are learning and about thinking about the education they are receiving and putting your point of view of what you want your school to offer to your children."

Parents mentioned that during this pandemic, they did not want to wait until next school year to expect their children to catch up. They noted how it was important for the children to show progress and attend school now. Despite the parents expressing their interest in their children's education, they acknowledged that there were some parents who showed lack of interest in their children's education. They heard it from the teachers who had shared with them how they wished there were more parents engaged in the kids' education. The teachers also stated that despite having to teach virtually, they wanted to reach as many parents as they could since many were not engaged or participating.

Theme Four: Family Background

Throughout the interviews, the parents discussed different characteristics about their family background that were present throughout the ten different families. The participants also shared that these same characteristics were present in families that live nearby them. This fourth theme can be divided into two subthemes that were discussed by the parents. The subthemes consisted of Number of Children and Work Schedules.

Number of Children. The number of children the parents had, also seemed to influence the engagement of the families. Parent B mentioned, "When you have multiple children, it's, it's very difficult. I mean, there's only one of you so." Several of the parents mentioned they had three or more children, and several mentioned how they were single parents raising their kids. For example, Parent A stated, "It's me and my two kids and my mom and my sister, my dad

goes, um and works every week." However, that did not impede this particular parent from engaging in their children's education. The parents who had three to five children mentioned that they came home, after a long day at work, and ensured that their children completed their homework. One of the parents mentioned how she had created and implemented a plan to ensure that she divided her time equally with all her children. She said following the plan was the only way she could ensure that she dedicated time to all her kids. Parent J stated,

> I have five children and I have a three-year-old girl. The other three who are in school, this one, and the oldest one and I still manage to get home and I try to have them turn in their complete homework.

Through their interview responses, the participants demonstrated that they were actively engaging in their children's education. However, they did bring to light that they knew of parents who did not engage in their children's education. Despite the number of children they had, the parents mentioned that if other parents were to divide and manage their time as they had, all of them would be able to dedicate time to their children and their education.

Work Schedule. The Work Schedule was the second subtheme that was discussed during the interviews and that directly impacted the family engagement. Parents discussed how many times they were not able to participate in school events because they were not able to request a day off from work. This affected the children because they expected their parents to attend the school events. Although, the parents wanted to be as engaged as they could in their kid's education, many times they had to choose work over attending events. Parent B mentioned, "They also have their schedule so it's very hard to go to your, your son's or your daughter's activities for school." She also shared that when she was younger, her parents had to work most of the time. Parent B stated, "my parents, my dad was never home. He would work away, which

I know it's a lot of, um, that's a lot of the situations for a lot of our students and my mom when she was a substitute." This goes back to their life priorities because if these parents did not attend work, they would jeopardize being able to keep their job. Many parents living in *colonias* come from low socioeconomic backgrounds; therefore, they are not able to afford losing their jobs.

Living an economically disadvantaged life affected many of their life commitments. The parents had to ensure they kept their jobs because they were living from paycheck to paycheck. They depended on the income to be able to provide the life necessities to their children. The children need the necessities to be able to survive, grow, and learn. The participants mentioned how poverty was prevalent in the *colonias* where they lived. This was also seen in the way they constructed their houses which were built in phases. Since many were undocumented or were not able to qualify for home loans, the families had to save money and add to their homes, section by section. When describing the *colonias,* Parent E mentioned the following, "They, they, I guess when their, when their money comes in, they do one part and then another part, and you don't really see a house that goes up real quick. It takes a while the houses from here."

Many of the families living in the *colonias* only had one parent who worked, and some were single parent family households. These situations also added to the stress of making sure they earned enough money to provide for their families. Parent D mentioned,

> I would think that it mostly wouldn't be that I would say that maybe because, I mean, a parent probably is working, other parents are at home um, I mean, it will be hard if the parents, you know only one parent works. So, um, it will probably be hard to get the day off, but I mean, I think it's one, if, you know, if parents know ahead of time that that works.

This is when, many times, the parents were not able to devote sufficient time to their children's education because they had to work to provide for their families.

Although some of the families only had one working parent, the other parent was still not able to attend the school functions. This could be because they only had one vehicle, or they avoided going outside for fear of being stopped by the Border Patrol Agents. However, it should be noted that parents mentioned that they were still able to engage in their children's education from home. They were aware how important it was to have them complete and submit their homework. They talked to their kids about the value of education and ensured they attended school every day. The times that parents were not able to attend the school events or school meetings, they took the opportunity to reach out to teachers to ask about what they missed from the meetings. This showed how they still found a way to engage in their children's education. Parent J indicated, "I could not participate with them, but I say I try to even if I do not participate in the meeting, talk with the teachers or with the Principal, right, to know what the meeting was about."

Parent J was engaged in her children's' education and found different ways to always keep herself informed about what was going on at school with her children. However, when asked directly about how they experienced family engagement at their children's school, most of the participants mentioned that participation was very low. They all agreed that the "parent meetings are where there is no participation." All mentioned that most of the parents who did attend school events, did so when the events were things such as celebrations, but not school meetings. Parents mentioned several of the reasons as to why the parents might not have attended the school functions. For example, Parent E stated,

Well, there is like the days there are school meeting and there is not much participation from the parents for those meetings. I do not know if it is due to their work but there is an opportunity to go in the morning or in the afternoon but no, honestly the number of families in the school, not even 50% show up.

From hearing the responses, the participants shared, it can be concluded that some parents are more engaged in their children's education than others. It was interesting to see how several shared their frustration about how they witnessed other parents who were not actively engaged in their children's education. They shared how the schools went above and beyond in providing the support for the children and for the parents, but some parents would not make themselves available. They mentioned how if they as parents could do it, so could the rest of the parents.

Summary

Chapter four consisted of the data collected from the interviews, surveys, and photos. By analyzing the interviews, surveys, and photos, I was able to triangulate the data; thus verifying it and making it more reliable. Participants were interviewed through email and phone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Photographs were also obtained to provide more data to answer the research questions. The three research questions were: 1) to what extent do parents, who reside in *colonias,* participate in their elementary children's education in a South Texas school district; 2) which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this study promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education; and 3) what are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study that hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education.

The analysis of data consisted in exploring themes from the interviews. Four themes and ten subthemes emerged from the participants' responses. The first theme was Parents' Access to Resources, which had the subthemes of Transportation, Knowledge and Skills of Pedagogy, and Living Conditions. The second theme was School and Home Communication and it had the subthemes of Teacher and Parent Relationships, Events at School for Parents, and Validation of Parents and Their Culture. The theme of Parents' Perspective of Education had the subthemes of Value of Education and their Children's Best Interest for Academic Success. The final theme of Family Background had the subthemes of Number of Children and Work Schedules. The themes were discussed in detail and quotes were included as references. Chapter five will consist of the discussion and conclusion of the research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of families living in *colonias* and the extent to which they engage in their children's education. Family engagement from families living in *colonias* is influenced by many factors. By exploring the lives of parents who live in *colonias* and who have children in elementary schools from two districts in South Texas, factors that hinder and promote family engagement were identified.

The findings in this study are similar to the information found in the review of the literature on *colonia* family engagement. Family engagement, from parents living in *colonias* is all influenced by factors such as the school and home connection, parent's access to resources, parent's view of education, and family background (Barone, 2011; Hollinger, 2001; Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018; Marschall, 2006; Renth, 2015; Vera et al., 2017). Some of these factors help promote family engagement while others hinder it.

Researchers identified that engagement in children's education from families who live in *colonias,* tends to be low (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011). This finding was confirmed in this study as parents who participated in the interviews stated they observe low family engagement overall related to children's education. The participants admitted they are personally engaged in their own children's education but, at times, various factors that impede them from fully engaging in their children's education. The participants shared the barriers they experienced to engagement are the same factors they

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observed in other families that lived close to them. Past researchers also identified varying levels

of family engagement depending on life circumstances (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007;

Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010;

Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011).

    Data were derived from participants' interviews, surveys, and photos to achieve triangulation

and to explain the phenomenon through the collection of rich data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012;

Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data were analyzed and categorized by themes,

which helped answer the three research questions:

1. To what extent do parents, who reside in *colonias,* participate in their elementary
   children's education in a South Texas school district?

2. Which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this study promote participation of
   parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?

3. What are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study that hinder parents
   living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "To what extent do parents, who reside in *colonias,*

participate in their elementary children's education in a South Texas school district?"

    The interviews, surveys, and photographs, revealed a low percentage of family

engagement from parents living in *colonias*. Eight of the 10 parents interviewed stated parents in

the *colonia* have low engagement. There was no distinction between parents by school campus;

the responses of how parents engaged in their children's education was similar in both schools.

This supports the research regarding the extent to which parents living in *colonias* engage in

their children's education. Parents stated, "parental involvement is limited" and occurs at a "low

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rate." Previous researchers also found a low percentage level of family engagement from families who live in *colonias* (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011).

Parents in this study participate in their children's education in a variety of ways. The results aligned with Cervone and O'Leary's (1982) Parental Involvement Continuum. Participants stated they are highly involved in one way or another, but they witness other parents who are not as highly involved. According to the Parental Involvement Continuum, engagement can range from passive to active participation. At times, the lack of participation in certain events or meetings comes across as no family engagement (Szech, 2021). For example, Parent H stated "parent engagement in school events is lacking when dealing with issues of our child's academics (literacy, student accountability)." Cervone and O'Leary classified type of engagement as passive participation during special events.

Participants also indicated parents engage in their children's education in other ways. Family engagement occurs through different venues, such as motivating children to complete their homework, instilling in them the value of education, ensuring they attend school, showing respect for teachers and the educational system, and communicating with their children's teachers and/or school staff. Activities such as motivating children to complete their homework, respecting the teachers and educational system, and instilling in their children the value of education are classified on the Parental Involvement Continuum as active participation i.e., parents teaching their children (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982). Helping children at home with homework and other activities falls under Type Four: Learning at Home of Epstein's Framework (1984). This type of parental engagement is mostly accomplished at home rather

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than showing presence at school. Home engagement over school engagement is a characteristic

of Latino parents but is usually not what is expected by school leaders or staff (Olivos &

Mendoza, 2010; Walker et al., 2011). School staff might perceive the lack of attendance to

school events as parents not caring about their children's education (Smith et al., 2011).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "Which factors, if any, as reported by the parents in this

study promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?"

Several factors resonated across all parents when they spoke about the things that

promote their family engagement. These factors include the teacher and parent relationships, the

school's validation of parents and their culture, the value parents have on education, and wanting

the best for their children. These factors were also present in the review of the literature

(Menchaca-Ochoa et al., 2012; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). The teacher-parent relationship

plays an essential role in helping promote family engagement. In this study, parents who

indicated a good rapport with the teachers and school staff were more inclined to stay in

communication with their children's teachers and be more engaged in their children's education.

The parents who felt their children's teachers were supporting them, also felt more obligated to

be present to support their children. Parents J, C, and D concurred that the constant

communication teachers have with them motivates them to continue being engaged in their

children's education. Teachers who validate parents and their culture allow parents to feel

appreciated, which increase the strength of communication between the school and home

(Menchaca-Ochoa et al., 2012; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). For example, Parent B stated,

"When it's something about [their] culture, I think that they, they come more often." In return,

the parents feel more comfortable going to school events or reaching out to the teachers if they

have a question. Parent C observed that when teachers make "those one-to-one connections and, uh, just mak[e] them feel comfortable and welcome them," parents tend to be more engaged.

The school and home connection was a prominent theme throughout analysis of parent interviews, documents, and photos. It was clear how the parent and school connection influences family engagement and encourages parents to be more involved. School and home connection includes teacher and parent relationships, events at school, and validation of parents and their culture.

Parents in this study discussed how they feel supported by their children's teachers. Parents feel that sense of connection and support when they reach out to the school staff and teachers. Parents stated teachers are always there to provide guidance; parents stated they do not feel alone when it comes time to help their children with education. Feeling valued and appreciated helps parents feel more comfortable or less intimidated when talking to teachers or attending school events.

Teacher's validation of parents and their culture was an important aspect of the school and home connection for parents in this study. This finding, correlates to research conducted by Menchaca-Ochoa et al. (2012) and Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2009). Building a connection around culture encouraged the parents in this study to engage or continue engaging in their children's education. The parents stated that staff host different events throughout the school year that connect to the parent's culture. When parents see that kind of effort, they feel a greater sense of belonging because the activity is familiar and inviting.

To continue connecting with parents, teachers and staff also cater to the parents' Spanish language. Many of the events held at the school are in Spanish to allow the parents to feel more comfortable understanding what is taking place. In contrast, when parents reach out to teachers

and do not receive a response, they are discouraged (Baker et al., 2016; Vera et al., 2017). For this reason, parents in this study felt there should be a strong connection between parents and teachers to foster a partnership. This strong partnership works for the best interest of the students because it allows both the teacher and parent to work in unison and support the child. If parents feel they have any questions about how their child is doing or how to help their child with a certain task, the reassurance of knowing they are not alone and would be supported, motivates them to continue the open communication between themselves and the teacher.

Schools continue to host events for parents; however, the most popular events are the ones in which the children participate versus the ones that are only informational. This type of engagement can be easily classified in the Parental Involvement Continuum. Under the continuum, attending special events that are informational and in which children participate is classified as a type of passive engagement (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982). Parents admitted they are more inclined to attend the events in which their children participate because they want to see their children present during the event. They also like for their children to see that they care by attending the event.

Although having events for parents continues to foster the school and home connection, schools can still take efforts to improve their connection with families (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). In this study, parents felt the school staff needs to find different ways of motivating and encouraging parents to participate in the informational meetings and not just attend events where their children present. This type of parental engagement falls under Parents Education on the Parental Involvement Continuum; it is mainly used as a way to inform the parents of how their children are doing at school (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982).

Parents in this study place a highly valued their children's education. Because of the perceived value education has, parents are encouraged to continue promoting to their children the importance of education. This contributing factor is one of the most valuable assets parents can pass on to and influence their children for their future. As one parent stated, parents instill the love for education from an early age; it becomes easier to continue fostering the importance of education as their children grow older. Parent I stated, "We have planted in his head that we have to study to be someone in life."   The parents in this study all have great respect for the educational system. They communicate to their children how education is important and they demonstrate its value by respecting their children's teachers. This type of family engagement is key in children's overall success. Promoting the importance of education starts at home and all it takes is parents' commitment and time to instill education's value in the hearts of their children.

Many of the parents in this study lack formal education. However, the wisdom they acquired from life and their many experiences, provides them with the knowledge to guide and support their children. The children then used the knowledge and the many resources found in their household to make connections between home and school (Moll, 2015). This notion is referred as the funds of knowledge that parents can use to help students succeed at school and beyond by having students share and build on the knowledge they have already gained (Gonzalez et al., 1994; Moll, 2015; Moll et al., 1992; Szech, 2021). In this study parents' lack of education was not an impediment as some of the parents created strategies and approaches to better help their child with the schoolwork. Under the Parental Involvement Continuum (Cervone & O'Leary, 192), having parents' help their children with schoolwork falls under parents being active participants in their children's education. One of the parents stated she felt valued when she went up to the teacher with her suggestion that she was using at home and asked the teacher

to try it at school. They were amazingly surprised when the strategy worked at school too. This is one of the most active forms of parental engagement (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982).

Parents in this study place a high value in education and, therefore, motivated their children to gain an education no matter what obstacle comes their way. Parents instill this value in their children at an early age to foster internationalization of the importance of education. Although there are several factors that might affect the way parents engage in their children's education, parents who want to be engaged find a way to do so. The family engagement of the parents in this study does not look like the traditional one-way family engagement that teachers assume should happen (Szech, 2021). Many times, the motivation parents have to engage in their children's education is simply that they have the best interest of their child in mind. The parent's best interest for their children and the value they place on their education was the motivation they had to attend meetings, help with homework, and speak to their children about the importance of education (Szech, 2021). In this study, while the parents interviewed demonstrated the motivation to be engaged with their children's education, they stated they have heard from teachers that not all parents share the same desire.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "What are the obstacles, if any, as reported by parents in this study that hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?"

Parents' access to resources such as transportation, knowledge and skills of pedagogy and their living conditions adversely affect their participation in their children's education. Parental engagement helps increase academic achievement and contributes to children's positive attitude toward school (Marschall, 2006; Mayo & Siraj, 2015). The factors hindering engagement identified by the parents in this study were similar to those reported by previous researchers

(Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Walker et al., 2011). Participants stated there are factors such as lack of transportation, work schedule, living conditions, and lack of knowledge and skills of pedagogy which impeded them from fully engaging in their children's education (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Renth, 2015; Vera et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2011). Some of these factors are things that are not fully in their control. The literature indicates these are the common factors that hinder family engagement in families with a similar background (Barone, 2011; Smith, et al., 2011).

Parents described times when they wanted to attend school functions or engage more in their child's education, but were not able to because they did not have the necessary resources. Parents are willing to attend school events or meetings, however, sometimes they do not have the transportation to do so or they need to work (Barone, 2011; Smith, et al., 2011). Therefore, their participation in special events is considered as passive participation by the school.

The parents in this study stated they have witnessed families who are unable to engage in school activities due to a lack of transportation. The families only have one car, and one parent might be using the car for work. Some families do not have a car. Parents feel their hands are tied because they are not able to attend school functions as often as they desire. This finding correlates to research that indicates how a lack of transportation creates an obstacle for parents when it comes to attending school events (Barone, 2011; Hollinger, 2011; Marschall, 2006; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). It should not be construed that parents do not want to be engaged in their children's education. Adding to the burden of transportation is the undocumented status of many families who live in *colonias*. Barton et al. (2015) and Strickland (2016) stated that *colonias* are populated by a percentage of undocumented immigrants. The families who live close to the border and, for that reason, border patrol agents are always close by. The families who

participated in this study talked about not feeling comfortable or feeling a sense of danger that

they might be caught and deported back to their home country. This is another reason why they

avoid walking on the streets or driving as much as they could. For them, driving to their

children's schools is more of a luxury than a necessity because of the risk they take in being

apprehended by the border patrol agents. They limit their trips to only those that are necessary,

such as going to work or buying groceries. Parents who can go outside without the risk of being

deported are faced with the misfortune of not having family close by who might extend a helping

hand. Additionally, parents sometimes do not feel comfortable asking their neighbors for a ride.

Parents' confidence level might also impede them from engaging in their children's

education. Many of the parents who live in *colonias* have not received an education and might

not feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to help their children or communicate with

the teachers. Spanish is the predominant language of parents living in *colonias,* and many parents

do not feel comfortable going to the school because they are afraid they will not understand what

is being presented or communicated to them. Their low confidence level caused by a lack of

knowledge and skills of pedagogy also forces them to believe the teachers are the only persons

responsible for their children's education. This finding correlates with research that indicates

parents in *colonias* see the teachers as the experts in the field of education (Marschall, 2006;

Walker et al., 2011).

Many *colonia* parents believe they lack a knowledge of pedagogy to help their children

(Barton et al., 2015). This belief produces a feeling that felt that they were not apt to help their

children as they should. For this reason, some *colonia* parents do not engage as much as they

need to in their children's education. They are not aware that the success of their children

depends on the strong connection between all three stakeholders: school staff, parents, and

students (Epstein, 1984; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). In addition, the capital wealth parents can share with their children can create a tremendous impact (Ferrera, 2015; Larrotta & Yammura, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The parents have wide array of resources they can use to support their children and engage in their children's education. An example of this is how they have used their resources to be successful by using the support from family members or neighbors (Ferrera, 2015; Larrotta & Yammura, 2011; Yosso, 2005; Wang, Deng, & Yang, 2016).

Parents also feel disconnected from the school when they were not informed about various meetings or events at the school. Some parents might feel that their only obligation is to take their child to school, and once the student steps foot onto the campus, they become the school's responsibility. However, this also means that the parents are putting all their trust in the school staff to educate their children. The parents have a strong value in education and respect the school staff. They feel the teachers are the trained professional who could best educate their children. Although they support their children entirely, many times their lack of presence at the school might come across as lack of commitment. This is something that can only be perceived as the educators gets to know the families.

One parent discussed the number of children she has as a barrier to involvement. She is a single parent and indicated she has to be strategic on how she divides her time between all her children. Her story is also the story of several parents living in *colonias* (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011). For some, this task might be more difficult to accomplish than for others. Support systems are vital for single parents and parents with many children. Some families live with extended family, which helps provide additional

help in child-rearing. The support system became imperative when the parents are not able to

attend school events, need to ask for a ride, or need help in taking care of their children.

Although some households might have several family members living under the same roof, this

can be both negative and positive.

Parents in this study and in the *colonias* must prioritize their activities to ensure they

provide their children with life necessities. This means they sometimes have to make a decision

to not attend a school event because of their job. *Colonia* parents have a low socioeconomic

status and every cent they earn goes toward either adding a part to their house, transportation,

bills, or food. The parents cannot afford to miss work or calling in sick because that would mean

their paycheck will be short. Therefore, on several occasions, the parents in this study said they

had to elect to miss out on school events or could not spend too much time with their children.

The parents interviewed did mention, however, that if they are strategic, they should still be able

to care for their children.

Parents in this study stated that these difficult choices drive low engagement.

Participants are more willing to go above and beyond to be involved in their children's

education. However, they witnessed several families of their children's classmates who do not

engage as often as these parents feel they should. Although two parents interviewed mentioned

family engagement is present at their children' school, the way they stated their belief was not

reaffirming. The parents did not give clear examples of how they see significant family

engagement. Parents' inability to describe how they see family engagement enacted lessened the

confidence in their statements. In contrast, the eight participants who mentioned there was low

family engagement did provide clear examples of what they consider to be low family

engagement. These examples, confirmed by 80% of the sample as evidence of low engagement lead to the conclusion of low engagement among the *colonia* families represented in this study.

The lack of resources attributed to the living conditions the families have to endure. Living in a *colonia* means that many of the families have similar living conditions. *Colonias* are notorious for their lack of infrastructure, lack of electricity, and small homes, among other poor living conditions that end up affecting the lives of children and their education (Olmedo & Ward, 2016; Texas Secretary of State, 2016). The parent's number one priority is to provide a safe environment for their children so they can remain healthy and have a roof over their heads at night. Although parents value education, their priority is to work to provide necessities for their family. This means that if there is a school event scheduled while they are at work, they will not be able to attend because they must continue to provide as much income as possible. Parents must earn enough money to construct their houses, which are usually built-in phases due to the need to save money for building materials (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Galvin, 2018; Nuñez-McHiri, 2012). Because parents are at the mercy of their work life, they must place full trust in the school system, respecting the teachers, and relying on the school staff to educate their children.

Family composition in the *colonias* examined in this study mainly consist of single parents, with multiple children, who live with extended family members. This finding is consistent with the literature on families with similar backgrounds (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007; Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Magnuson & Schindler, 2016; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011). Parents discussed the ways they managed to engage in their children's education. Participants spoke about personal motivation and the value they place on education. Because of their commitment to their children's education, parents find

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creative ways to engage with each child in their family. They have learned to cope with the various challenges that come with having multiple children or being a single parent. The support system they have at home from their extended families also helps them continue to be innovative in their support of their children's education.

Family support systems are helpful when parents have to work at the same time there is a school event or when their children need help with their homework. Parents discussed how their extended family usually steps in to show support for the children and remain engaged in their education. The parents might have wanted to attend their children's school activities, but their life priority was to survive. In order to survive, they must work to provide for their children, so attending school events was not always a priority. Teachers may view parents' nonattendance at school events as poor family engagement (Szech, 2021) but it may be that the ways parents in *colonias* engage are different from what is traditionally expected. Low participation in school events does not necessarily mean that parents are not engaged in their children's education in other ways. *Colonia* parents might still communicate to their children the importance of an education, help them with homework, and communicate with teachers about their children's progress in school (Szech, 2021). Participants in this study confirmed their own involvement in their children's education but also discussed their observations of other families' low engagement.

Implications

Parents shared their lives as parents living in *colonias* and the factors that influence their engagement in their elementary children's education. Eight participants talked about observing low family engagement from their counterparts and recognized that low engagement is often due to factors that were out of parent's control.

School staff should also be aware that many times parents still engage in their children's education from home (Szech, 2021). Educators need to be aware the parent engagement occurs in different ways and in a continuum. It could be the case that although parents do not attend school events they are still highly engaged in their children's education from home. This is imperative for school leaders to also be aware of. School leaders serve students and their families. Therefore, as a school leader, they should be familiarized with their student's circumstances at home. This can shed light as to the reason how the students are performing academically at school but also the reason why their parents might not be as involved at school as educators would want them to be. Becoming familiarized with each student's family background can also help school leaders bridge the gap between home and school. For example, if the family is going through a difficult circumstance he/she can help communicate this to their teachers so they can understand and better help the student. The school leader can also take initiative in seeking resources to provide for the family if they are going through a difficult circumstance.

The findings of this study shed knowledge on the factors that promote and hinder parental engagement from parents living in *colonias.* Educators who work with families from *colonias* need to continue fostering the connection between school and home and validate students' parents and their culture. This will help promote parental engagement from the families living in *colonias.* In addition, educators need to acknowledge that parents are engaging in their children's education from home and value parents' contributions. Parents need to know their efforts at home are valued by school staff. Showing respect and value for parents will help motivate parents to continue engaging in their children's education. Educators should recognize parent's view of education, such as the value they have for their child's education and the importance

parents place on their child's best interest. The considerations will promote family engagement for *colonia* families.

There are several factors that hinder parental engagement; therefore, school staff should seek to support families as they manage these barriers to engagement. For example, findings revealed the families have difficulty attending events at school due to their work schedules and transportation limitations. Therefore, school staff should be accommodating to parents by either offering the events at different times or providing the information through different means. Building the bridge between home and school is imperative in education in order to help students grow academically and socially. Being aware of the lives of parents living in *colonias* is one way to continue building that bridge (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). Being aware that many families are experiencing difficult situations at home that it might be difficult for them to assist school events or even respond to teacher's phone calls or emails.

My personal experiences, both as a student and educator, are what drew me to this type of research. Exploring the lives of parents who live in *colonias* is of utmost importance to me because of my first-hand experience with it. Helping children who live in *colonias* is something I want to continue doing. The living conditions described by parent in this study are similar to what I observed when teaching children from *colonias.* It is important to be aware of and understand the living conditions of students living in *colonias* and know there may be reasons, which are out parents' control that limit their ability to fully engage in their children's education.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is recommended to continue exploring the lives of parents living in *colonias* due to the limitations this study contained. One of the limitations was that the study was conducted with parents of two school campuses. Further research would benefit from expanding

the number of interviews to include parents from a wider sample size in order to collect more information. This could help in identifying additional factors that contribute to family engagement from parents of elementary children living in *colonias*. Second, the parents interviewed were all highly involved in family engagement. This limitation might have yielded results that are only present in parents that are highly engaged. A suggestion would be to interview parents and school staff to see if the perceptions of school staff align with the perceptions of parents.

This study was conducted in South Texas, and could also be expanded to include *colonias* in other regions. Additional research in *colonias* from other regions would help expand on the findings by demonstrating similarities and differences based on geographic location and culture. A longitudinal study in which data are collected over a longer period of time might yield more findings about family engagement among *colonia* parents. For example, if data were collected over the course of a school year, researchers might be able to identify further the types of events parents are able to engage in and whether the timing of those events contributes to level of engagement. Finally, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a limitation because the school setting, virtual learning environment, and home environment were completely different than during a typical school year of in-person instruction. A suggestion would be to replicate this study over an extended period of time once the pandemic has diminished significantly at a time when the learning environment operates at its traditional level.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions are as follows:

1. Give background information of where you live and how many of your children attend this school campus.

2. To what extent do you believe parents at this school participate in their children's education?

3. Which factors, do you believe, help promote participation of parents from *colonias* to engage in their children's education?

4. Which factors, do you believe, hinder parents living in *colonias* from engaging in their children's education?

5. Can you share a personal story of a time when you were not able to participate in your children's education? It could have been an event at school or a project at home, etc.

6. What difficulties have you encountered when trying to engage in your child's education?

7. What has helped when trying to engage in your child's education?

8. How do you feel the school has helped to support family engagement?

9. Please feel free to add any information I may have left out that you believe is important to this study.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1.   Parent Name: _____

2.   Gender: Check the appropriate response

      Male _____ Female _____

3.   Marriage Status: check the appropriate response

      Married _____ Single _____ Separated _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____

4.   Ethnicity: check the appropriate response

      Hispanic/Latino _____

      Not Hispanic/Latino _____

5.   Home: Check the appropriate response

      Do you live in a *colonia*?

      Yes _____ No _____

6.   Children: Check the appropriate response

      How many of your elementary children attend this school campus? _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eugenia M. Hernandez-Moreno graduated from the University of Texas Pan American with her Bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and a minor in Bilingual Education in May 2007. She started working as an elementary teacher after her graduation. In 2008, she started pursuing her Master's Degree in Guidance and Counseling at the University of Texas Pan American and graduated in May 2011. In her pursuit as a life-long learning, she was accepted to the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program. Upon acceptance to the program, she started working as a Research Assistant at the University of Texas Pan American. After a couple of years as a Research Assistant, Eugenia started working as a high school counselor and continued working on her doctoral program at the University of Texas Pan American, which was later renamed the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Eugenia was awarded a Doctor in Education degree from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in May 2022. Her email address is eugeniah04@yahoo.com.