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INVISIBLE DOESN'T MEAN INACTIVE: PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF AN ARABIC SPEAKING COMMUNITY ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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of
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
at
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
Aziz Elabida

Date Submitted 11/10/2021 Date Approved 1/30/2022

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ABSTRACT

INVISIBLE DOESN'T MEAN INACTIVE: PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF AN ARABIC SPEAKING COMMUNITY ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Aziz Elabida

An extensive body of research has established the positive impact that parental involvement has on student academic, social, and emotional performance and well-being. These benefits are, however, not enjoyed by all students due to a string of logistical, communicative, perceptual, and cultural obstacles. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of parental involvement as perceived and practiced by Arabic speaking parents in American public schools. This research is guided by the six typologies of Epstein's parental involvement model (1995, 2007, and 2012) and Khalifa's four strands of culturally responsive school leadership (2016). Through a descriptive single case study, the researcher conducted virtual semi-structured individual interviews of 16 Arabic speaking parents, two focus groups of eight paraprofessionals, and three community-based leaders to explore the challenges that Arabic speaking parents face as they strive to support their children in education. The results of this study yielded three major themes: cultural and religious mismatch, communicative barriers, and logistical obstacles. The research provides district and school leaders with a series of culturally responsive recommendations to address these obstacles. The study is significant in that it added new cultural insight to a limited body of research about the Arabic speaking parents' involvement in their children's education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my wife Tracy, my son Harouni, my mother-in-law Danessa (Mama Mia) who have been a renewable source of support, encouragement, and patience during my graduate study and research. I would also like to dedicate this research to Khali Muhammed who supported me tremendously and sowed the seeds of educational aspirations in my brain since my childhood. Thank you all for your unwavering support, unconditional love, and great sacrifices to facilitate the process of this accomplishment. Alhamdulillah, I am blessed to have you in my life. May Allah bless you and reward all of you.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Parental involvement has been an area of academic research for decades. Research has provided convincing evidence about the strong existing correlation between parental involvement and students' social-emotional well-being, positive attitudes towards school, fewer unsubstantiated referrals to special education, intellectual perseverance, lower dropout rates, fewer behavioral challenges, fewer suspensions, and academic success (Christenson & Hurley, 1997; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995; Jeynes, 2011; Panferov, 2010; Ream & Palardy, 2008; Scharton, 2019). Promoting, supporting, and expanding parent involvement in the education of children involves pivotal approaches and strategies to advance the effectiveness and improve the quality of education (Chrispeels, 1996; Epstein, 2009; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997).

These research-based findings have propelled educational policy makers across the country to double their efforts to enact federal educational policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) that were re-authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. NCLB requires district and school leaders to engage parents in their children's education and defines parental involvement as,

> the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: assisting their child's learning; being actively involved in their child's education at school; serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as

> appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (No Child Left Behind, 2002, Section 1118).

ESSA expanded the school accountability matrix to include family and community engagement (Blank & McGuire, 2016). In a serious effort to ensure educational equity and excellence, ESSA charts four policy principles to accelerate equitable learning for all students with a focus on historically underserved students, including immigrant students and English language learners. ESSA requires schools to design and adopt a high quality curriculum that requires culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. The act also lays out measures of school success that holds schools equally responsible for all student groups with different socio-economic, racial, linguistic, cultural, and cognitive abilities and backgrounds. Finally, ESSA includes in its accountability system the school climate that supports equitable practices and outcomes for students (Blank & McGuire, 2016). Student engagement and inclusion require school leaders to promote parental involvement to enhance students' sense of belonging and boost students' learning.

In response to the ESSA principles of accountability measures and designations, states developed systems to hold their districts accountable for student and parental engagement in education. For instance, New York City has developed a school quality guide or a framework for great schools that highlights the following pillars: student achievement, rigorous instruction, collaborative teachers, supportive environment, effective school leadership, strong family-community ties, and trust.

ESSA and Strong Family-Community Ties

The element of strong family-community ties measures the extent to which schools establish strong and meaningful partnerships with parents and communities to improve school performance (New York City Department of Education, 2015). State and national policies use these principles to foreground community partnerships to accelerate learning and instruction and advance equity (N.Y.C. Chancellor, 2018) to reap the different benefits of parental engagement that research has highlighted. In studying the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Scharton (2019) found that students whose parents and guardians were involved in schools obtained higher grades, attended school regularly, and graduated on time regardless of their parents' socio-economic status and educational backgrounds. These evidence-based findings should be a source of inspiration and hope for schools whose student performance is struggling due to factors such as low attendance, lack of sense of belonging, lack of motivation, lack of educational resources, and cultural and linguistic challenges.

Obstacles to Parental Involvement

A number of factors such as language barriers, communication methods and styles, cultural differences, and perceptions (Geenen et al., 2005) affect parental involvement in school-based activities.

Communicative Obstacles

Research found that communication is one of the obstacles for English Language Learners (E.L.L.) parents to actively take part in school-initiated activities (Poza et al., 2014; Ramirez, 2003). Parents with no or limited English language use are intimidated to visit a large school when they know there are no or few people who can speak their

language. The research also found that while there are schools that provide interpreters, the latter are so formal and have little time to interact with parents to fully understand or gain their trust to ask them probing questions (Poza et al., 2014). As a result, parents feel that when they attend school activities, teachers and interpreters are talking at them, and the relationship becomes transactional instead of being relational (Panferov, 2010; Reilly, 2008).

Cultural Obstacles

Another barrier to parental involvement for parents with a different cultural background, like Arabic-speaking parents (A.S.P.s), is the lack of cultural understanding on the part of school-based staff. Different perceptions and expectations of what E.L.L. parents and school leaders consider a successful school involvement create confusion for E.L.L. parents. The literature found that most of the immigrants respect the authority and competence of school staff to take care of their children without parents being involved (Doucet, 2011; Georgis et al., 2014; Panferov, 2010; Perriel, 2015). Parents coming from a culture where teachers and school leaders are fully entrusted with the future of students, and there are no expectations of parents to attend school activities do not attend school-centered activities because of their previous experiences.

In cultures similar to Arab culture, questioning a teacher’s classroom choices is considered disrespectful and is not socially and culturally accepted. In Arabic, for example, there is a proverb that says, "*9om lilmo3alim wafeh atabjeela/ kada almo3alimo a yakoona rasula*" (stand up for the teacher and glorify him & [her]/ for a teacher's status was about to be akin to a messenger/prophet). It is difficult for parents coming from such backgrounds to go to schools and ask teachers about curriculum, instruction, assessments,

and other school-related issues. In addition, immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education takes different invisible forms, not just physical visibility as U.S schools expect. Furthermore, parental involvement is understood and practiced based on how A.S.P.s understand it. The challenge here is that parental involvement is open to different interpretations and measured by different standards that might not be well communicated to parents. In the case that the standards and interpretations are conveyed to A.S.P.s, the new expectations of parents might not be in harmony with what they consider a true parental involvement within their scope of understanding. The larger question about equity is similar to Yosso's (2005) questioning; that is, whose culture, standards, and interpretations have more capital and acceptance?

Different Perceptions of Parental Involvement

The third obstacle to parental involvement is parents' perceptions of parental involvement. While the research gap on the Arab's parental involvement in school activities in the U.S.A. needs to be filled, there are sporadic attempts in the Arab world that started examining the perception of Arab parents and their attitudes towards school participation. In Abu Dhabi, Jordan, and Israel, research highlighted three findings. First, Arab parents know very little about how the school system operates due to their absence from school activities that discuss student learning. Second, there is no shared definition and understanding of school participation between school leaders and parents. Third, both Arab parents and school principals do not believe that parents should be involved in school activities and decision-making. This belief is rooted in the fact that parents entrust educators with their jobs regarding students’ academic achievement. Parents and teachers also believe that teachers, not parents, should shoulder teaching responsibility since they

are trained to teach. On the other hand, parents deal with their students' education by - upbringing and supporting them at home through different means (Abdullah et al., 2011; Aghbaria & Kna'ana, 2009; Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2007; Moosa et al., 2005).

A large body of literature studies the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement (Brown et al., 2011; Desimone, 1999; Fan & Chen, 2001; Rath et al., 2008). Despite this, most of these studies have focused only on the general student population of Hispanic and Asian students and parents. There is, however, a gap in the literature about A.S.P.s (El Nokali et al., 2010). Therefore, generalizing these studies' findings to specific student population groups such as Arabic speaking students and parents might be myopic and inaccurate (Gniewosz & Noack, 2012; Jasis & Ordonez- Jasis, 2012). There are some applicable findings of previous research, such as work schedule conflict that other parent subgroups like Asian, Hispanic reported. However, some cultural and religious idiosyncrasies are exclusively related to (A.S.P.s) who observe Islamic teachings and cultural norms: avoiding gender mixing is one of these values that cannot be compromised for such parent subgroups (Aghbaria & Kna'ana, 2009; Hourani et al., 2012).

Educators and school leaders expect and demand Arabic speaking parental involvement with their children's schooling because it is instrumental in students' success, yet there is a shortage of resources and research for schools to consult with as they strive to deepen their partnerships with A.S.P.s. This lack of resources creates isolation and disconnection between schools and A.S.P.s because school leaders do not understand their realities and lived experiences. Therefore, meaningful partnerships between schools

and A.S.P.s are limited but can be revived through understanding parents' cultural backgrounds, facilitating communication, uncovering perceptions of parental involvement, and engaging parents' voices and perspectives.

Most school leaders use traditional parental involvement activities such as Parent-Teacher Conferences (P.T.C.s), Parent- Teacher Association (P.T.A), and Back-to-School Nights. Leaders attach high value to in-person attendance at a school-determined specific time and day. As a result, they judge the parents' commitment to and involvement in their children's education using the criteria of the dominant stream model of involvement. Like other minority or "minoritized" parents, A.S.P.s might receive inequitable educational opportunities provided by the school-based staff (Crozier & Davies, 2007). These traditional forms of parental involvement are breeders of educational inequities and alienation from which the non-dominant parents like A.S.P.s suffer. Additionally, research has found that when educators and school leaders fail to understand the cultures of a minority or minoritized students and parents, they tend to view linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse children and families through a deficit approach (Calabrese et al., 2004; Carvalho 2001; Lightfoot, 2004; O'Connor, 2001).

This deficit-based approach ought to be replaced by an asset-based approach through promoting cultural awareness and competence, affirming and welcoming culturally diverse parents, and establishing true partnerships that seek in-depth understanding and responsiveness to parents' needs as provisioned in the ESSA (2016). School leaders and educators need to be mindful of a string of considerations needed to facilitate productive parental involvement for A.S.P.s effectively. Some factors have

communicative implications that stem from linguistic sources, and others spring from gender-based norms conceived and practiced within a specific cultural community (Geenen et al., 2005). Awareness of these factors will pave the path towards school-home communication and a two-way cultural bridge leading to fostering a sense of belonging, value, and student success at all levels.

Problem Statement

While research has presented strong evidence that there is a strong positive link between parental involvement and students' social-emotional, behavioral, and academic achievement (Perriel, 2015), many multilingual students and parents are not enjoying these benefits. This disadvantage is attributed to the fact E.L.L.'s, including Arabic speaking students, parental participation in school activities has been shrinking due to several barriers (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Floyd, 1998; Moles, 1993; Panferov, 2010). As for the Arabic speaking population, Figures 1 and 2 from the United States Office of English Language Acquisition highlight the rapid increase of Arabic speaking student population that requires immediate attention and study.

Figure 1

Numbers of Reported Arabic Speaking EL Students: SY 2008-09 through Fall 2015

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008–09 through 2015–16 "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/xls/tabn204.27.xls

Figure 2

The Top 20 Languages on States' "Top Five" Lists of Languages Spoken by K-12 ELLs: 2016-2017 School Year

Ranking	States' Top 5 Languages: SY 2016-17	Number of Speakers Reported [a/]	Percent of Total U.S. EL Students [b/]
1	Spanish; Castilian	3,790,949	76.44%
2	Arabic	122,227	2.46%
3	Chinese	94,711	1.91%
4	Vietnamese	63,078	1.27%
5	Somali	29,460	0.59%
6	Haitian; Haitian Creole	26,032	0.52%
7	Hmong	19,616	0.40%
8	Tagalog	19,169	0.39%
9	Portuguese	18,305	0.37%
10	Russian	12,619	0.25%
11	Urdu	10,216	0.21%
12	Bengali	9,303	0.19%
13	Navajo; Navaho	7,943	0.16%
14	Karen Languages	6,574	0.13%
15	Polish	5,989	0.12%
16	Marshallese	5,014	0.10%
17	Portuguese-based Creoles and Pidgins	3,902	0.08%
18	Burmese	3,822	0.08%
19	Amharic	3,575	0.07%
20	Nepali	3,328	0.07%

Note: Ten-Year Trends of the Five Most Common Languages of the 2016-2017 School Year

As the reports show in Figures 1 and 2 (Office of English language Acquisition, 2017), the Arabic speaking student population is one of the fastest growing segments of school populations in the United States. For instance, in the school year of 2008-2009, the number of Arabic speaking students was 65,278 and in the school year of 2016-17, the number reached 122,227 students. In a period of eight years, the number of students almost doubled, and the Arabic language as one of the top five spoken languages in American public schools moved from the fifth position to the second position after Spanish. Many of these students are entering the school system with so many emotional, social, and academic challenges because they ran away from political instability, military conflicts, civil and regional wars (Fraihat & Yaseen, 2020).

Students coming from such environments experienced interrupted education and emotional trauma, and so did their parents. Therefore, schools ought to be innovative in reaching out to Arab parents and ask for their input regarding what constitutes active parent involvement in their children's education and establish shared and mutual understanding of parental participation by being responsive to their different needs to support students in maximizing their learning and elevating their educational aspirations (Fraihat & Yaseen, 2020). large body of research shows that there is a strong positive correlation between parental involvement in their children's school and student academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing (Baker & Soden, 1998; Epstein, 1995, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). So, how can school leaders, in their efforts to ensure access and equity for all students, extend these benefits to Arabic-speaking students and parents?

To answer such a critical question, there is a dire need for research on A.S.P.s' perception, definition, and enactment of parental involvement to respond to their needs and support them in supporting their children. The problem is that there is a deficiency in research literature regarding parental involvement for A.S.P.s. There is a lack of research on the experiences of A.S.P.s with parental involvement since the topic has not been explored and studied sufficiently in America despite the fact that Arabic speaking students are in surge, and Arabic language has been reported to be the second spoken language in public schools. This research will shed light on this unexplored phenomenon and will bring the voice of this understudied and underrepresented group of parents who face many obstacles as they attempt to get involved in school-based activities.

Research Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to unearth and outline the perceptions of A.S.P.s regarding their parental involvement. The study will pay close attention to gender-based understandings of parental involvement and their responses to such perceived expectations as parents strive to support their children in their education. The study will also seek to examine both the existing cultural, religious, linguistic, logistical, and perceptual obstacles and suggested solutions to improve parental involvement as perceived by A.S.P.s.

The research will fill the gap in the literature existing between the field of research about Arabic-speaking parents' cultural and linguistic backgrounds that can affect parental involvement. The data will foster an asset-based approach centering A.S.P.s. In doing so, the research serves as advocacy by providing an educational platform for parents to voice their concerns, explain their perceptions, reveal their particular ways of supporting their children in schooling, and suggest a set of culturally synchronized and compatible solutions to their challenges and barriers to parental involvement. School leaders need to comprehend these multi-faceted obstacles and learn about the participants' recommendations to devise effective strategies to connect with parents in general, and A.S.P.s in particular. This research will also help school leaders to unearth perceptions of parental involvement and develop culturally and linguistically responsive school leadership conducive to increasing parental involvement that has positive impacts on Arabic speaking students' social-emotional well-being and academic greater achievement.

Implications for Practice and Research

Research is needed to examine A.S.P.s' perceptions of school involvement and identify the inhibiting and promoting factors to becoming visibly involved in school activities. For practice, school leaders, teachers, English as New Language coordinators, language access coordinators, parent coordinators, school counselors, and psychologists need to expand their inclusionary and culturally and circumstantially responsive practices to promote E.L.L. parents' participation in school activities. School-based personnel will also maximize students' and parents' involvement in education using different methods besides the school building-based activities.

New and additional research is necessary to capture cultural, linguistic, and religious idiosyncrasies of A.S.P.s and measure their limiting and encouraging impact on their involvement in school activities as envisioned by schools. In addition, unpacking the tenets of cultural mismatch theory and the main components of culturally responsive school leadership will raise awareness of implicit/explicit practices that keep anchoring the obstacles to E.L.L. parental involvement in general, and Arab parents in particular.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that guide this study are Epstein's (1996) parental involvement model and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSL). The Epstein (1996) framework highlights six types of parental involvement in children's education. The Epstein model also foregrounds several strategies to guide educators and parents as they engage in deepening and expanding school-home or community meaningful partnerships. The six types of Epstein's parental involvement framework are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. On the other hand, the CRSL

(Khalifa et al., 2016) has four strands. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), the culturally responsive school leader (1) critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors, (2) develops culturally responsive teachers, (3) promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (4) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts (p.1 283). The third and fourth strands of such behaviors focus on promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environment to equitably engage and support culturally different students and parents in indigenous contexts. The synergy of these theoretical frameworks will provide a holistic approach to capture and analyze parental involvement.

Social Justice and Vincentian Mission

As public servants, public school leaders bear the responsibility to ensure that all students have equal and equitable access to learning opportunities regardless of their backgrounds. By executing this primary responsibility, school leaders will be performing within the social justice framework that can achieve the Vincentian mission. The mission is grounded in core values of justice, dignity, and freedom from being marginalized based on creed, race, class, gender and so forth. Vincentian justice also deploys all its tools to provide an excellent education for all students and engage parents in their children's education in a way that is culturally and linguistically responsive and sensitive. A.S.P.s need such forms of justice that St. Vincent advocated for to neutralize the social injustice caused by factors like neglect, stereotypes, racism, discrimination, or simply lack of knowledge and understanding of how culturally and linguistically parents behave and perceive things related to parental involvement in education. Therefore, school leaders can carry out the Vincentian mission of social justice by learning how to become adaptable to their parents and the community's population.

Acting within the social justice framework compass, school leaders recognize that culturally, linguistically diverse parents, such as A.S.P.s, are dynamic, and their perceptions, belief system, cultural norms, and religious practices are very complex and deep-rooted in their behaviors. As such, school leaders are morally required to understand that "recognition and redistribution," as one tenet of social justice framework, refers to cultural groups' struggle for "respect and dignity and socio-economic classes' demands for more equitable sharing of wealth and power" (North, 2008, p.1185). For A.S.P.s, wealth and power will be the feeling of belonging to a school community and being recognized as a group of parents who value education and support their children in a way that is different from the American promoted and accepted norms. Wealth will also be metaphorically distributed and increased when school leaders involve A.S.P.s in decision making regarding school curriculum planning that values their positive cultural artifacts and considers them as assets, not deficits and liability in a school curriculum.

Research Questions

The research will seek to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do Arabic speaking parents (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting?

Research Question 2: What are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking students' school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools?

Research Design

This research will employ a qualitative, descriptive single case study methodology to explore the perceptions of parental involvement for A.S.P.s. The case study method will be the most appropriate method to conduct this research because it will enable the researcher to investigate the phenomenon under study in its "real life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13) and attain an in-depth understanding and description of the phenomenon. The descriptive case study approach is also a suitable method since the focus of the research is to answer "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2003). This case study will focus on 10-12 individual interviews and one focus group. To facilitate a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study, this case study will use multiple sources of data- to enhance the creditability of findings (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

Participants and Data Collection Method

The participants in this research are A.S.P.s, Arabic speaking paraprofessionals, and community leaders. To capture multiple perspectives, the researcher recruited 26 male and female participants from different Arabic speaking countries and from different religious backgrounds to represent the Arabic speaking population. This recruitment method used a snowballing sample since having access to female Arabic speaking participants was difficult due to cultural norms and gender-based interaction rules. The participating parents had the experience of sending their children to school in an Arabic speaking country and immigrated to the United States where their children continued studying in public schools. Additionally, the participating Arabic speaking paraprofessionals have a range of 2 to 15 years of experience in supporting Arabic speaking students and parents in American public schools.

The method of data collection used virtual semi-structured 16 individual parents' interviews, two focus groups of four paraprofessionals for each group, and three Arab-Muslim community leaders. The researcher planned to use observation notes, but due to cultural norms, most participants respectfully declined to have a Zoom interview with cameras on. The researcher made the interview questions available in Arabic and English. Some participants conducted the semi-structured interview in Arabic, and others conducted it in English. Some participants code-switched during their interviews to express their ideas clearly.

Definition of Terms

Achievement refers to student academic attainment in terms of content skills and knowledge that lead to graduation and social-emotional well-being (Cyril, 2015).

AL-Imam is an Arabic name for a religious leader who leads Islamic prayers. Al-Imam is also a spiritual advisor in religious affairs.

Culturally responsive leadership refers to culturally aligned activities that school-based staff, including school leaders, engage in to support parents and students in pursuing their educational aspirations (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Deficit-based approach refers to a deficit thinking mindset that focuses on others' weaknesses and ignores their strengths. It also refers to the mindset that misinterprets the responses of others to an action, rather than assesses the causes of the reaction—in other words, blaming the victim (Gay, 2018; Yosso, 2005).

Al-Ikhtilat is an Arabic word for gender mixing.

Ghadol-basar is an Arabic word for lowering gazes from looking at *non-Mahram* (marriageable) men or women.

Mahram is an Arabic work for a member of one's family with whom marriage would be illegal in the Islamic law.

Parents refer to students' guardians whether they are biological, adoptive, foster parents or relatives who take care of the students (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 2010).

Parental involvement refers to any parental practices and behaviors that are intended to support children in their education, whether these practices are at school or at home, and whether they are tangible/ visible or intangible/invisible to school-based staff (Young et al., 2013).

Perception as a concept will be used here to refer to an individual's unexamined understanding and intuition of how things should be and practiced.

School-home partnership refers to a joint commitment that parents and educators display in various ways to boost the success of students (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

Conclusion

Parental involvement has a positive impact on students' academic performance and social-emotional well-being. As a result, the U.S. Department of Education included family and community engagement in the federal educational policy under the ESSA. In addition, there are other federal funds such as Title III and Immigrant Tittle III that require parent engagement and parents training to become more engaged in children's education. This study will seek to answer two central questions: **First,** how do A.S.P.s perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting?, and **Second**, what are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking students

school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools? In chapter two, the researcher will focus on the extensive literature that illuminates the positive relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing. The chapter will also reveal the gap in the literature on parental involvement for A.S.P.s.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Chapter one began with an introduction to parental involvement. The researcher described the study, its rationale, and its components by introducing cultural, linguistic, and perceptual challenges as barriers to parental engagement, then outlining the implications of the parental involvement study for practice and research. Using the theoretical frameworks, Epstein's model of parental involvement (1995) and Khalifa's culturally responsive school leadership framework (2016) to guide the study, the researcher aims to present the challenges and recommendations to understand and engage A.S.P.s as active participants in their children's education.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, this chapter will focus on prior research that discusses parental involvement. The following topics outline the chapter: first, the definition of parental involvement, types of parental involvement, and limitations; second, an outline of parental disengagement, student dropout, and educational legislation mandating school parental partnerships: third, the chapter will present the benefits of parental involvement and obstacles to parental involvement that literature found, and fourth, the chapter will discuss the gaps in the literature regarding A.S.P.s' perceptions of parental involvement in US public schools and present some research conducted overseas regarding the topic. Finally, the chapter will address the sociocultural, religious, and sociopolitical contexts of Muslim A.S.P.s for readers to appreciate the impact that cultural matches can have on parental involvement. The chapter will conclude with a synthesis of the stated research and the research context in the proposed study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Engaging all parents in their children's education has been a moral imperative and an instructional responsibility for all school leaders. Research has been consistent in showing that parental involvement contributes to student success. As a result, Epstein (1995, 2002, and 2007) and Khalifa (2012, 2016) advocated for parental involvement using different approaches. Epstein provides a framework that focuses on the family, the school, and the community underscoring the importance of six typologies of parental involvement as a guide for school leaders (Epstein 1995, 2001, 2002, 2007; Epstein et al. 2002; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). On the other hand, Khalifa et al., (2016) centered attention on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices that enable school leaders to interact with parents in their "indigenous context" and become community leaders by practicing four strands of CRSL. This framework requires a school leader (1) to critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, (2) to develop culturally responsive teachers, (3) to promote culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (4) to engage students, parents, and indigenous contexts.

In addition to learning benefits for students, parental involvement becomes an urgent need for schools to meet. This urgency springs from school leaders' need to become inclusive and equitable in serving their school constituents. The moral imperative also emanates from school leaders' responsibility to advocate for historically marginalized and underserved student and parent populations to create a school environment conducive to social justice that Saint Vincent promoted in his life. School leaders' efforts to ensure social justice and equitable learning opportunities for all students at their schools can be thwarted if they do include all parents in their school

decision making. Culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) is one of the practices that school and district leaders can engage in to build strong partnerships with E.L.L. parents. Khalifa (2012) and Khalifa et al. (2016) magnified both the value and urgency for school leaders to become community leaders in addition to instructional leaders. In this research, the framework of culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) and Epstein's (2007) framework for parental involvement served as a theoretical anchor.

Epstein (1995, 2001, 2002, 2007), Epstein et al.(2002), and Epstein and Salinas (2004) established and revised a parental framework whose underpinnings are rooted in six typologies of parental involvement.

1- **Parenting:** This type concentrates on helping parents and families to establish a home environment conducive to student learning. It also focuses on assisting parents with parenting, child-upbringing skills, and understanding child developmental stages and associated needs, health, and nutrition.

2- **Communicating:** This type of parental involvement revolves around school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs, curricula, and student progress. Schools and families communicate through parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, memos, newsletters, and other available media of communication.

3- **Volunteering:** This type aims at soliciting parents' support in participating in school-based activities that range from participating in school programs, attending after school and extracurricular activities, participating in student trips, supporting teachers, and helping with meetings and other parents.

4- **Learning at home:** This type advocates for engaging parents in supporting their children with their homework and other assignments related to learning. Such engagement is supported by schools by providing parents with resources and training on how to support students at home.

5- **Decision-making:** This type promotes the necessity of involving parents in the school decision-making process to capture their perspectives and representations in school policies and activities. Parents are encouraged to take part in school organizations such as the PTA, school leadership committees, and advisory councils.

6- **Collaborating with the community:** This type advocates for identifying and coordinating community resources with those from schools to support students. It also encourages schools to provide services to the community. The latter is advised for community members to get involved in sharing information and resources about health, job training workshops, and school trips to enhance students' knowledge and skills.

The Epstein framework for parental involvement is a guide for school leaders to deepen their relationships with parents. School leaders can also strengthen the Epstein framework by using Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework that could support culturally and linguistically diverse parental involvement. To supplement Epstein's parental involvement framework, the research will employ the culturally responsive school leadership framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) that delineates four core culturally responsive school leadership strands and behaviors that strengthen school-parents' relationships. Each strand has sub-strands and overlapping spheres of

reciprocal influence. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), the culturally responsive school leader (1) critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors, (2) develops culturally responsive teachers, (3) promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (4) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts (p.1 283). The third and fourth strands of such behaviors focus on promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environment to equitably engage and support culturally different students and parents in indigenous contexts. The synergy of these theoretical frameworks will provide a holistic approach to capture and analyze parental involvement.

CRSL theory addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. Addressing these diverse cultural and linguistic needs fosters a school climate that promotes relationships with community members and treats them as partners and key pillars in school success. Therefore, adopting the strands of the CRLS theory will establish a school environment and context inclusive of A.S.P.s and students. These needed culturally inclusionary practices are not articulated in the Epstein parental involvement framework, yet the framework is widely cited in parental involvement literature and influential in educational policymaking. This research will benefit from using the CRSL framework to expose the deficiencies in the Epstein model and hopefully inform school leaders of alternative pathways to engage in meaningful partnership with their students' parents. Analyzing research data and aligning the findings with these frameworks will support both school leaders and families as they continue to invest in their children's education and support them with pursuing their educational goals and aspirations.

An in-depth understanding of parental involvement entails examining A.S. P.'s behavioral practices. These practices are usually guided by their belief systems that encompass religious, cultural, and social values. These values influence A.S.P.s' collective perceptions through which events and realities are filtered and constructed. These values are also embraced and sustained by Arab communities that become part of what Bourdieu (1977, 1986) called "cultural capital." The hard currency of this cultural capital is a set of social networks that empowers its stakeholders through sharing material resources, navigational skills in a new school system, and adaptive abilities to synchronize two seemingly incompatible cultures without marginalizing their cultural identity. To comprehend the Arab parents' perceptions of parental involvement, the Epstein parental involvement model must be fortified by a culturally responsive framework to address its deficiencies and encapsulate the "multiplicity of voices and visions" that comprise this multifaceted concept of parental involvement (Glesne, 2016, p. 26).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has long been recognized by expansive research in the field of education as a strong predictor of students' academic success or failure (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014). Substantial research has shown that a high level of parental involvement in their children's schooling is frequently found to be one of the strongest contributing factors in a student's educational success (Rath et al., 2008). The connection between home and school through strong partnerships with parents helps establish an organic and productive zone for students to succeed (Rath et al., 2008).

Beyond higher academic achievement, parental participation in school activities is associated with several positive results such as a higher rate of attendance, more assistance or monitoring of students' home learning, stronger partnerships and communication with teachers, and more access to school support and resources (Clark, 2007; Walker et al., 2012). Engaging parents and guardians in their children's schooling can lead to building social networks for parents within the school community. This social networking can also uncover material resources and social networks outside the school, which will establish mutually supportive relationships that are conducive to increasing students' educational aspirations. These two types of social networks that parents gain access to through parental engagement can serve as a support system and motivation for students upon facing challenges as they march towards post- secondary education (Hill & Wang, 2015).

In addition to academic achievement, parental involvement is found to neutralize behavioral issues, and unhealthy risk factors and also reinforce success factors as students avoid sexual risky behaviors, tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [CDC], 2015; Hill & Taylor, 2004). On the other hand, parental disengagement is sometimes associated with students' academic underachievement that could lead students to drop out of school. A 20-year study found that students who lacked parental leadership and guidance were exposed to a high risk of dropping out of high school (Henry, 2007; Henry et al., 2012). The finding was especially significant for students who live in low-income communities. Studies also indicate that major and minor discipline problems are higher in schools where parental involvement in school-centered activities is not visible and is low (Epstein, 2007). Discipline that requires the removal of

a child from the classroom minimizes learning opportunities for students and puts them at risk of falling behind their peers in their academic pursuits. It can also lead to a feeling of being mistreated, and consequently, disliking school.

Research findings have been consistent in highlighting the benefits of parental involvement for all student subgroups whether they are E.L.L.s or special and general education students (Ishimaru, 2014; Jeynes, 2011; Panferov, 2010; Scharton, 2019). Research also confirms the benefits of parental involvement for students from several ethnic groups such as Hispanics, African Americans, and others (Byndloss, 2001; Rath et al., 2008). The findings should spur educational policymakers, school leaders, and parents to make parental involvement imperative to bolster and underpin students' academic success, social-emotional well-being, and minimize students' dropout risk (Henry et al., 2012; Hooven et al., 2013).

To reap the sought-after benefits of parental engagement and avoid the detrimental consequences and implications of parental disengagement, school leaders and parents need to identify and remove many obstacles inhibiting parents from maximum involvement. Schools and parents have rich and diverse resources that need to be activated and aligned with the mission of supporting all students coming from all socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and academic backgrounds. This next section of this literature review will define parental involvement, review educational legislation mandating school parental partnerships, discuss types of parental involvement, present perceptions of parental involvement, and provide the benefits of parental involvement. Related research also includes obstacles to parental involvement and approaches to boost parental involvement. Ultimately, the review is designed to identify gaps in parental

involvement literature concerning A.S.P.s whose definition and perception of parental involvement may differ from the operating definition school leaders may follow.

Definitions of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement includes direct and visible involvement in school-initiated and related activities, such as attending school parent-teacher conferences and volunteering to serve as a trip chaperone. The definition also includes invisible practices at home such as parents conversing with their children about the importance of education, asking their children about what they learned at school, and making sure their children have space and time to do their homework (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; 2004). Even though this definition might seem comprehensive, it does not meet the needs of scholars who advocate for multi-ethnic and multi-cultural parents; these parents lack social capital and are often culturally misunderstood by educators who still apply the historical norms of White middle-class parents (Khalifa, 2012; Yosso, 2005).

Scholars in education and educational policymakers have worked to expand the scope of literature on parental involvement and are attempting to have a shared definition of parental involvement that is inclusive and comprehensive. For instance, the Harvard Family Research Project attempted to define parental involvement as any planned activities that parents engage in to improve learning (Bouffard &Weiss, 2008). However, this broad definition does not align with the traditional definition of parental involvement as perceived and practiced by practitioners in education whose limited or associated parental involvement with school-based activities encapsulated in parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher associations, and school-based events. Sociologists and parent advocates have contested the tradition by adding another dimension to parental

involvement, namely, home-based activities that include helping children with school assignments and asking and discussing children's experiences at school (Green et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2005).

Multiple models are used to establish a framework for parental involvement within which scholars and educators can theorize, conceptualize and operationalize the key components of parental involvement. One of the models is the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1995, 1997). The main three dimensions within this construct are modeling, reinforcement, and direct instruction. The authors asserted that parents could have an impactful influence on their children's academic achievement by enacting and embodying the model's components. By modeling for their children through showing interest in and attending school activities, children are predicted to match their parents' interest in school and increase the likelihood of academic success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). By rewarding children's positive behavior and successful performance at school, parents will be reinforcing and nurturing good and desirable habits that can establish a strong foundation for success and support children's motivation to boost their self-esteem and love for learning. The last mechanism for parents to maximize learning outcomes is direct instruction that develops cognitive and metacognitive skills (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997).

Other researchers such as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) also recognize that parental involvement should not be reduced to only attending school-sponsored events and volunteering; rather, the definition should be expanded to promote the role of parents as their children's first teacher and the house as the child's first school (Barbour, 2001).

Critique of Epstein's Parental Involvement Model

Epstein (2001) has delineated six different types of parental involvement that comprise of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. This framework leaves, however, much to be desired when it comes to immigrant parents whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds are different from those of mainstream parents. As a result, Epstein's framework is considered too simplistic and narrow to theorize for positive and acceptable parenting styles that are conducive to student achievement when it comes to culturally and linguistically diverse students and parents (Mapp et al., 2013).

A critique leveled against Epstein’s parenting component of her parental involvement model is that teachers whose ethnic backgrounds are predominantly White and female (Cooper, 2009) are more likely to be biased in valuing the parenting approaches and cultural capital of White and from a middle class, and problematize the parenting styles of non-White parents (McGrady et al., 2013). By favoring and depending on bias-infused understandings of parental involvement as theorized by scholars such as Epstein, parents whose parental practices are not aligned with the Epstein framework will be characterized as deficient, inadequate, and in need of fixing (Grantham & Henfield, 2011). This practice of viewing one parenting style as complete and the other as incomplete breeds and feeds a deficit-infested mindset. The deficit mindset, according to Gorski (2008), "holds that inequality is the result, not of systemic inequities in access to power, but intellectual and ethical deficiencies in particular groups of people" and "has been used throughout history to justify imperial pursuits" (p. 518).

School leaders and educators in a multi-cultural setting ought to examine this deficit mindset and try to diversify their approaches to respond to their diverse body of students and parents who do not subscribe to a Western way of thinking and acting. When Epstein (2005) asserted that "parental involvement as an essential component of school improvement," but she linked parental involvement to "the curriculum, instruction, assessments, and other aspects of school management" (p. 179), she had unconsciously sentenced other parental involvement practices in education to failure. Epstein (2005) also foreclosed students whose parents do not emphasize "curriculum, instruction, and assessment" from success, which is a mono-hegemonic, exclusionary, and aberrantly flawed perspective (p. 179).

Limiting parental involvement to curriculum, instruction, and assessments leads to inequality, inequity, and alienation of English languages learners and parents. Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) underscored how "some critics assert that the deficit perspective leads educators to view culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families as "the problem" (p. 8). Moreover, Arias and Morillo Campbell (2008) explained that such thinking "suggests that fault and responsibility lie with the ELL population rather than the school and that the role of the school is to change the ways families interact with schools" (p. 8). One way to address this issue is through culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

CRSL theory addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. Using CRSL in an advocacy sense allows school leaders to hear and acknowledge the needs of culturally diverse voices, use their experiences and perspectives to change

policies, refine parental engagement opportunities, address the disconnect between teacher and parent expectations, and address diverse cultural and linguistic needs (Khalifa, 2013). CRSL fosters a school climate that promotes relationships with community members and treats them as partners and key pillars in school success. To do so, the framework relies on the development of meaningful school-community partnerships. As it relates to the proposed study, the explicit acknowledgment of race and culture can broaden current understandings of meaningful parental engagement, contribute to an understanding of the opportunities and barriers impacting A.S.P.s as they support their children in the school setting, and add nuance to the expectation and appreciation of parental support. Therefore, adopting the key strands of the CRLS theory will establish a school environment and context inclusive of A.S.P.s and students. Culturally inclusionary practices are needed, yet not articulated in the Epstein parental involvement framework, yet the framework remains widely cited in parental involvement literature and influential in educational policymaking. To understand how parental involvement is operationalized, the following presents a review of the prevailing types of parental involvement and the cultural limitations they impose.

Types of Parental Involvement and Limitations

While extensive research has repeatedly confirmed the vital role that parental involvement plays in boosting student academic achievement that convinced educational policymakers to legislate national, state, and local laws to engage parents in their children's education, forming effective relationships between families and schools is a vague process. The perceptions of parental involvement are also confusing for parents. This ambiguity about what constitutes parental involvement has been documented for

decades. For instance, Lightfoot (1978) characterized teachers' and parents' perceptions of school engagement as poles apart because they held conflicting opinions and conflicting responsibilities encapsulated in parental involvement. To reconcile these world-apart understandings of parental involvement, Epstein (1990) concluded that teachers and parents ought to establish an interactive partnership between home and school since both have "overlapping spheres of influence" (p. 100) on children.

Research investigating parental involvement from the perspectives of parents, educators, and school leaders continues to endure the haziness that emanates from different beliefs and interpretations of how this parental involvement construct is defined (Falbo et al., 2001). This lack of universal definition leads to different interpretations and perceptions that can prevent parents and educators from participating in effective parental involvement programs (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hayes & Cunningham, 2003). A shared understanding of parental involvement and collaborative work between parents and schools to harvest the fruits of parental involvement for students requires educators to admit the necessity of conceptualizing home-school cooperation. For this school-home alliance to be effective, schools need to adopt an asset-based approach and recognize the magnitude of rich and heterogeneous skills, aptitudes, and resources that parents have at their disposal (Crowson, 2003). Acknowledging such diversity of knowledge and capital will allow schools to embrace the fact that there is more than just one type of parental involvement traditionally defined and legitimized within the school-initiated and sponsored activities. As such, the narrow definition of parental involvement will expand and spiral up to include both school-based and home-based parental involvement, and both types are mutually reinforcing, and none excludes the other.

School-Based Versus Home-Based Involvement

Parental involvement is anchored in at least two major practices that could be categorized as school-based and home-based involvement. The school-centered and initiated parental involvement involves parents attending parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school nights, volunteering in classrooms with teachers, participating in and attending cultural days, attending sporting events, and attending any activity in a school building or that is sponsored by a school. This type of school-based parental engagement activity is researched and found to positively impact student learning outcomes (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Also, school-based parental involvement puts many parents at the risk of not attending due to several challenges, and lack of parental visibility in these events can lead to misconceptions and wrong perceptions that can, if not examined and corrected, marginalize the home-based parental involvement.

Despite the limitations of this school-based model of parental involvement, the Epstein framework is broadly accepted in education and used in the American public school system, where many parental involvement practices are measured against a framework that many educational scholars critique. For example, Fernandez and Lopez (2017) testify that "parental involvement is now at the point where only those practices and actions that correspond to Epstein's typology are recognized and privileged in school" (p. 126). One of Epstein's types of parental involvement is good parenting, which becomes problematic when examined from a multi-cultural perspective. Scholars like Daly (2013), Fernandez and López (2017), Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003), and Yosso (2005) exposed to prejudice and bias inherent in the dominant description of good parenting and the explanation of effective parental involvement.

These scholars argue that Epstein's "good parenting" type depends on a Westernized concept of parenting that is ingrained in the dominant, White middle-class understanding of parenting and the practices Western parents engage in to participate in their children's education. This Westernized belief of parental involvement idealizes classroom visits and focuses on schools' needs, instead of focusing on parents' needs and different parental involvement practices and behaviors (Barton et al., 2004). The code of good parenting and parental practices to show that children's education is important as theorized by Epstein becomes the quick reference for the government and states as they encourage parents to acquire and practice "socially desirable parenting" (Daly, 2013, p.160). This state-endorsed parental involvement model adds a layer of structural injustice, inequity, and opportunity gaps in the American public school system, whose student demographics have become extremely culturally and linguistically diversified in recent years (Gillies, 2005).

Other studies also found that home-based parental involvement is as effective as, if not more than school-based involvement when it comes to student learning and educational aspirations. Researchers like DePlanty et al. (2007) and Sheldon and Epstein (2005) found that home-based parental involvement played a great deal in student achievement. The researchers identified examples such as providing moral support and incentives to children to intrigue their interests and motivate them to do school-related assignments, providing areas free from distraction for study, asking family members, neighbors, friends to support their children in their academic endeavors, and motivating them to do better.

Parental Disengagement and Student Dropout

Building positive partnerships with parents and engaging them in schooling their children are recognized by research as protection against risk factors and as a strong contributing success factor for students' social-emotional well-being and academic achievement. This affirmative home-school connection positively affects students' completion of secondary education (Wang & Eccles, 2012). On the other hand, parental disengagement is deemed in the field of education as a risk factor for students. Research has shown that when there is no collaboration and connection between schools and parents, the aftermath can be devastating (Hooven et al., 2013). Rose (2008), for example, found that parental disengagement could negatively affect students' attitudes towards schools and erode both students' and parents' sense of belonging.

If parents perceive that schools are not interested in including them in decision-making because of lack of communication on the part of schools, parents might slowly withdraw or remain distant from all school-based activities. Van Ryzin et al., 2012 found that this can lead to students' and parents' alienation which can create a space for students to take part in antisocial behavior, bullying, and engaging in delinquent behaviors, including substance use (Van Ryzin et al., 2012). The authors explored how parental monitoring and involvement in their children's education could lead to substance use. The authors conducted a longitudinal study on 998 (472 female and 526 male) students ages 12 to 23 from ethnically diverse backgrounds such that the sample was made of 423 European Americans (42.3%), 291 African Americans (29.1%), 68 Latinos (6.8%), 52 Asian American families (5.2%), and 164 (16.4%) of other ethnicities (Van Ryzin et al., 2012). The authors recruited student families in sixth grade from three middle schools in

the Pacific Northwest that comprised student populations representing the area in order to determine how social influences from peers affect substance use.

The findings of the study were that some students who did not have family time and relationships associated with "deviant peers" who exposed them to substance use such as alcohol, tobacco, and so forth. On the other hand, the study found that family involvement that enhances parental monitoring in middle school reduces the risk for substance use in middle and high school. The study also found that parental monitoring and relationship influenced students' friends selections, peer associations, and peer networks that could help students ages 12-23 to avoid substance use and stay engaged in schoolwork.

Van Ryzin et al. (2012) determined that parental monitoring, family relationship quality, and involvement in education are among the protective factors for students that maximize their learning and reduce risk factors such as substance use and dropping out. This longitudinal study highlighted the importance of parents' and peers' influence on substance use throughout critical periods of students' physiological developments and school transitions from elementary to middle school, and from middle school to high school. During these transitions, students experience varying degrees of stress and anxiety that come from the adaptation to new environments and expectations, pressures to fit in with new peer groups, peer rejections, and bullying that can lead to school disengagement and dropouts.

A Consequence of Parental Disengagement: Dropout

When there is a positive interaction between home and school, students benefit socially, emotionally, and academically. This interactive partnership also helps prevent at

risk students from dropping out of high school, which this decision is often loaded with deleterious consequences for students. Much research has proven that lack of education puts students at the risk of unemployment, low earnings, poverty, incarceration, poor health, and a short life span (Archambault et al., 2009; Belfield & Levin, 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lehr et al., 2004).

For example, in their large scale study, Archambault et al. (2009) surveyed 13,330 (44.7% boys) from 69 high schools in Canada in the province of Quebec during their three consecutive high school years to examine the aspects of student engagement that can lead to post-secondary success or high school dropout. The study aimed at finding out the relationship between behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement during adolescence and school dropout. The study showed that students, especially boys, were reported to have experienced a high degree of behavioral engagement at age 12 fueled by peer pressure and was not conducive to cognitive engagement (Archambault et al., 2009).

The study also found out that by age 16, students exhibited low engagement in school-related work. In the girls' group, the study found that the students' affective and behavioral challenges increased from age 13 to 14, which led to placing 8.0 % of students in special education classes and 6.1% dropping out of school. In the boys' group, the study revealed that by age 16, 10.5% of students were placed in special classes, and 11.2% dropped out of school. In short, the results of the study show that students experience many changes as they enter the age of puberty/ adolescence, and these changes can lead to a decrease in interest in school and a higher risk of school dropout.

While this study focused on the psychological, behavioral, and academic dimensions of high school completion, and not specifically on parental involvement, the

authors strongly recommended that among the school-based interventions to support students in completing their secondary school is "through relationship building with mentors,. . ., and enhanced home-school communication and home support for learning" (Archambault et al., 2009, p.7). Enhancing parental involvement in students' education is one of the protective factors for students to cope successfully with physiological and environmental changes. Establishing a culturally and socially-emotionally responsive learning environment has the potential to neutralize the risk factors and to contribute to students' achievement and healthier lives, which can have both social and economic benefits for the nation.

Dropping out of school has tremendous consequences on individuals and the community alike. In their book, *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*, Belfield and Levin (2007) analyzed the exorbitant price that both individuals and the government pay when a society does not invest in adequate education and involve all stakeholders, including parents, in developing excellent education that leaves no child behind. Belfield and Levin (2007) compiled contributions and perspectives from scholars in different fields to examine and accentuate the social cost of poor and unequitable education.

To substantiate the catastrophic social disparities and inequities between people who graduate high school and those who do not, Belfield and Levin (2007) used the contributions of Bailey et al. (2007). For example, in the fourth chapter of the book that is authored by Tomas Bailey (2007), the author emphasized that education is an indispensable foundation for productivity and progress in any given society. In the marketplace, sustainable growth is propelled by not only educated people who are more productive, but also those

supported by technological advances that depend on an educated workforce. Investing in excellent education will yield educators, engineers, scientists and others who will innovate and invent in many fields that will create economic and social benefits for people.

On the other hand, the author alerts that “the education system as a whole has continued to be highly inequitable with respect to race, ethnicity, and social class” (Bailey, 2007, p.74). Bailey et al. (2007) warned that without investing in equitable education so that all students will at least graduate from high school, the United States would suffer from low productivity and lose in the global market. As a result, Bailey (2007) strongly recommended that the government equitably invest in increasing the number of high school graduates and facilitating post-secondary education to produce an educated workforce that will compete globally and sustain a high degree of productivity. For a labor force to maintain its global competitive edge, improvements in equitable education for all student subgroups, including Arabic speaking students, must be made. Otherwise, the government will fulfill the prophecy of Bailey’s (2007) warning that “without improvements in educational opportunities for black and Hispanic students, the bulge may be a liability rather than an opportunity” (p.75). Thus, economic leadership is associated with educational attainment for all.

"Quantifying the Costs of Inadequate Education" is the title of the second part of the book, where the authors illuminate the economic and social benefits that the government and taxpayers will get from such an educational investment. For instance, Rouse (2007), who authored the first chapter in the second section, showed that it would cost the government less to educate students to obtain their high school diploma than the taxes revenue that could be lost from individuals in the future. To demonstrate this,

Rouse (2007) showed that inadequate education (no high school graduation) creates an economic loss for the state and government because people will not earn more to spend and pay taxes, and they will ask for federal and state support. The author also demonstrated that education is a must due to the huge earning disadvantage that undereducated people have in comparison to those who are educated. According to Rouse (2007), in 1964, a high school dropout earned “64 cents” for every dollar earned by someone with at least a high school diploma, but in 2004 the high school dropout “earned only 37 cents” for each dollar earned by a person with more education (pp. 99-101). To magnify these losses for the government, Rouse estimated that when all things are considered and when things are “aggregated over one cohort of 18-year-olds who never complete high school, the combined losses of income and tax revenues are likely more than $156 billion, or 1.3 percent of GDP” (Rouse, 2007, pp. 99,101). These financial costs are awe-inducing when it comes to the government and are alarming and terrifying when we think about individuals with insufficient education. The author admitted that high school graduation is necessary to contribute to society, but not sufficient.

This point is further developed and substantiated by Muenning (2007), who wrote chapter six by showing that people who drop out of high school are a heavy burden on the state and government health care system. Muenning (2007) stated that the government could save about $40,000 for each student it helps to graduate high school because “improvements in educational attainment directly improve health outcomes . . . that lead to reductions in Medicare spending” (p.126). The author argued that people with more education are likely to have employment that offers private health insurance and have better life and longevity. Muenning (2007) maintained that the likelihood of

premature death for people who did not graduate from high school is so high to the point that "35 percent of all deaths among high school dropouts, cancer (27 percent), infection (9 percent)…" (p.127). This life cost can be saved by increasing high school graduation rates. One of the many ways to do this is to engage parents in improving their children's education and support parents in helping their children emotionally as they navigate their adolescent life challenges that could distract them from focusing on education.

In the seventh chapter, the economist Enrico Moretti (2007) also discussed the relationship between inadequate education and criminal justice costs. The author argued that the government could save up to $1.4 billion annually in criminal justice costs by augmenting the graduation rate by 1% because "education might help teenagers better understand the consequences of their decisions and ultimately mak them more farsighted, more risk-averse, or both" (Moretti, 2007, p. 142), which might result in lowering the rate of crimes and avoid engaging in criminal activities. Moretti (2007) found that raising high school graduation rates is associated with a significant decline in incarceration. The author states that "one extra year of schooling resulted in a 0.10 percentage point reduction in the probability of incarceration for whites, and a 0.37 percentage point reduction for blacks" (p. 144).

Some of these devastating outcomes of dropping out can be avoided simply by engaging parents in children's education since some of the factors of students dropping out are attributed to parental disengagement. Ferguson (2007) believed that to move towards education characterized by excellence with equity, "skillful parenting and deeply transformative, community-level school reforms" (p.226) are necessary and feasible in pursuit of excellent, inclusive, and equitable education that will help all students from all racial,

ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds raise their standards of academic achievements. Ferguson (2007) argued that resource disparities that emerge as a result of inadequate education lead to a string of cascading consequences such as lower academic skills, lower average wages, less wealth, and fewer social network ties to people and institutions. This affects the way parents can provide effective assistance to their children, which usually creates or widens the achievement gap. To help remedy these negative factors, Ferguson (2007) called for schools to "improve parent teacher communication, supplement home learning resources, help parents with stress management" (p.231). Parent-teacher communication is of paramount importance regardless and extremely urgent if teachers and parents do not speak the same language and do not share the same cultural norms that govern communication. A.S.P.s whose gender roles and expectations, cultural and religious values, and English proficiency are in need of culturally and linguistically responsive communication and interaction engage them in their children's education which is conducive to higher academic achievement. As Ferguson (2007) put it, school leaders need a "cultural blueprint" (p.227) that will involve parents in education while not compromising the cultural and religious norms by which they live.

Involving parents could be one of the positive factors that can break the vicious cycle of students dropping out of school and social-emotional, academic, and economic repercussions that will negatively affect the nation at large. Dropping out of school has been considered a problem and economic plague for decades (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). For example, governmental data collected from the 2009-2010 school year was economically alarming in that only 31% of the dropouts found a job. To put this percentage in perspective, Rumberger (2011) showed that 607,789 students dropped out

of public schools in the United States during the 2008-2009 academic year and approximately 1.3 million students did not graduate. These frightening figures become socially and financially distressing news for families, cities, states, and the government because the economy will suffer when the unemployment rate goes up, public assistance increases, and increases in students' involvement with drugs, crimes, and imprisonment. To make things worse, these youth will become parents and might have children who might be at the risk of dropping out and continue to feed the cycle of poverty and its associated consequences (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

While students might drop out of school as a result of multiple factors such as truancy, academic underachievement, lack of sense of belonging, a low socio-economic status that forces students to seek jobs and leave school, and pregnancy (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Shuger, 2012), a great deal of research has documented on how parental involvement in schools boosts students' achievement and social-emotional well-being (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Miedel and Reynolds (1999), for example, conducted a longitudinal study to examine the correlation between parents' involvement in their children's pre-school and kindergarten years and their children's later school performance and competence in middle school. In this study, which was conducted in Chicago, 704 parents were interviewed to learn about the types of school activities and the frequency of their participation to gauge their impact on students. Regardless of the family's socio-economic and educational backgrounds, the research results showed that parental participation in preschool and kindergarten was strongly and significantly correlated with higher reading literacy achievement, lower grade retention rates in middle school, and

fewer years in special education. This research conducted over two decades ago showed that the family-school connection through parental participation in school activities is instrumental in low-income communities where parents may feel less effective about being involved.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) reported similar findings. In their research, the authors conducted a longitudinal study in southeastern Michigan that included 22 elementary schools and ten middle schools in four districts. One of the districts had a large number of economically disadvantaged families, where 84% received reduced-free and free lunch. The purpose of the study was to investigate how parents' encouragement of educational activities within the home differs between high-achieving and low achieving students, and to study if the frequency of parents' school involvement differs between high-achieving and low-achieving students.

The results of the study showed that parents of high achieving students frequently initiated communication with their children's teachers to check on their performance in classes and kept nurturing positive relationships with the school officials (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). In contrast, parents of low achievers seldom visited their children's school unless they were asked to meet with school staff in response to their children's misbehavior or poor performance. The study also found that parents of high achievers also visited the school more frequently and enrolled their children in community activities to support their children's academic goals. This study clearly shows that parental involvement in children's education is positively associated with student academic achievement regardless of the socio-economic background of the family (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). In this study, parents of both groups of students were from a

low-income background but created connections with school staff and community resources to help offset the potential socio-economic negative impact on students' academics.

In light of these research findings, it is a moral imperative for school leaders and parents to establish strong and supportive partnerships to equip students with knowledge and skills to graduate high school and pursue their post-secondary education or vocational training. This might minimize, if not eliminate, the lurking damaging effects of dropping out.

Educational Legislation Mandating School Parental Partnerships

In his final remarks in the meeting of "Mom Congress" sponsored by Parenting Magazine in 2010, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan delineated some aspects of the Obama administration's continued efforts to legislate and develop family and community engagement programs in U.S. schools. Duncan asserted that parents are one of the core partners and indispensable resources for schools to accomplish the success of every student's mission. Duncan reminded the audience that since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that was signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson on April 9, 1965, the federal government "has required or encouraged states, districts, and schools, especially those with large numbers of low-income students, to promote parental involvement in children's education," but he conceded that "the department has done a mediocre job of supporting parental engagement. We have been too concerned with monitoring for compliance--and not concerned enough with improving student learning and boosting meaningful family engagement" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In response to research describing the value of parental involvement, updated education law includes parental engagement. In 1965, President Johnson enacted ESEA, a federally funded and state supported measure to ensure that all students had equal access to quality education. This educational act was President Johnson's cornerstone in his "War on poverty" (McLaughlin, 1975). ESEA was an all-embracing statute that funded elementary and secondary education and mandated high standards and accountability. Funds from this act were specifically for professional development, instructional materials, and promotion of parental engagement.

In its continuous efforts for improvement, the government re-authorized the ESEA to respond to the findings of research on both student achievement and the role of parental involvement in student learning. In 2001, ESEA went through reauthorization during President George W. Bush and became known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This reauthorization augmented the degree of learning rigor and accountability for student success from teachers and students. Also, the Title I fund set the achievement standards to measure schools' performance.

The NCLB Act required schools to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all student demographics; otherwise, schools could be subject to restructure if they failed to make AYP for three years after being identified for improvement. As it relates to parental engagement and the NCLB act, parental engagement has gained a status in the literature since the passage of No Child Left Behind. In this legislation, parental involvement was referred to as a much-needed component of school reform, and states were urged to institute parental involvement practices that "foster achievement to high standards for all children" and are directed "toward lowering barriers to greater

participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement" (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 8). This higher level of school accountability and funds forced district and school leaders to hire highly qualified teachers and invest in community and parental involvement.

Fourteen years after the NCLB act, ESEA was reauthorized on December 10, 2015, and became known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) under President Barack Obama. ESSA required states to adopt a new measure of accountability by adopting college and career readiness standards and assessments for all students focusing on the lowest-performing schools and schools with wide achievement gaps among student subgroups. In addition, the ESSA has required and ensured that districts were implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). States are expected to implement and enforce the statutory requirements of the ESSA. The government monitors the statewide accountability systems and data reporting under Title I of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA.

The funds that the government allocates to states and districts under ESSA can ameliorate a lack of equity by hiring and developing effective teachers, improving parental involvement, deepening community partnerships, and coordinating services between school and community. The money can also serve as leverage for professional development for teachers to support them in responding effectively to the learning needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. These additional ESSA requirements are instrumental in advancing equity for all students, especially vulnerable students like ELLs and other subgroups. ESSA also offers opportunities for parents and community organizations to make school decisions to help shape state educational plans.

For parental involvement to be effective, schools need to expand their support, and definitions of parental involvement.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Research has provided compelling evidence of the strong correlation existing between parental engagement and students' social, emotional, and academic success (Perriel, 2015). Promoting, supporting, and expanding parental engagement in the education of their children has been considered as a pivotal approach and strategy to advance the effectiveness, improve, and strengthen the quality of education (Chrispeels, 1996; Epstein, 1995; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). These research-based findings have propelled school leaders, under ESSA, to double their efforts to involve parents and caregivers in their children's education to reap the benefits that research has highlighted.

Parental participation in school activities is viewed in many studies as a strong educational partnership with several intersecting spheres of influence. In such a partnership, all stakeholders mutually support each other by synchronizing their resources and contributions to advance learning, increasing motivation, and supporting the development of non-academic skills for students (Epstein, 1995). Upon studying researchers' findings in this field, common themes emerge that school leaders need to pay close attention to maximize both active parental involvement and student learning outcomes and well-being. The common themes include the rewards of and challenges to parental involvement, each of which has a string of sub-themes.

Academic Achievement

One of the common findings underscored in the literature review is the strong positive correlation between parental engagement and students' academic achievement.

The more engaged the parents are, the higher student achievement becomes regardless of their backgrounds. For instance, in his review of literature on Hispanic/ Latin Parental Involvement in K-12 Education, Tinkler (2002) found out that several studies conducted by numerous researchers such as Ascher (1988), Baker and Soden (1998), Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995), Epstein (1996), Floyd (1998), and Petersen(1989) confirmed that parental involvement in school is associated with positive learning outcomes for students. These findings were also reported by other researchers like Christenson and Hurley (1997), Harris and Goodall (2008), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), Ishimaru (2014), Jeynes (2011), Nye et al., (2006), Panferov (2010), Ream and Palardy (2008) and Scharton (2019). In a meta-analysis study that Fan and Chen (2001) conducted, they found out that the overall relationship across all studies between parental involvement, students' academic achievement was statistically significant. This positive association between parental involvement and students' academic advancement was found to cross the socio-economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. These findings from the 25 studies used in this meta-analysis "confirm the intuition harbored by ma ny educators and researchers, that parental involvement and students' academic achievement are positively related" while there is still "inconsistency in the empirical research literature" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p.13, 18).

Niehaus and Adelson (2014), who concluded that school support and parental involvement had a positive impact on both academic and social-emotional outcomes for E.L.L.s, also reported this finding. Parental involvement is a strong indicator of student academic success and has been studied in other countries as well, and the results are similar to those conducted in the United States. For instance, in Britain, Driessen et al.

(2005) found that parents who are active in school activities tend to make great contributions to educational, psychological and sociological gains and influences.

Researchers from different decades have also documented the positive results of parental involvement. As an example, Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to synthesize the quantitative literature about the relationship between parental participation in school activities and students' academic achievement. The study used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) theoretical framework about parental involvement that focuses on three main issues: (1) why parents become involved in their children's education, (2) how parents choose specific types of involvement, and (3) why parental involvement has a positive influence on students' education outcomes. The findings of this meta-analysis research revealed that parental aspirations/expectations for children's educational achievement have the strongest relationship, whereas parental home supervision has the weakest relationship with students' academic achievement. In addition, the relationship is stronger when a global indicator (e.g., GPA) than a subject-specific indicator (e.g., math grade) represents academic achievement.

Social-Emotional Growth and Decline in Behavioral Problems

Research on parental involvement has found a generally positive correlation between parents' engagement in their children's education and students' behavioral outcomes (Desimone, 1999; Fan & Chen, 2001). Likewise, school intervention studies indicate that efforts to enhance students can be more effective when the family is involved (Brown et al., 2011). A longitudinal examination of parent involvement across a nationally representative sample of first, third, and fifth graders found that while involvement did not predict increases in academic achievement, it did predict a decline in

problem behaviors (El Nokali et al., 2010). Another study conducted by Niehaus and Adelson (2014) found that socially and emotionally, Asian/Pacific Islander E.L.L.s reported fewer social and emotional concerns as compared to Hispanic E.L.L.s. Student growth in social-emotional domain and behavioral outcomes of low-income students who are at risk for poor achievement was also confirmed (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

Parental involvement was also credited for social-emotional benefits for high school students. According to Trusty and Lampe (1997) and Reilly (2008), parental participation in school activities is valuable in that it helps to provide a sense of security, belonging, comfort and self-esteem in a changeable society as the adolescent makes every effort to grow, self-develop, and self-regulate. Parental involvement at this unique juncture of student physiological and psychological development is beneficial and vital to high school students who might be at risk of disengaging from school and turning to their peers. Parental involvement was also found to have positive associations with higher self-esteem and improved social and behavioral skills that allow adolescent students to adapt better to the school environment.

Reily (2008) also found out that better communication between schools and families boosted parental involvement and led to better student academic learning and social-emotional well-being. In his research, Reily (2008) focused on a middle school where the school's parent contact program generates about 400 communications between parents and teachers each month via either e-mail, phone, or written notes sent home. Positive response to the program from both teachers and parents resulted in more frequent visits to the school by parents to discuss students' misbehavior or lack of work. The parental involvement program had success because teachers communicated with

parents before problems began interrupting the learning process. Parents became supportive and receptive of teachers' suggestions as to how to improve their children's attitudes, and the number of complaints decreased significantly.

El Nokali et al. (2010) carried out research about parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. The study was designed to investigate if there was a relationship between parental involvement and children's trajectories of academic and social-emotional development across first, third, and 5th grades. While the study did not conclude that parental involvement affected student academic achievement in a significant way, the authors found, however, that parental participation in school significantly decreased behavioral problems and increased social-emotional skills. These benefits also lead to better school attendance. In the absence of parental involvement, however, Rumberger et al. (1990) warned that the lack of parental involvement and peer influence and pressure may lead to negative attitudes towards schools and risky behaviors, ranging from truancy to drug use, from depression to low academic performance (Rumberger et al., 1990). To mitigate these negative impacts of not engaging ELL parents in school activities, research suggests addressing several barriers.

Building Social and Cultural Assets

Among other benefits of parental involvement is the possibility of establishing and expanding social networks for parents and their children. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that this social networking leads to social and cultural capitals that can address some of the social inequality issues when it comes to access to communal resources. As explained by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), cultural capital refers to an

accrual of cultural knowledge, education, language, and skills inherited and possessed by fortunate people. The authors also claimed that social capital formed because of social networking and connections could disrupt social inequalities. These two types of capital can support student achievement, leading to social mobility.

The challenge with capital, as conceived by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), is that it is socially exclusionary; parents from a different background and economic status might not be able to access the middle and upper class parents in public schools. Privileged parents may choose private or specific schools and activities for their children. Bourdieu and Passeron 's concept of capital is also problematic for some scholars such as Yosso (2005), Oliver and Shapiro (1995), and Delgado-Gaitan (2001) who strongly advocated for the promotion of community cultural wealth framework.

By adapting a model of community cultural wealth from Oliver and Shapiro (1995), Yosso (2005) outlined several key components of cultural wealth that are culturally and linguistically aligned with multiethnic and multilinguistic parents. Yosso (2005) asserted that cultural wealth that can be shared and connected among non-White middle and upper dominant classes has the potential to empower parents through activating and merging the capitals of the community cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) argued that multicultural and non-dominant parents in the U.S.A. have aspirational capital, navigational capital, cultural capital, familial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and resistant capital. Culturally and linguistically responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) equips school leaders to create a cultural environment for parents to engage in parental involvement that allows parents to acquire and merge these communal capitals to support their children academically, socially, and emotionally. Capitalizing on

these resources, culturally responsive school leaders will be able to support all students and parents, especially those who either need the support the most due to lack of American public school navigational capital and linguistic capitals.

Obstacles to Parental Involvement

Research strongly suggests that the endeavor of schools to maximize parental involvement faces serious challenges, some of which are structural and logistical, and others are cultural and communicative. Logistical challenges range from transportation, translation and navigating the building to finding teachers on different floors and wings. Structural barriers refer to the time and date the school decides to offer opportunities for parents to engage in their children's education. Cultural obstacles are a set of behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and individual and social dispositions to interact with people from a different, but dominant culture.

Gaps in Arabic Speaking Parental Involvement Literature

While there is a paucity of literature that explores the concept of Arabs' parental involvement in education in the United States, there is a growing body of literature in the Arab world that examines the perception of Arab parents and their attitudes towards school participation. In Abu Dhabi, Jordan, and Israel, research shows that (a) Arab parents attach a great deal of importance to education and consider it as a sole tool for their children's upward mobility, (b) parents know very little about how the school system runs due to their absence from school activities that discuss student learning, (c) there is no shared definition and understanding of school participation between school leaders and parents, (and d) Arab parents do not believe that they or school principals should be involved in school activities and decision-making because parents trust schools

to perform their job regarding student academic achievement and parents deal with student education -upbringing -and supporting them at home through different means (Abdullah et al., 2011).

Structural Barriers

Structural barriers are embedded in traditional parental involvement activities. School-initiated activities are sometimes not attended by parents due to time pressure, lack of transportation, conflicting work schedules, or working multiple jobs due to a lower socio-economic background (Doucet, 2011; Rah et al., 2009; Tinkler, 2002). These challenges prevent some parents from participating in school activities traditionally, making such parents less likely to gain the information relevant to the needed resources for their children to increase their educational attainment.

Cultural Barriers

Identifying and discussing cultural barriers forces scholars and researchers alike to think of cultural mismatch theory and its implications. Cultural mismatch theory contends that inequality and inequity are bred and reproduced when the cultural values in dominant institutions and systems are not in harmony with the cultural norms of underrepresented social groups in those institutions (Stephens et al., 2012). The two key philosophical assumptions of cultural mismatch theory are that cultural norms are based on (a) US institutional systems values, and by default, the economically and politically powerful majority. These exclude and marginalize the cultural norms of historically underrepresented cultural groups; (b) when American institutions advocate only for mainstream cultural values, they intentionally or unconsciously deepen inequality by

producing hurdles for the underrepresented cultural groups to perform according to the mainstream cultural standards (Stephens et al., 2012).

The criteria of normative parental involvement for underrepresented cultural groups is often at odds with the dominant group's cultural values. This cultural mismatch creates anxiety, stress, and bitterness for people from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Townsend et al., 2012). One of the areas where cultural mismatch becomes painfully and blatantly visible for Muslim A.S.P.s who observe their cultural norms is during Parent Teacher conferences. American schools expect parents to meet in mixed sex settings. Even though discussing student academic and behavioral performance is done with good intentions, and for students' benefit, the setting is against the Islamic teachings, making many men and women uncomfortable.

The cultural challenges to parental participation in school activities emerge from the school culture's incongruence with their home culture. Cultural predispositions of minority parents differ from American schools and their personnel, reducing interactions and ultimately access to school and community resources. The combination of linguistic and cultural barriers, including eye contact, body language, tone, and dress code can minimize parental involvement at its best, and eliminate parental involvement at its worst because parents might feel disempowered and disrespected (Garcia et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2009). In another study on parental involvement as a ritualized practice, Doucet (2011) examined the impact of ethno-cultural group identity among monolingual, English proficient parents and ELL parents on parental involvement in their children's education and the effect of that on student achievement. The study combines the five-year

longitudinal data collected under the umbrella of the Harvard immigration study by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008).

By using structured interviews, observations, and field notes with first and second generation parents of Haitian descent, Doucet (2011) highlighted three main findings and aligned them with the three root paradigms of parent involvement as theorized by Turner (2006). The researcher found that gender-based roles among Haitian immigrants are culturally delineated; the father would be the person to attend school activities such as parent-teacher conferences and other formal meetings, while mothers were more likely to do pick up and drop off. Doucet (2011) also found that Haitian immigrants' parents supported their children in a generalized sense, not specifically at school. Furthermore, the assumption of direct parental advocacy in a school setting stood in direct contradiction to Haitian immigrant parents' understanding of schools' role, especially among parents who were more recent immigrants to the United States. In Haiti, teachers are treated with utmost respect and are permitted, even expected, to reprimand their students and physically punish them if deemed necessary. Some Haitian parents even question US teachers’ competency for constantly seeking their input and feedback about their children's school performance - a practice completely outside their experience in Haiti. This study's findings are related to A.S.P.s whose gender roles and responsibilities are similar to those of Haitian families.

Communicative Barriers

Related to the cultural barriers are language and communication obstacles. Parents whose English proficiency is low are intimidated to engage in conversations with teachers speaking about the curriculum and content area subjects and report cards

(Desimone, 1999; Georgis et al., 2014; Lareau, 2011; Lee & Bowen 2006). Because of both structural and cultural challenges, some parents do not attend, and teachers sometimes construe their absence as a lack of care, an attitude that may have negative ramifications for children (Hill & Craft, 2003).

Scribner et al. (1999) asserted that people from different sociocultural contexts have diverse perceptions of what parent involvement is, and these views are culturally oriented and unique (Trumbull et al., 2001). This diversity in perceptions can create a perceived obstacle to parental involvement. For instance, research conducted in Hispanic cultures found that the parents' role is to provide food and shelter, instill morals, promote good behavior and manners, ingrain values, respect, nurture aspirations, and hope despite difficulties.

These roles do not fully concur with a western model, which views parents as having a hand-in-hand relationship with the school to promote academic achievement (Carger, 1997; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001). This cross-cultural communication, even when parents speak English, is significant in defining and determining parents' parental involvement, especially for parents whose previous experience with parental involvement is different from those in America. When parents speak English, the cross-cultural communication mismatch in terms of body language, gender, the perceived authority of teachers from their positionality impacts full communication between parents and teachers.

Sociocultural and Religious Contexts for Muslim A.S.P.s

Although there is a shortage of literature documenting Arabic speaking parental involvement practices in America, there is related research outside of the country. For

example, research conducted in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) provides insight into parental involvement as a sociocultural practice. For context, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. Islam is the official religion, and Arabic is the official language. It is also noteworthy to mention that although UAE is generally described as a mono-ethnic country, new school reforms have led to the recruitment of licensed teachers from Anglophone countries like Canada, the US, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The situation has created tensions in the area of language and communication across cultures (Hourani et al. , 2012).

Hourani et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the perceptions and practices of Arab parents in public schools in the UAE. To obtain a representative perspective of parental involvement, the authors interviewed school administrators, social workers, teachers, and parents from seven primary Public-Private Partnership schools in Abu Dhabi. The authors found out that in the sociocultural context of Abu Dhabi, there are social restrictions that acted against the reforms that UAE tried to implement regarding increasing parental involvement. These constraints stemmed from the sociocultural norms and religious mores. Two of the four main findings of the research are the following. First, there is male and female segregation in schools. Second, there are sociocultural inhibitions regarding the roles of mothers and fathers.

Male and Female Segregation in Schools

Hourani et al. (2012) also found that single sex education and separation of men and women are the sociocultural norms that parents were still observing. The authors also found that gender role delineation was still prevailing in the public schools in Abu Dhabi.

The authors reported that in male schools, the expressed concern was that parental engagement that required sex intermingling during parent-teachers conferences did not satisfy the sociocultural values and were doomed to failure. This was because women/mothers felt uncomfortable meeting with male teachers and avoided visiting the schools administered by males. Likewise, the authors found out that fathers/men stayed away from going to schools directed by females (Hourani et al., 2012).

Two sub-findings were reported in this study regarding female teachers' and fathers' reactions. First, if female teachers were either westerners or did not cover themselves in the locally, culturally expected way (long dresses, hijab, and veil), fathers do not feel comfortable interacting with them. Second, if the female teachers were covered according to the religious and cultural dress codes, fathers were in deference of such female teachers and did not feel comfortable breaking the cultural norms. Sometimes, administrative policies prohibited fathers from entering the girls-only school (Hourani et al., 2012).

Social Inhibitions Relating to the Roles of Mothers and Fathers

Hourani et al. (2012) found that the sociocultural expectations of male and female roles govern the scope and the extent to which fathers are engaged in their children's education when it concerns the school-based involvement. The research found that in Abu Dhabi mothers are entrusted with taking charge of their children's schooling, while fathers earn a living and take care of other outdoor activities. The assignment of parental involvement as a mother’s duty presents a dilemma as they face social barriers imposed on them by either male teachers or their husbands. For example, the researchers found

that some husbands or male guardians restrict their wives' involvement in male schools and limit women's taxi transportation use.

Religious Context for Muslim Parents

Like other religions and governing systems, Islam has two major sources of legislation regulating Muslims' lives: Quran and Sunnah. Quran is the Islamic Holy Scriptures that Muslims believe to be the word of God revealed to the prophet Mohammed through the archangel Gabriel. Quran is written in Arabic and consists of 114 chapters, referred to as suras of various lengths. Quran is considered the first source of Islamic jurisprudence that governs Muslims' lives. The second source of legislature is Sunnah. Sunnah is a collection of Prophet Mohammed's sayings and practices known in Arabic as Hadith. Quran and Sunnah address different aspects of people's lives including mixed-gender interactions and communication. Another key word to explain here is *mahram.* Mahram is an Arabic word meaning a member of one's family with whom marriage would be deemed haram (illegal in Islam).

Maintaining modesty is one of the key Islamic ethics that Islam highlights regarding interaction between the sexes and the dress code. For observant Muslim women, covering up the body with a loose, non-revealing garment or uniform is of paramount importance, especially outside the house. In the Quran, some verses urge men and women to dress modestly and lower their gazes. For example, verses 30-31 in chapter 24 in the Quran explicitly address both men and women, stating:

قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا۟ مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا۟ فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ
ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَـٰتِ
يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ
زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ
وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ
ءَابَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ
أَوْ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَآئِهِنَّ
أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَـٰنُهُنَّ أَوِ ٱلتَّـٰبِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُو۟لِى ٱلْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ
ٱلرِّجَالِ أَوِ ٱلطِّفْلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰ عَوْرَٰتِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ۖ
وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ ۚ وَتُوبُوٓا۟
إِلَى ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Knower of what they do. (30). "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc.) and to draw their veil all over juyÙbbihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husband's son, or their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male

servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex. In addition, let them not stamp their feet to reveal what they hide of their adornment. In addition, all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful. (24: 30- 31).

These detailed verses underscore the importance of lowering gaze for men and women. Since women are advised to cover their beauty except for mahram (people certain people in the family circle who cannot marry them, then it will be so uncomfortable observing men to sit one on one with female teachers alone in a classroom discussing students report cards and learning progress, the same can be applied for observing women. Another warning/ advice comes from Sunnah where the Prophet states that

لَا يَخْلُوَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ بِامْرَأَةٍ فَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ ثَالِثُهُمَا

"No man is alone with a woman but the shaytaan is the third one present," narrated by Ahmed Al-Tirmiddi. In this Hadith, people who are non-mahram adults of the opposite sex are forbidden from being alone together in a closed place. The prophet is also reported to have stated that

لاَ يَخْلُوَنَّ رَجُلٌ بِامْرَأَةٍ إِلاَّ وَمَعَهَا ذُو مَحْرَمٍ

"No person (man) should be alone with a woman except when there is a Mahram with her" [Bukhari & Muslim]. As a result of this religious requirement, both men and women may be very reluctant to have an in-person one-on-one meeting.

Sociopolitical Context for Arab Muslims after September 11, 2001

Saint Vincent as a strong advocate for social justice and equity would be disappointed beyond measures to hear the associated adjectives that Arab Muslims received because of the September 11 catastrophic attack. September 11, 2001 is one of the saddest days in the American and global recent collective memory. On that terrible day, terrorists connected to the extremist group of al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and perpetrated suicide attacks against targets in the United States. The identified perpetrators are Arab Muslims. In response to these attacks, President Bush declared "War on Terror" which started in Iraq and Afghanistan and both are Muslim countries. The war on Terror was perceived in the Arab and Muslim world as War on Islam, which heightened both collective and individual racial consciousness of adult Arab American Muslims (Alimahomed, 2011). The post September 11 institutional practices that homeland security enacted to curb suspected homegrown terrorism targeted Arab Muslim population.

Cainkar (2008) asserted that the post September 11 homeland security measures, the media coverage, and political discourses portrayed Arab Muslims negatively using Muslims' ideological assumptions. Arab Muslims became associated with adjectives like dangerous, violent, and suspected terrorists. Homeland security agents surveilled many mosques. These security measures created feelings of perceived mutual hostility and suspicion (Bayoumi, 2008). Due to these events, Arab Muslim men and women continue to struggle with harmful and threatening cultural and religious stereotypes. Muslim women who wear hijab and Islamic clothes are easily identified as Muslims in public spaces like schools, and might attribute unfavorable treatment to their religious and

cultural affiliations. This feeling of perceived discrimination can deter Muslim men and women from participating in school-based activities.

Conclusion

This expansive body of literature about parental involvement establishes how engaging parents in their children's education influences students' academic success. All students and parents do not equitably share this success due to logistical, cultural, communicative, socio-economic, and other factors that might prevent parents from participating in their children's education. Beyond this, schools and school leaders may lack a broad understanding of what parental engagement means for parents of different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds than their own. To address these challenges, school and district leaders need first to know what the challenges are. For Arabic speaking population, there is very little to no research that can guide school leaders. Given the surge of Arabic speaking students entering the American public schools coupled with a lack of research, this study will be instrumental in highlighting many assets that this population brings. This study acknowledges current engagement obstacles and offers culturally, linguistically, and religiously mindful recommendations.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data of this qualitative, descriptive case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The chapter first reviews the research tradition, design, and the methodology used for the chapter. The chapter will more specifically address the rationale behind choosing the qualitative descriptive case study methodology to investigate the phenomenon of Arabic speaking parental involvement in education within a "real life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Third, the chapter will include the two central research questions that guide this study. Also addressed are the study's setting, participants, data collection instruments and procedures, coding process, meaning making tactics, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter will end with a section on the components of research trustworthiness, ethics, and researcher role in this study.

The chapter's study design will facilitate gathering data from a snowball sampling of A.S.P.s, paraprofessionals, and community leaders to illuminate the parental involvement as perceived and practiced by these participants. As discussed in chapter 2, parental involvement is associated with students' academic performance and social-emotional well-being. These benefits, however, are not enjoyed by all students and parents due to challenges discussed in chapter one. These challenges will be analyzed and addressed through the Epstein parental involvement framework and Khalifa's culturally responsive school leadership framework as discussed in chapters one and two.

The purpose of this study is to unearth and outline the perceptions and practice of parental involvement in which A.S.P.s engage. The researcher paid close attention to

gender-based understandings of parental involvement and their responses to such perceived expectations as they strive to support their children in their education. The study examined the existing obstacles and suggested solutions to improve parental involvement as perceived by A.S.P.s, community leaders, and Arabic speaking paraprofessionals assigned to support Arabic speaking students in New York City public schools. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it centers participants' voices to learn the nuance of values and culture. To do so, this study used a qualitative, single descriptive case study design. As Creswell (2008) emphasized, the purpose of qualitative research is "not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" that a specific group or individuals experience in their lives (p. 213).

Design and Methods

In designing qualitative research, the researcher has the option to choose from at least five research approaches. Creswell (2013) proposed the following five main qualitative research approaches: phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, ethnography, and descriptive case study. The philosophical underpinnings of these approaches are fortified by "ontological stance (nature of reality), epistemological stance (how reality is known), and axiological stance (role of values)" (Creswell, 2013, pp.36-37). While these philosophical assumptions can inform and drive this study about A.S.P.s' perceptions of parental involvement and obstacles and solutions to parental involvement, the philosophical paradigm's *axiological* stance is the most appropriate philosophical assumption in this research.

This consideration is because the researcher ought to consider the participants' beliefs and values as new understanding and meaning develop from the research participants' experiences (Cresswell, 2014). The axiological stance is also appropriate because it reminds the researcher and reader that beliefs and values are socially constructed. Fathoming and recognizing this reality sets the stage for engaging in the epistemological stance where relative reality is accessed and brightened through multiple approaches and perspectives of members of the same group. Understanding the reality of phenomena trains the researcher to understand that reality is socially constructed and understood through the lens of social values espoused by a given society (Berger & Luekmann, 1967).

According to Robson (1993), a descriptive case study is "a strategy of doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (p.146). The qualitative single descriptive case study is the most appropriate methodology that the researcher can use to empirically investigate and measure the perception of Arabic speaking parental involvement as a unit of analysis in this study by examining the perspectives of participants. The perception of parental involvement translated in behaviors, actions, and attitudes with consequences constitutes the central phenomenon explored in this study (Creswell, 2013). The descriptive case study is also the appropriate methodology for this qualitative research study because the defining characteristics of a descriptive case study, as Merriam (2009) categorized them, are "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (p. 43).

These attributes align with the topic of this research. This study is particularistic because the study focused on the particular phenomenon of parental involvement from the perspectives of Arab parents, community leaders, and paraprofessionals. The case study is also descriptive because there is little research on A.S.P.s' involvement in America. Thus, this study is an attempt to generate a rich description of the phenomenon under study. Finally, the descriptive case study is heuristic in that the findings that will emerge from the participants' experiences and an emic perspective should deepen the reader's understanding of the topic under study. This descriptive case study methodology will help the researcher and the reader unpack the reality of parental involvement as constructed by the participants in their previous social world in their original countries.

Also, this study employs a descriptive qualitative research method to describe the phenomenon of A.S.P.s' and paraprofessionals' perception of parental involvement in their children's education. Descriptive case studies are considered more useful and appropriate for providing information on areas of research where little research has been done (Merriam, 2009). While a considerable body of literature has examined the benefits and challenges of parental involvement, as we saw in chapter two, little, if nothing, is understood about A.S.P.s concerning parental involvement in American public schools. The descriptive case study also provides a holistic description of the participants' perceived benefits and parental involvement challenges. To do so, research questions were designed based on the theoretical framing of parent involvement and culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL).

Research Questions

The research study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do Arabic Speaking Parents (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting?

Research Question 2: What are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking students school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools?

Setting

This single, descriptive case study took place in the North Shore of Staten Island, New York. North Shore of Staten Island was selected to be the setting of this study because of the increase in the Arabic speaking population. The researcher, who has lived in this area for 14 years, taught and supported schools as a District English as a New Language (ENL) Coach, Instructional Lead, and as an Assistant Principal for eight years. During this time, he noticed the growth of Arabic speaking student population moved from fifth place to third place as a reported spoken language at home. As a result of the growth, the researcher was contacted by many schools to support with Arabic translation, Arabic instructional materials, and teaching strategies to support Arabic speakers. School teachers and leaders expressed their unpreparedness and lack of instructional materials and Arabic-speaking staff to support the increasing Arabic speaking student population in their schools. This growth of A.S.P.s and students, and an overall Arab-Muslim population in North Shore was also reflected in the establishment of three mosques, two halal markets, many local stores owned by A.S.P.s, one Islamic private school and one under construction, four community-based organizations and centers, and a church where sermons are delivered in Arabic.

The researcher accessed the participants through the snowballing method by approaching the targeted participants in local stores, houses of worship, and community centers. The researcher explained the purpose, the procedures, and the confidentiality of the research. The researcher also explained that due to COVID-19 and time constraints, the participants would have the option to participate virtually, and interview questions would be asked based on the participants' preferred language of communication, whether Arabic or English since the researcher spoke both languages. The researcher also informed the participants that questions could be given in advance should participants prefer that for comprehension and processing purposes.

Participants

The study began in the Fall of 2020 and ended in the Fall of 2021. The researcher collected data from 27 participants using semi-structured virtual interviews and email correspondence for participants who preferred written responses to virtual interviews as they honored their cultural and religious values. The participants were composed of eight Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals who have been supporting Arabic-speaking students and parents for years, ranging from two to 15 years.

These paraprofessionals were divided into two focus groups. The first focus group was composed of four high school paraprofessionals and the second focus group was made of four elementary paraprofessionals. Most of the participating paraprofessionals worked in the K-12 educational setting. The study also collected data from three community leaders, and 16 A.S.P.s. The participating parents came from different Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen. The researcher was intentional in trying to recruit participants from diverse countries, and to

balance the gender of the participating parents (nine women and seven men) to have a balanced input from both male and female parents.

The researcher recruited 27 participants that included 16 A.S.P.s, eight Arabic speaking paraprofessionals, and three community leaders. The community leaders comprised of an Imam (a spiritual leader) and two community-based organization leaders. The inclusion of Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals and community leaders in this study was intentionally designed to provide insight that illuminates the cultural and linguistic fabric of A.S.Ps. As for Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals, they serve as a gateway to educating Arabic-speaking students by supporting them in navigating the American school system, translating in the classroom, providing social-emotional support by reducing the anxiety associated with limited English to communicate, and helping students with locating resources to make content accessible to students.

Arabic –speaking paraprofessionals also support A.S.P.s in navigating the school system, sharing resources, and translating. These daily tasks that paraprofessionals engage in earn them unique perspectives about the obstacles that A.S.P.s face to involve themselves in school-based activities. Furthermore, Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals provide insight into the culture and religion of the community as they relate to education. Also, four paraprofessionals were Christians and four were Muslims. The researcher deemed it necessary to diversify the faith background of the participants when possible to capture common and different strands of Arab culture. It is also important to note that many schools do not have Arabic speaking paraprofessionals; therefore, it was beneficial to research to have them represented in the study.

As for the inclusion of community leaders, the researcher strived to bring the challenges and the recommendations to the reader and to the literature of parental involvement through theological, cultural, and communal lenses. Community leaders are deeply involved in the community. They serve as cultural brokers and guides, resources to the community, and advocates for their community members. Therefore, they have intimate knowledge of their community members' concerns, challenges, and strengths that they can share with the researcher and readers, with the district and school leaders to improve student learning and social-emotional well-being for students and their parents. The participating community leaders were also immigrants from different countries and were aware of both the school leaders' expectations of parents in the countries of origin and those expectations in the public schools in Staten Island.

This awareness helps community leaders understand the misalignment between the two different educational systems and helps them detect the facilitative and prohibitive conditions for parental involvement in school-based activities. This knowledge, coupled with the advocacy and leadership roles that community leaders are entrusted with makes community leaders essential participants in this research to understand the religious and cultural infrastructure of the A.S.P.s in general, and the Arab-Muslim parents in particular. One final worthy note here is that two of the three community leaders in this research were Christians and converted to Islam, and they came from countries where the majority of people are Christians. This fact highlights the bicultural background that these leaders have and leverage it to serve the Arab community regardless of their faith background. For confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The researcher targeted recruiting A.S.P.s - male and female- migrated to the United States and resided in the North Shore of Staten Island, New York, within the last ten years. These A.S.P.'s also had children who started their education in their native Arabic speaking countries and continued their public school education in America after their immigration. To capture both male and female views, the researcher adopted the method of participants' stratification, which means that the specific characteristics of individuals such as gender (females and males) were represented in the study sample (Fowler, 2009). This stratification helped ensure diverse voices were present regarding gender, geographical regions, and experience with A.S.P.s, students, and the American school system that parent paraprofessionals represent. This was an effective method of highlighting the "multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented" (Stake, 1995, p. 108).

These requirements were purposefully established to investigate the phenomenon of parental involvement and its implications through different "real life context[s]" that Robson (1993) included in the descriptive case study definition. This descriptive case study focused on 16 parents from different Arabic speaking countries to capture "general" and "specific" characteristics and practices of parental involvement as perceived by A.S.P.s. In addition to individual interviews, the researcher hosted two paraprofessional focus groups. The first focus group had four elementary paraprofessionals, and the second had four high school paraprofessionals. Both groups supported Arabic speaking students and parents in the K-12 setting throughout their career that ranges between two to 15 years.

The decision to include the Arabic speaking paraprofessionals in the research was multifaceted. Firstly, the research will benefit from illuminating the phenomenon of A.S.P.s' perception and practice of parental involvement as experienced and summarized by four parent paraprofessionals who have been working with Arabic speaking students and parents for at least a decade. Secondly, the paraprofessionals, especially the female ones, have more access and unrestricted communication with most female parents whose cultural norms and observance of gender-based roles and communication do not allow them to speak comfortably with the researcher who is a man. Thirdly, the parent paraprofessionals share multiple common lived experiences with A.S.P.s such as language, culture, and sometimes religion. Finally, the participating paraprofessionals also serve as knowledge and culture brokers for both parents and school leaders. Based upon these salient reasons, the researcher strategically elicited the participation and contribution of female parent paraprofessionals to access a reservoir of authentic information that could enlighten and explain the phenomenon under study.

Fowler (2009) identified the following forms of data collection: mail, telephone, the Internet, personal interviews, or group administration. Because of both COVID-19 and cultural audio-visual (face-to-face) communication norms, the researcher accepted the flexible and convenient methods for participants to collect data and capture multiple perspectives to “explore the general, complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon [Arabic speaking parental involvement] and present the broad, varied perspectives or meanings that participants hold” (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). Flexibilizing the process of collecting data expanded the base of participants, included voices of

participants who might not have been heard otherwise, provided insight about this understudied or unstudied topic while being culturally and linguistically responsive.

Due to religious and cultural values and norms, access to female participants who observe their religious teachings was difficult. To address this access challenge, the researcher adopted the method of snowballing. According to Creswell (2008), "Qualitative snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling that typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study" (p. 217). This snowballing method enabled the researcher to balance input from females and males. Another challenge that emerged as the researcher tried to access participants was the lack of virtual interviews via phone calls or Zoom because some parents respectfully declined to participate using audio-visual methods. In response to these cultural norms in communication with female participants, the researcher offered the option of using the e-mail interviews or hand-written answers to the questions. For any follow-up and clarification questions, the researcher emailed the participants or spoke on the phone with the husband of the female participants for clarification.

Being aware of the cultural norms and the anticipated difficulty of accessing female participants within a reasonable timeframe during this research, the researcher initiated the process of generating interest in the potential study about Arabic speaking parental involvement. First, the researcher asked an Imam (the spiritual leader) if possible for both the researcher and the Imam to speak to people who come to the mosque (a house of worship for Muslims) about the potential study to see if they would be willing to participate in the study and/or refer the researcher to other potential parent participants when the time of research arrives. Second, the researcher spoke and explained to the Arab

owners of stores and Muslim community-based leaders and members the research purpose and asked for referrals. The strategy of speaking with community-known people for referrals was to build trust and credibility with potential participants that would allow for an opportunity for the researcher to explain the purpose of the research and the steps involved when the researcher is ready to conduct the research.

Due to potential linguistic barriers when it comes to communication in English, the researcher translated and interpreted the interview questions into Arabic and provided participants with the Arabic version of the interview questions. Parents who opted for email correspondence all responded in English. For the parents who agreed to have virtual interviews through Zoom and phone calls, the researcher interpreted the questions and translated the transcripts.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was conducted using both one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. In discussing different types of interviews, Creswell (2008) recommended telephone and e-mail interviews to reach "a geographically dispersed group of people" (p. 227). Therefore, the researcher developed interview protocols. For the one-on-one interviews, the researcher asked participants 15 open-ended questions to receive open-ended responses (Creswell, 2008). The questions were designed to capture information about the participants' past and present experiences with parental involvement in their countries of origin and in public schools in the North Shore of Staten Island, NY, and asked them to share their plans regarding school involvement should their linguistic and cultural needs be met. The research questions for this study were aligned to theory and related literature, as shown in Table 1. The collected data was entered in the computer

program, Deddoose, where the data went through at minimum, three rounds of coding until all transcripts were coded and clear themes were developed by the researcher.

Instruments

The instruments of this study were guided by in-depth, semi- structured open-ended interviews and focus group protocols that took place virtually due to both COVID-19 and participants' religious considerations. These open-ended questions were designed to explore participants' lived experiences regarding their perceptions of obstacles, and solutions to parental involvement. In both guides, the researcher developed 15 questions for individual interviews and five questions for focus group interviews. Table 1 shows the alignment of research questions with the interview protocols, theoretical framework, and related literature.

The individual interviews took between 25 -40 minutes, and the focus group interview lasted 45-60 minutes due to the participants' responses. Both individual interview and focus group protocols included potential follow-up or probing questions, or what Fraenkel et al. (2012) referred to as "a contingency question"- it is contingent upon how a respondent answers the first question. If properly used, contingency questions are a valuable survey tool" (p. 402). For instance, if a participant cited religious reasons for not participating in school-centered activities, the researcher asked if there was a verse from the Quran (Muslims' Holy Scriptures: God's words) or Hadith (Muslims' second source of religious teachings: prophet Muhammed's words) to support participants' statements and behaviors.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions with Interview Protocols, Theoretical Framework, and Related Literature

Research Questions	Individual and Focus Group Questions	Theoretical Framework Alignment	Related Literature
Research Question 1 How do Arabic speaking parents (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting?	1. Back in your country, what did school leaders (principals, teachers) expect you to do to support your children in their education? 2. In your country of origin, how often did the school ask you to participate in a year? What type of activities did the school have for parents? How often did you participate? 6. In your opinion, what do you consider as active parental involvement in your children's education in America? Give examples. 14. Some people think that if parents do not participate in school-based activities and do not show up for parent-teacher conferences and other events, then those parents do not care about their children's education. What is your response to this claim and why?	Yes	Parental Involvement: Perception and School-based versus Home-based Parental Involvement
How do A.S.P.s describe the parental involvement that improves their children's education?	7. Can you describe what you have done to help your children in their education and school activities in American schools?	Yes	Parental Involvement: School-based versus Home-based Parental Involvement

How does A.S.P.s ' perception of parental involvement affect their levels of participation in their children's school-based activities?	13. What efforts do you make to strengthen the types of parental involvement you practice? Based on your experience with both Arabic speaking students and parents, can you describe the ways Arabic speaking parents have participated in parental involvement in their children's education? (Focus Group).	Yes	Parental Involvement: Perception and School-based versus Home-based Parental Involvement
Research Question 2 What are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking students school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools?	3. If you participated in school-based activities in your country, how did the school organize the activities (women-only and men-only sections or mixed? which one did and do you prefer and why? 4. In American public schools, would mixed gender environment limit or increase your involvement in school activities? Why? 5. If mixed gender environment limits your involvement in school-based activities in American schools, what do you suggest school principals and teachers do to remove this obstacle? 9. Can you communicate with teachers in English about your child's learning? If not, would you prefer to bring a person with you to translate or to have school-based translators? Why? 10. Would your level of English limit your level of participation in school even if you have an interpreter? Why? Do you prefer	Yes	Parental Involvement: Communication and Culture

	a female interpreter or male interpreter, why? 11. What obstacles limit your participation in school-based activities for your children? 3. Based on your experience with Arabic speaking parents, what obstacles prevent them from participating in school-based activities for the students you have supported? (Focus Group)		
How can A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking paraprofessionals contribute in establishing a culturally and linguistically responsive framework that school leaders can use to promote A.S.P.s ' parental involvement and community partnership?	12. What do you suggest school leaders do to help you and other parents of your gender logistically, culturally, and linguistically to become more involved in your children's school activities? 4. Based on your relationships and understanding of the needs of the parents whose children you support, what do they and you suggest school leaders do to help Arabic speaking parents to become more involved in their children's school activities? (Focus Group)	Yes	Parental Involvement: Culture and Communication

Procedures

The procedures followed by the researcher in this study design are aligned with the five recommendations that Creswell (2008) made for designing qualitative data collection: "selecting participants, gaining permissions, selecting and weighing data types, designing recording protocols, and administering data collection" (p.241).

Due to cultural values and sensitivities, the researcher approached the Arabic speaking men as the first step in this snowballing method of recruiting participants. In

this conversation, the researcher explained that one of the goals of the study was to capture the voices and input from both men and women. He asked these individuals if they could refer and forward the interview questions and the researcher's phone number to other participants. All participants satisfied the following conditions: 1- Arabic speaking male and female parents who migrated to America after their children studied in their native countries for at least five years, and 2- the participants can be of different religions and continents- Africa and Asia. These conditions were set to obtain a diverse pool of candidate participants who could represent the A.S.P.s, in terms of gender, geography, and religion.

Once the researcher received text messages, phone calls, or in-person from potential participants, the researcher reached out to the participants to thank them and explain the procedures. The researcher then outlined the process by stating that (1) participants will receive a letter of consent from the researcher using the email address of St. Johns University. If needed, the researcher plans to interpret and translate the content of the letter and will go through the terms of the consent, (2) the participants will need to read, sign, and return the consent prior to conducting the interviews, (3) participants' input will be anonymized. After receiving the consent forms, the researcher will start the interviews according to the participants' preferences (a phone call, Zoom, and email). The researcher reached out to participants after the initial interview to seek clarification if needed, and to check the accuracy of the data collected and translated. The researcher protected his subjects' identity and confidentiality by referring to them by pseudonyms in the study. Pseudonyms were Arabic names to reflect the participants' linguistic backgrounds.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research depends on the researcher to design instruments, collect data, and interpret the findings. Since interpretations are subjective and influenced by the researcher's personal bias and subjectivity, the research findings can be subject to internal and external validity threats, which might cast aspersions on the researcher's trustworthiness. The researcher in this study shared common linguistic backgrounds, cultural beliefs, and social biases that can be positive and negative. This interaction between the researcher and the participants could become a fertile ground for unreliable findings if the researcher did not establish a bias monitoring system. Miles et al. (2014) warned that "Qualitative analyses can be evocative, illuminating, masterful—and wrong" (p.257). The possibility of this "wrongness" would be high if the researcher did not establish and follow a set of procedures to test the findings. Threats to research validity can come from different resources, such as "the holistic fallacy…, elite bias…, personal bias,… going native" (Miles et al., 2014, p.257).

Qualitative researchers should be vigilant, attentive to biases that could be portrayed due to the researcher's positionality. The researcher has the ethical obligation to balance between what Simmel (1950), Burgess (1984), and Merton (1972) referred to as the dichotomy of being an "insider" or "outsider" in a research study. The authors remind researchers of achieving this balance when they imply that it is the stranger who is able "to survey conditions with less prejudice" (Simmel, 1950, p. 405). It is the stranger who can "stand back and abstract material from the research experience" (Burgess, 1984, p. 23), while "it is the insider, overly-influenced by the customs of his or her group, who remains ignorant, parochially mistaking error for truth" (Merton, 1972,

p.3). Being aware of this credibility importance, the researcher strived to ensure that the data and findings truly reflected the participants' experience.

To protect the research findings from internal and external threats, the researcher employed the confirming and verifying tactics that Miles et al. (2014) proposed to qualitative researchers. The authors suggested 13 strategies to boost researchers' and readers' confidence in data and findings. Some of these tactics are "(1) checking for representatives, (2) checking for researcher effects, (3) triangulating, (4) weighting the evidence, (5) checking the meaning of outliers, (6) following up surprises, (7) replicating a finding, and (8) and getting feedback from participants" (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 257-258). To avoid the threat of a personal bias, which is defined as "The researcher's personal agenda, personal demons, or personal "axes to grind," which skew the ability to represent and present fieldwork and data analysis in a trustworthy manner" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 257), the researcher employed the tactics of Checking for Representativeness, Replicating a Finding, and Getting Feedback From Participants.

The first trustworthiness tactic that the researcher applied was to seek a balanced perspective based on the gender of the participants. Although it might be difficult to access female participants and easy to have access to all male participants, the researcher pursued the course of seeking female participants instead of using the convenience method. In addition to having both males and females, the researcher ensured to have representativeness of participants from two different continents- Africa and Asia. This geographical factor was very important in understanding the level of participants' openness to a Western way of social interaction, especially when cross-gender and cross-cultural interactions are involved. For context, as it was mentioned elsewhere in this

research, there are 22 countries where Arabic is spoken and used as the official language. These countries are dispersed across Africa and Asia. By selecting participants from different countries, the researcher also attempted to create geographical representativeness. In addition, since not all A.S.P.s were Muslim, the researcher also selected Christian participants from the pool of the participants obtained through the snowballing method. These representatives of participants in terms of gender, geography, and religion were designed to boost the validity of the findings.

The second tactic to increase the reliability of the findings was the tactic of getting feedback from participants. The researcher ensured the accurate representation of participants' input by (a) summarizing the key points in the interview in Arabic and asking the participants at the end of the interview if the summary was accurate, and (b) by asking clarifying questions to ensure that the researcher's understanding is what the participants intended to convey. These three tactics - representativeness, feedback from participants, and member checking- helped the researcher to examine any internal bias that could minimize the validity of the research findings. By implementing these reliability tactics, the researcher was able to assess the quality and integrity of this qualitative descriptive single case study and to enhance its "confirmability, dependability, credibility, and potential transferability" (Miles et al., 2014, p.73).

Research Ethics

Throughout the research process, many potential ethical issues could arise that a researcher had the moral and professional responsibility to address. In this context, Creswell (2014) outlined some of the possible ethical issues during different phases of the research inquiry, specifically "Prior to conducting the study, Beginning the study,

Collecting data, Analyzing data, and Reporting, sharing, and storing data" (p.132). To address the ethical issues that can emerge during the "Prior to conducting the study" and "Beginning the study," the researcher sought local approvals from the people in charge of houses of worship, community centers, and local stores to both generate interest in the research and asked for referrals using the snowballing method. The researcher also developed and submitted a proposal for an institutional review board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study. Along with these two approvals, the researcher wrote a letter of consent that was approved by the researcher's research advisor and by the IRB that explained the purpose of the research and informed the participants of their rights to that included, but was not limited to, consent, confidentiality, and withdrawal from the research at any time they want.

The researcher also explained to the participants that he, as a Muslim Arab male, was aware and responsible for ensuring that religious, cultural, gender-based values and norms would be honored and respected, and consent from their spouses, when applicable, would be sought before beginning the study interviews. Based on this respect for cultural differences, the researcher was flexible to collect data using whichever medium was convenient for the participants to observe their values. The researcher also explained to the participants that they could participate in English or Arabic through phone, Zoom, email, recorded answers for those who would not read or write, and written forms to ensure inclusive and equitable ways of communicating ideas. The interview questions were also available in English and Arabic.

During the "Collecting data, Analyzing data, Reporting, sharing, and storing data" phases of the study, the researcher asked the same questions for the individual interviews

with potential follow-up clarification questions and the same questions for the focus group interview. All participants were treated respectfully, and no preferential treatment was allowed. The participants were informed that their data would be securely stored and pseudonyms would be assigned to them when the researcher is analyzing their inputs. The researcher also reported divergent perspectives and contrary findings. Lastly, the researcher created field notes, engaged in member checking, and when appropriate, gathered additional feedback from the participants.

Lastly, the interviews were transcribed and translated when the interviews were conducted in Arabic. The data transcripts went through three rounds of coding using the coding software Dedoose. Once all data was coded and themes were identified, the researcher engaged in within and across case analyses to measure the A.S.P.s' perception of parental involvement and the challenges and recommendations to strengthen parental involvement. Triangulation of data as a strategy to boost the validity and reliability of the findings was used in the data analysis segment of this study. (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

Coding is one of the most important steps in analyzing collected data in qualitative research through interviews and focus groups**.** According to Saldaña (2016), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). These codes can be arrived at deductively or inductively. Deductive coding is rooted in prior knowledge that is gained from the literature review, previous conceptual constructs, and theoretical frameworks. As for

inductive coding, it is generated from data as the researcher goes through the cycles of coding (Miles et al., 2014). Deductive and inductive are mutually reinforcing coding procedures in making sense of data collected or observed in the field of research.

As a qualitative researcher, it becomes a matter of choosing the strategy that fits the purpose. As Wolcott (1992) put it, the researcher can adopt the approach of "theory-first" and "theory-later," or the other way around. These "theory-first" and "theory-later" approaches to coding are synonymous with "the deductive conceptualist [who adopts] a top down model, and the inductive constructivist [who] has a built-up one" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 212). In both approaches, coding goes through multiple rounds to refine and distill data into meaningful codes that encapsulate themes of the findings of data analysis. In this research, the researcher will begin with deductive coding methods while being open to inductive coding methods to "describe and analyze a pattern of interrelationships" between priori theoretical frameworks and nuance gained in the researcher's empirical study (Miles et al., 2014, p.37).

Coding Process

Data coding is a process that goes through "iterative cycles of induction and deduction to power the analysis" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 95). Whether a researcher is trying to test a theory or generate a new theory from data analysis, the researcher needs to examine the research participants' data. Therefore, the data coding process is instrumental in making data digestible and meaningful by creating themes under which different pieces of information can be filed. In this research, the researcher used the computer program called Dedoose to code the transcripts and identify themes in the data (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). The coding process went through a minimum of three rounds. In

the initial coding phase, the researcher read and coded the interview data. Upon finishing all interviews, 65 parent codes were generated in Dedoose. Afterwards, the researcher started collapsing the codes under different categories and switching some of the parent codes to child codes based on the connections existing among the parent and child codes. During these phases of coding, the researcher adopted the deductive/ theory-first approach, the start list came from the literature review and previous conceptual frameworks like those of Epstein's parental involvement framework (Epstein, 2009) and culturally responsive school leadership by (Khalifa et al., 2016). This deductive approach led to establishing codes like, "benefits of parental involvement," and "obstacles to parental involvement," Other codes such as problems, solutions, and previous perceptions, cultural and religious references emerged in the first round of coding.

During the second round that began a few days after the first round the researcher re-read the data and the generated codes to examine other issues that existed as "central phenomenon of interest" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). During this round, the researcher adopted the inductive coding approach where close reading and interaction with data revealed new codes that were borrowed from the literature or in-vivo codes (Miles et al., 2014) that were borrowed from the participants. The third round of coding focused on clustering codes under major themes. The researcher used these themes to categorize codes that emerged from analyzing the collected data.

Meaning Making Tactics

The process of making sense of data is another important step in research. While coding "is deep reflection about…deep analysis and interpretation of the data's meaning," clustering as a meaning-making tactic is about a "display of condensed

chunks" of data to be ready for analysis (Miles et al., 2014, p. 79). The researcher reviewed the codes and began combining some codes under one cluster. In addition to clustering, the researcher employed the Making Contrasts/Comparisons tactic (Miles et al., 2014) to generate more meaning out of the data. The researcher sought feedback from both participants and second readers who read the transcripts and developed codes and themes, to confirm or challenge these codes and themes.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies is of paramount importance as the researcher strives to remain ethical and faithful to the quality and reliability of both data collection and data-based analysis. The qualitative study researcher is also the person who designs the instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); therefore, if this human instrument is not free from preconceived ideas, ideological orientations, and value judgments, the findings might not be valid, ethical, or reliable. As Simmel (1950) put it, the outsider is in a position to describe people's lived experiences and circumstances with less prejudice. This prejudice can creep in as a result of being an insider who can generalize or project his/her world views and understanding of a phenomenon, or it can creep as a result of being an outsider who filters and interprets collected data through different perspectives not aligned with those of the research participants.

While an effective qualitative study, the researcher needs to ask fact-finding and probing questions to unveil the root-causes, consequences, perceptions, and lived experiences of research subjects. A balance must be stricken between pursuing objectivity through data-driven findings and allowing the insider information to illuminate and explore a collective community viewpoint through deep and wide

exploration. The researcher's striving to materialize the goal of bias-free topic exploration can be challenged by the researcher's positionality and shared culture.

The researcher's role and positionality are anchored in three main intertwined strands of his identity; that is, personal, professional, and communal. At the personal role, the researcher identifies himself as a Muslim-Arab-immigrant-man. At the professional level, the researcher is an educator, educational leader, and doctorate candidate. At the communal level, the researcher's role, especially before the pandemic, was perceived as a community leader where he participated in community-based organizations' efforts to support community members. Each of these identity dimensions has a potential influence on both the researcher and the participants in this study.

The researcher's religious and ethnic dimensions of his identity make him an indigenous member of the study group. For participants who are Muslims, their participation might be influenced by the fact that the researcher is perceived to be an educated person who is expected to know the religious aspect of Islamic behaviors and actions. This perceived shared consciousness on the part of both the researcher and participants might lead to responses to the study questions that are aligned with religion and culture rather than a free expression of ideas in fear of being perceived as a person who does not observe the religious norms.

The researcher initially thought that his professional role, as a previous district instructional leader and coach, and as a current assistant principal in a large comprehensive high school in the district where he teaches English language learners including Arabic speaking students, would have the potential of putting participants under the pressure of responding in a way that would not attribute lack of parental

involvement, if applicable, to school leaders and teachers to avoid the perception of shifting the blame to schools and the researcher is a member of the school community who might be offended. But in reality, participants were willing to speak freely and shared their thoughts because they wanted their voices to be heard and shared with school leaders.

Bias is an invisible academic virus that can destroy worthwhile and much needed research. Bias comes in positive and negative forms, and neither is healthy for research. It can also manifest itself in confirmation and selection bias. Confirmation bias happens when the researcher tries to include only data that will prove pre-determined assumptions. Selection bias occurs when a researcher selects convenience in terms of accessibility even if the researcher knows the risk of data collection validity and reliability. This inherent risk of bias and preferences is fortified by the researcher's positionality and what Banks (1998) referred to in his typology of cross-cultural researchers as the indigenous insider who subscribes to and advocates for the belief system espoused by the community of which the researcher is a member.

This cultural community in which individuals "cross-pollinate," as one of the participants in a pilot study (Elabida, 2020) stated, and uses similar tools to make sense of the world and practice more of the same epistemological cloning that is resistant to any culturally modified ideas. In the researcher's case as an Arab, Muslim, man, an immigrant, he carried with him a reservoir of ideological thoughts aligned with the study participants' moral compass, shared consciousness, and behavioral framework. This cultural cargo could burden an objective analysis and fog the interpretive lenses if the researcher did not pay close attention to such influential factors.

To mitigate the risk of all these types of bias and threats, the researcher employed tactics for testing the findings of the study. The data and findings used the tactics of "checking for representativeness; checking for researcher effects; triangulating; Checking the meaning of outliers; the tactic of getting feedback from participants" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 258) to guide the research and follow research methodologies that facilitate objective data collection, analysis, and reporting. The researcher also used the random and snowball method of selecting participants to take part in the research. In addition, the researcher used the data coding software, Dedoose and had peers and professors review both the coding and findings to check objectivity and data-based analysis free of external and irrelevant interpretations. The researcher also explained to the participants the purpose of the research, the importance of multiple perspectives, the privacy of participants, and the researcher's ethical and moral responsibilities to report honestly and objectively. Finally, the researcher's awareness of these sources of bias and his responsibility to hold himself accountable for objectivity helped the researcher become more objective observant even though he will start as a member of the group (Punch, 1998).

Conclusion

The researcher of this qualitative research study explored and measured the A.S.P.s perceptions of parental involvement. The study employed a single descriptive case study using focus groups and semi structured individual interviews. The collected data was translated, transcribed, and coded using the Dedoose coding software.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the phenomenon of parental involvement as perceived and practiced by A.S.P.s to support their children's education in the K-12 public school setting in the North Shore of Staten Island, New York. This study also aims to identify barriers to parental involvement and elicits recommendations from the participants to guide school leaders as they try to engage A.S.P.s in school-based activities using culturally and linguistically responsive approaches and practices. To gain a deeper understanding of the parental involvement phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2003), the researcher has employed a single, descriptive case study in this qualitative research where the unit of analysis is the measurement of participants' perceptions and practices of parental involvement.

Chapter one began with an introduction to parental involvement. The researcher described the study, its rationale, and its components by (a) introducing cultural, linguistic, and perceptual challenges as barriers to parental engagement, and (b) outlining the implications of the parental involvement study for practice and research. Using the theoretical frameworks- Epstein's model of parental involvement (1995) and Khalifa's culturally responsive school leadership framework (2016) to guide the study, the researcher aims to present the challenges and recommendations to understand, expand, and engage A.S.P.s' involvement in their children's education. Chapter two reviewed the parental involvement literature, discussed the theoretical frameworks, and presented research-based findings related to social-emotional and academic benefits of parental involvement and the negative impact of lack of parental involvement on students. Also, in chapter two, a definition of parental involvement, types of parental involvement,

obstacles to school-based parental involvement were discussed. In addition, the chapter discussed the gaps in the literature regarding A.S.P.s' perceptions of parental involvement in U.S. public schools and presented international research regarding the topic. Finally, the chapter addressed the sociocultural, religious, and sociopolitical contexts of Muslim, A.S.P.s.

In chapter three, the researcher presented the study design and outlined the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data of this qualitative, descriptive case study. The chapter addressed the research setting, participants, data collection instruments and procedures, coding process, meaning making tactics, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter concluded with a section on the components of research trustworthiness, ethics, and researcher role in this study.

The main research questions of the study are as follows:

1. How do Arabic speaking parents (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting? How if at all do these perceptions differ?
2. What are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by Arabic speaking stakeholders, A.S.P.s, Muslim community leaders, and Arabic speaking students' school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools?

Description of the Cases

This single, descriptive case study analyzed data collected from 27 participants and took place in the North Shore of Staten Island, New York. The study lasted from August 2020 to November 2021. Participants included 16 parents, eight paraprofessionals, and three community leaders. North Shore of Staten Island was

selected to be the setting of this study because of the increase in the Arabic speaking population. The researcher, who has lived in this area for 14 years, taught and supported schools as a District English as a New Language (ENL) Coach, Instructional Lead, and as an Assistant Principal for 8 years, noticed the growth of the Arabic speaking student population. During the researcher's tenure as an ENL coach in North Shore, the district's data for English Language Learners who are Arabic speakers showed that Arabic moved from fifth place to third place as a reported spoken language at home. As a result of this growth, the researcher was contacted by many schools to support with Arabic translation and the incorporation of Arabic instructional materials and strategies. School teachers and leaders expressed their unpreparedness, a lack of suitable instructional materials, and a need for more Arabic-speaking staff to support the increasing Arabic speaking student population in their schools.

This growth of A.S.P.s, students, and an Arab-Muslim population in the North Shore of Staten Island is also reflected in the local establishments of three mosques, two *halal* markets, several halal restaurants, many local stores, and *halal* mobile food carts owned by A.S.P.s, one Islamic private school and one under construction, four Arabic community-based organizations and centers, and a church where sermons are delivered in Arabic. Parents send their children to community educational centers to learn Arabic, study the religion, and volunteer help community-based organizations. Some parents send their children to Islamic and Catholic schools, but most of them send their children to zoned public schools. Due to the increasing Arabic-speaking population, the school district hired an Arabic speaking principal to serve and connect with the community. In general and according to informal conversations with both parents and community

leaders, Arabic-speaking parents do not feel connected to schools due to several factors such as lack of cultural understanding on the part of schools, language barriers, and misalignment of values and social behaviors.

The Arabic-speaking community in the North Shore of Staten Island seems to be a close-knit community as evidenced by their participation in community-based events such as Eids, fund-raising events, and their attendance of religious rituals. Some parents informally reported to the researcher that they have reached out to the community centers for assistance, other Arab parents for support with school, center for childcare assistance, and other community-based supports. The close-knit nature of the Arabic-speaking parents is also reflected in the quick recruitment of this study's participants because the researcher reached out to community leaders and some Arabic-speaking parents who connected the researcher with many parents who might be difficult to recruit, especially the female parents.

The Arabic-speaking parents were also thankful for being advocated for and having an opportunity for their voices to be heard. When the researcher thanked the participating community leaders, paraprofessionals, and parents for their participation in the study, most of the participants responded by saying "Thank you for doing this for us." Also when the researcher asked al-Imam if he needed to add something that the researcher had not asked about, Imam replied by stating "we need people like you to speak up for our community." The Arabic-speaking parents expressed that they respect school leaders and teachers and do not feel it would be appropriate to speak up against occurrences that oppose their belief system. However, they love to take part in communal

activities and be contributing members of the community if they are invited and culturally respected.

The parents want the school leaders to know that they respect them, trust them with their children's education and that they care about their children's education. Almost all participants stated that one of the main reasons they left their countries, families, friends, and jobs was to provide their children with a better education. The participants want the school leaders to know that their absence from school-based activities should be culturally and circumstantially contextualized, and ***not*** construed as a lack of care, or as a sign of devaluing education. Culturally, parents want school leaders to know that they experienced a different educational system in their countries of origin, and they were not expected to go to school-based activities unless they were of celebratory nature. Parents trust that school leaders and teachers are there for their children and are competent to perform the teaching task. They also want schools to know that culturally sensitive topics such as gender mingling prevent them from in participating school-centered activities. Circumstantially, parents want school leaders to know that language barriers, childcare needs, work schedule conflicts, and other competing priorities impede their school-based parental involvement. Finally, parents want to relay to school leaders that they are doing everything possible to support their children at home to have a better future.

The inclusion of Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals and community leaders in this study was intentionally designed to provide insight that illuminates the cultural and linguistic fabric of A.S.P.s. Community leaders know their community members and serve them in their community centers. The community leaders serve the spiritual, social, educational, and recreational needs of the Arabic-speaking parents in North Shore of

Staten Island. Through these daily services and interactions, community leaders help to maintain the close-knit fabric of Arabic-speaking community. As for Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals, they serve as a gateway to educating Arabic-speaking students by supporting them in navigating the American school system, translating in the classroom, providing social-emotional support by reducing the anxiety associated with limited English to communicate, and helping students with locating resources to make content accessible to students. Arabic–speaking paraprofessionals also support Arabic-speaking parents in navigating the school system, sharing resources, and translating. The daily tasks that paraprofessionals engage in earn them unique perspectives about the obstacles that Arabic-speaking parents face to involve themselves in school-based activities.

Furthermore, Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals provide insight into the culture and religion of the community as they relate to education. Four paraprofessionals in the study are Christians and four are Muslims. The researcher deemed it necessary to diversify the faith background of the participants to capture common and different strands of Arab culture. It is also important to note that many schools do not have Arabic speaking paraprofessionals; therefore, it was beneficial to research to have them represented in the study because of their insightful contributions to understanding the experiences of Arabic-speaking parents with parental involvement. Since they speak Arabic and know the culture, Arabic speaking paraprofessionals are able to interact with Arab parents naturally and openly. Because of shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds, parents and paraprofessionals reported that they mutually connect and trust one another, which paves the path for parents to share their concerns and speak their truth without the fear of being judged. Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals also reported that school-based

staff refers to them for communication purposes. Overall, this study presents data from Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals from different countries and with different years of experience to capture different perspectives that will help school leaders better understand the cultural, social, and educational needs of the Arabic-speaking school population. Table 2 below shows the diversity of participants' backgrounds.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Focus Group 1 Paraprofessionals and Years of Service	**Gender**	**Country**	**Religion**
Fairouz: 16 Years	Female	Egypt	Christianity
Warda: 13 Years	Female	Egypt	Christianity
Hajar: 13 Years	Female	Egypt	Christianity
Lamis: 5 Years	Female	Egypt	Christianity
Focus Group 2 Paraprofessionals and Years of Service	**Gender**	**Country**	**Religion**
Najib: 8 Years	Male	Egypt	Islam
Khadija: 3 Years	Female	Egypt	Islam
Malak: 9 Years	Female	Jordan	Islam
Nadia: 2 Years	Female	Palestine	Islam
Participating Community Leaders	**Gender**	**Country**	**Religion**
Hoda	Female	Undisclosed	Islam
Imam	Male	Undisclosed	Islam
Mustafa	Male	Undisclosed	Islam

Participating Parents	Gender	Country	Religion
Amal	Female	Egypt	Christianity
Zakaria	Male	Jordan	Islam
Haroun	Male	Jordan	Islam
Farida	Female	Jordan	Islam
Younes	Male	Yemen	Islam
Yasin	Male	Yemen	Islam
Ahmed	Male	Yemen	Islam
Basem	Male	Palestine	Islam
Mariam	Female	Palestine	Islam
Aisha	Female	Palestine	Islam
Fatia	Female	Morocco	Islam
Khawla	Female	Morocco	Islam
Jamila	Female	Morocco	Islam
Ibrahim	Male	Morocco	Islam
Fatima	Female	Morocco	Islam
Latifa	Female	Unknown	Islam

Findings

Data from this qualitative study yields three major themes with sub-themes, outlined in Table 3. The first overarching theme that came into view is what can be termed as "cultural and religious mismatch." Under this major theme, three sub-themes include gender-mingling, differences in traditions and gender roles, and different perceptions and expectations of parental involvement. The second central theme revolves

around the communicative barriers that limit parental involvement as expected by school-based staff. Within this theme, the results show that there are two more sub-themes inclusive of English proficiency and cultural and cross-gender communication rules. The third overarching theme is about logistical barriers to parental involvement. This theme branches off into the following sub-themes: childcare and work schedule conflict. The three aforementioned themes addressed the perceptions of and the obstacles to parental involvement identified by A.S.P.s, paraprofessionals, and Muslim community leaders. Within these themes, participants also provided concrete steps that school leaders can take to address the obstacles identified in this study.

Table 3

Overarching Themes and Sub-themes

Overarching Themes	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2	Sub-theme 3
Theme 1: Cultural and Religious Mismatch	Gender Mingling	Differences In Traditions and Gender Roles	Different Perceptions and Expectations
Theme 2: Communicative Barriers	English proficiency	Cultural and Cross-Gender Communication Rules	
Theme 3: Logistical Barriers	Childcare	Work Schedule Conflict	

Religious Context Building and Findings

Before diving into the details of the emerged themes, a working definition of cultural and religious mismatch must be provided to contextualize the theme. Mismatch

in the context of this research refers to the incongruity between two different cultures- Arab-Muslim culture and American public school environment and culture. Mismatch also refers to the misalignment between what Arabic-speaking parents perceive of parental involvement and what American public schools perceive and expect from parents to think and do to be considered active parents in their children's education, regardless of their cultural and experiential backgrounds. This cultural divergence might sometimes stem from religious values that are incompatible with the American public school system's expectations of parents in general and Arabic-speaking parents in particular.

There is also a need to establish the religious framework within which most of the participants in this qualitative research operate so that readers can synchronize their understanding of the research findings and participants' religious references that govern their behavioral orientations. To facilitate this religious understanding, two Arabic terms need defining since they will be used frequently when speaking about religious and cultural values espoused by Muslim participants. The first term is *mahram*. In Islam, a mahram is defined as a member of one's family with whom marriage would Islamically be illegal, and the presence of a mahram is needed when two persons of the opposing sex have to meet in Kholwa, an Arabic word for isolation or seclusion, for legitimate and lawful purpose.

Due to the central importance of the presence of a mahram in Islam, there are two verses in the Quran- the Holy Book for Muslims- in chapter 4 entitled An-Nisa (Women) that specify who is included in the definition of a mahram with whom marriage cannot be

allowed. In verses 22-23 in An-Nisa, God instructs the prophet and all Muslims by stating:

> And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already passed; indeed it was shameful and most hateful, and an evil way. Forbidden to you (for marriage) are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster mothers, your sisters from suckling, mothers of your spouses, your step-daughters from your those spouses you have entered into them but if you have not entered into them then there is no blame on you, spouses of your sons from your own loins and that you add two sisters except that has passed; indeed God is forgiving and merciful. (Quran, Chapter 4, verses 22-23)

The second Arabic phrase to be defined is *Ghado al basar*- lowering gaze, which is an important divine instruction to both Muslim men and women. In Islam, adult men and women are required to dress modestly and to lower their gazes, and not looking at the opposing sex's beauty to avoid any sinful thinking or action. This instruction from God is found in verses 30-31, chapter 24 entitled Al-Noor (Light) in the Quran as demonstrated by Figure 3.

Figure 3

Quaranic Verses Regarding Lowering Gazes and Dress Code

قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا
يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Tell the believing men that they must lower their gazes and guard their private parts; it is more decent for them. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what they do.

وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا
ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ
آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ
بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ
أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ ۖ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ
بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ ۚ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

And tell the believing women that they must lower their gazes and guard their private parts, and must not expose their adornment, except that which appears thereof, and must wrap their bosoms with their shawls, and must not expose their adornment, except to their husbands or their fathers or the fathers of their husbands, or to their sons or the sons of their husbands, or to their brothers or the sons of their brothers or the sons of their sisters, or to their women, or to those owned by their right hands, or male attendants having no (sexual) urge, or to the children who are not yet conscious of the shames of women. And let them not stamp their feet in a way that the adornment they conceal is known. And repent to Allah O believers, all of you, so that you may achieve success.

This religious frame is deemed necessary for readers to contextualize and make sense of the findings of this research as they gain insight into this culture-specific conduct. The aforementioned Quranic verses and the subsequent Ahadith – Prophet Muhammed's sayings- were referred to by an Imam (the spiritual leader in Islam) and other participants in this research to explain both the obstacles and solutions to parental involvement as perceived by Arabic-speaking parents.

Theme 1: Cultural and Religious Mismatch

Upon analyzing the gathered data, the theme of cultural and religious mismatch surfaced as one of the five central themes in this research. The underpinnings of this

cultural mismatch are buttressed by religious values and norms that regulate Muslim-Arabic-speaking parents' comportment and activities. These religious codes of conduct became established manners and shared consciousness for most of the participants in this study. As cited under the section of Religious Context Building and Findings, there are Quranic verses that decree certain behaviors that Muslim parents deploy efforts to observe to create harmony between their beliefs and actions. In this section, a set of quotes from three Muslim community leaders who participated in this research are used as a catalyst into fathoming and appreciating some aspects of cultural and religious mismatch that emerged as one of the central themes in this study. One of the recurrent statements that was captured in the research is provided by an Imam who serves as a spiritual leader for the Muslim community. When asked about the obstacles that can prevent A.S.P.s from parental involvement, the Imam stated the following:

> There is cultural barrier. One because, for example, some Muslim women based on their culture, they do not go [to school-based activities] if they're not with their husbands. . . , or with their mahram . . . Muslims in general, as we all know the tradition [Hadith] which says that if a man and if a woman are by themselves, the Satan is their third. So for some people, they will not accept it to go to a, for example, parent teacher meeting when the teacher is a male, and the parent is a woman and there is no other person to be part of this, or there is no husband or son to be a part of. I mean, an adult, to be part of this so I would say, culture, and somehow religion.

The Imam cited the following Ahadith- the sayings of the prophet of Islam- that warns men against being alone with a woman and requires the presence of a *mahram* to comply with the Islamic teachings.

Figure 4

Prophet Mohammed's Warning and Instruction Related to Gender-Mixing

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

لَا يَخْلُوَنَّ أَحَدُكُمْ بِامْرَأَةٍ فَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ ثَالِثُهُمَا

"No man is alone with a woman but the third one present is the shaytaan" [At-Tirmidhi, classed as Saheeh by al-Albani in Saheeh at-Tirmidhi].

The Prophet (ﷺ) also said:

لاَ يَخْلُوَنَّ رَجُلٌ بِامْرَأَةٍ إِلاَّ وَمَعَهَا ذُو مَحْرَمٍ

"No person (man) should be alone with a woman except when there is a Mahram with her" [Bukhari & Muslim].

In elaborating on these two Ahadiths, the Imam emphasized the risk of compromising the religious belief and ethics if gender-mixing without a *mahram* occures during school-based activities by repeating that

> This is a general hadith and these rules for both men and women. Prophet salla allaho aleihi wa sallam (May Allah's prayers and peace be upon him), If a man and a woman alone and they are no Maharim, meaning they are no relatives and no husband and wife. So Shaytan (Satan) is the third, which means there are chances for temptations, and in Islam, having relationship between a man and woman outside of marriage is of extreme, is a sin, and a great sin. And we as Muslims, it is not what the people are saying, if they're catching us, or seeing us. It is what God says for us, because God says: Wherever you are, I'm with you.

> And we believe that there is no meeting of two people except that He-Allah- is the companion . . . so wherever you are, God is with you and as a Muslim, you know that, and we are asked to lower our gazes and that is for men and for women . . . to try our best not to be tempted.

In addition to the cited Ahadith, the Imam also alluded to some Quranic verses when he was asked if lowering gazes are religiously endorsed or sub-culturally motivated depending on where the Arabic-speaking parents are coming from. The Imam asserted that

> . . . in sourat al noor, which is chapter 24, and in Alahzab, which is chapter 33 in both Allah is telling women to lower their gaze, as well as men, especially in sourat Anoor, to lowering their gazes not only men or jus women, but both men and women are to lower their gazes and cover their nakedness and the nakedness for a man is what could attract people, you know, from, you know, in his, in his body, and for women to make efforts to cover everything of the body except for the face and hands. I can cite also in another hadith, but both in both sourate anoor and sourat alahzab, Allah tells men and women how to conduct and in sourat anoor, both men and women how to conduct in two ayats that are consecutive.

Figure 5

Quaranic Verses Regarding Lowering Gazes and Dress Code

قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا۟ مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا۟ فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Tell the believing men that they must lower their gazes and guard their private parts; it is more decent for them. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what they do.

وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَـٰتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَـٰنُهُنَّ أَوِ ٱلتَّـٰبِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُو۟لِى ٱلْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ أَوِ ٱلطِّفْلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰ عَوْرَٰتِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ۖ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ ۚ وَتُوبُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

And tell the believing women that they must lower their gazes and guard their private parts, and must not expose their adornment, except that which appears thereof, and must wrap their bosoms with their shawls, and must not expose their adornment, except to their husbands or their fathers or the fathers of their husbands, or to their sons or the sons of their husbands, or to their brothers or the sons of their brothers or the sons of their sisters, or to their women, or to those owned by their right hands, or male attendants having no (sexual) urge, or to the children who are not yet conscious of the shames of women. And let them not stamp their feet in a way that the adornment they conceal is known. And repent to Allah O believers, all of you, so that you may achieve success.

Attempting to espouse these religious teachings and trying to attend school-based activities in a gender-mixed environment creates a cultural mismatch and incongruity for some Arabic-speaking parents. Within this central theme, three sub-themes complicate the process of negotiating these core religious values to participate in school-centered parental involvement activities. These sub-themes are gender-mingling, differences in traditions such as gender roles, and different expectations and perceptions of parental involvement.

Gender Mingling

The first sub-theme that emerged under the overarching theme of cultural and religious mismatch is the conflict between attending school-based activities as part of parental involvement and the concession that observers of religious teachings have to make in a gender mingling school environment where such activities take place. As it was mentioned before, the ahadith that call for a mahram – "no man should be alone with a woman except when there is a Mahram with her" and the hadith stating that "no man is alone with a woman, but the third one present is the shaytan-satan"- prompt Muslim parents to avoid any environment where *kholwa* (isolation while meeting the opposite sex) and *ikhtilat* (sex mixing) are possible. Echoing what the Imam said before, several Muslim and non-Muslim Arabic speaking participants stated that gender mixing limits their involvement that requires parental attendance at school in a sex-mixing setting. For example, Ahmed as a father maintained that "Mixed gender environments reduce the degree of parental involvement. Coming from a Yemeni culture, we did not participate in Yemen, and we do not participate in a mixed environment here [America]." When asked if shunning gender mingling during school-based activities for parents is driven by a Yemeni culture, Ahmed elucidated the point by saying that

> There is Deen- religion. A woman can't go and mingle with a man. It is necessary to be conservative because we have in shariaa (Islamic law), a woman must have a husband or a mahram – a family member that a woman can't get married to according to the Islamic law when she goes to another place like schools. A woman can't sit with another male teacher. I personally won't accept my wife to go to school and sit down with a male teacher even if she speaks English very well- impossible. But if the teacher is a female teacher, then there is no problem.

> At the same time, if there were Muslim teachers, I would be able to accept the meeting between my wife and the female or female Muslim teacher.

Ahmed's religiously inspired determination to evade and keep his wife away from any adult gender-mixing milieu is endorsed by other male and female participants in this study. For instance, Zakaria from Jordan emphatically contended that "mixed- gender setting will limit parental involvement" because "women and men could not go and get mixed in schools because of religious and cultural rules and roles." Complying with these religious rules and guidelines is a priority for some of the participants and creating conditions for such compliance gladdens some participants. As it was expressed by Maryam from Palestine who joyfully reminisced about the single- sex setting arrangement her schools made in her native country "to prevent intermingling of the sexes which is prohibited in my religion. The woman would also have their own campus at another location."

Adult gender mixing seems to be a shared irreconcilable concern that is diametrically opposed to Muslim participants from different countries. Latifa (did not disclose her native country) whose children go to elementary and middle school justified her unwillingness to take part in school-centered parental involvement activities by attributing it to ". . . religious reasons. For example, Islam forbid[s] gender mixing, music, dancing . . ." Al –ikhtilat – gender mixing is a profound religious concern and has a significant weight which engenders anxiety and amounts to a culture-threatening social practice that some of the Arabic-speaking participants feel. This feeling of distress and frustration was palpably felt in the tone when Najib in the focus group interview, a 15-year paraprofessional and a father from Egypt, stressed that

> . . . in the parent teacher conference, if you have a male teacher and sit down with some of the women, because in our religion, we are not allowed to sit in one room [with the opposite sex] alone even if the door is open. Some women believe that they cannot do that [sit with a man alone] she will not feel comfortable sitting down with him, talking with him. Do you understand? Because of the religion, because of the culture. This is like this!

This challenging and thought-provoking question- “do you understand?”- that Najib asked the researcher, and by implication, every reader, and the succinct, yet complex answers- religion and culture- that the participant provided summarizes the religious and cultural mismatch that some Arabic-speaking parents experience in their attempts to respond to parental involvement activities as conceived, expected, and practiced by public American schools. It is worth noting here that the rest of the focus group participants, originally from Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, reaffirmed what Najib stated unequivocally by saying “that’s true; that’s right; yea.” The intersectionality of religion and culture for Arabic-speaking immigrant parents is interlocked and establishes an educational system that is different from that in America, not only for parents’ interaction but for students’ education as well. For instance, Haroun from Jordan, Ahmed from Palestine, Saleh, Yasin, and Ahmed from Yemen, all said that schools in their countries of origin have single-sex schools that either start from first grade or fifth or sixth grade. Haroun reported that

> It is a school system and policy there [in Jordan]. Private schools started mixing boys and girls, but public schools are usually gender-based. This is of course rooted in religion and has religious teachings where mixing men and women,

> female and male children are not encouraged, especially in middle and high school when students reach puberty.

Ahmed also shared that back home, "the school supported gender diversity from first grade to fourth grade and was gender-specific (female only) from fifth to tenth." The same schooling approach has been implemented in Yemen. As Ahmed explained, "there are schools exclusively for girls and schools for boys. In the girls' school, teachers are female, and the principal is female as well as for boys, the teachers are male. So, schools are completely gender-based." Embedded in this different school system are other distinct traditions, practices, and expectations that both school leaders and parents have of one another, which produces another example of a cultural and religious mismatch.

Differences in Traditions and Gender Roles

Differences in traditions and gender roles constitute the second sub-theme within the central theme of cultural and religious mismatch. These traditions spiral to include or exclude cultural traditions such as dress codes, expressing affection in public, social interactions between females and males, gender roles, and even interactions in the classroom setting in which teaching some academic subjects needs to be sensitive to the gender of students and teachers. This sub-theme is described by Yasin who expressed that

> The first obstacle [to parental involvement] I believe is the traditions and culture of this [American] society. For example, the dress code is different, the traditions and customs are different. From a social perspective, a man kisses a woman, and a woman kisses a man in public. This is different from our culture in Yemen. The second is the clothes people wear here; it is not conservative and decent. This

> totally differs from our culture. These are the obstacles. The main obstacle is different traditions and customs.

Yasin's assessment of the dress code as not being proper and appropriate is based on his cultural rubric, which is not in congruence with what he notices during parental involvement activities in American public schools. Some of the Muslim Arabic-speaking traditions are sometimes the outcome or intertwined with religious standards. For instance, men and women are instructed in Islam to lower their gazes as the Imam cited and explained. Hence, participants are anxiously conscientious about the environment where circumstances can deal a blow to the values one embraces.

Within the culture and traditions of Arabic-speaking parents, there are religious and societal guidelines related to dress code, behavior, communication, gender mingling and interaction, and gender sensitive topics. Therefore, when teachers in a gender-mixed classroom teach units on human reproduction or ask students to perform some body movements in physical education classes, students and parents find such learning as opposing their religious values. Such situations generate discomfort for some students. In an interview, Salah from Yemen stated his unease with this issue:

> Another factor is that schools teach a subject about sex in a gender-mixed class. This is in contrast with the teachings of the Islamic religion, against our culture and traditions. In our culture and traditions, when girls and boys reach the age of puberty, girls should not sit with teenage boys in the same classroom. This goes against traditions, customs, and Islam.

Teaching human reproduction in a mixed-gender classroom, and especially by a teacher of the opposite sex is considered offensive and out of bounds for some Muslim students

and parents. Lamis, a paraprofessional who once worked in high school as well, described what transpired in a health class by summoning up this piece of memory.

> The first girl [student] I had, I start[ed] doing everything [classes] together and in the health period, she ran away from the classroom when she started hearing the teacher and after that her dad called me and said: never ever take her [his child] to that class. This is because the teacher was teaching about sex and stuff.

While these statements are about instruction and students in classrooms, not about parental involvement, Salah, like Yasin, believes that these "traditions and culture here oppose our [their] culture and traditions," which affects their sense of belonging due to these traditions misalignment. The coalition of divergence of values, different dress codes, and clash of expectations threatens ways of life for some A.S.P.s. When Ahmed was asked to explain why his wife, his daughter, and his adult family members do not embrace gender-mixing activities including instruction and participation in school events because of their religious beliefs, or due to Yemeni's culture and sub-culture, he replied that both contribute to this decision stating "Some come from religion and some come from communal and tribal customs, *Al-orf* (customary rules/ norms)." Ahmed disclosed and underscored that in Yemen, people behave based on rules born out of an amalgam of religion, customs, and what he referred to in Arabic as *Orf,* meaning unspoken rules. In Ahmed's words,

> Sometimes, customs and traditions overshadowed religion and of course, religion is the foundation. But at the same time, the cultural legacy, like for example, Yemeni girls wear hijabs, moltazimate [dress modestly, committed to Islamic teachings], we got accustomed in our country that women wear *hijab* (a scarf that

> Muslim women wear on their head], niqab [a mask-like covering the face of a woman] and so forth, this is *ayb* [not becoming or befitting of someone to behave and say something]- On the other hand, there is Deen- religion. A woman can't go and mingle with a man. It is necessary to be conservative.

Gender mingling is not an embraced social phenomenon for Muslim A.S.P.s even when there is a *mahram* and even when people know each other, and share a common culture, common language, and sometimes friendship. In this context, Zakaria from Jordan shared his memories about how he and his friends would deliberately dodge one another to comply with the traditions. He said:

> I remember that when I used to go shopping and if I see a male friend, only a male friend [with his female family members] and I tried to avoid them and they tried to avoid me even though they are my friends and they know my family. When I was walking with my family like my mother, sister, my male friends would try to avoid me and vice versa, I would avoid them. They have their family with them I would avoid them out of respect and to live up to the norms. It is also personal, but in general, it is a mother that will avoid anything that may have to do with men… Women would stick to themselves. . .

The consequences of this mismatch between the participants' traditions or norms and gender mixing in public schools on parental involvement in school-based activities are reported by several paraprofessionals who have been supporting A.S.P.s and students for years. In one focus group, Lamis, a paraprofessional, clarified some of the reasons Yemeni parents do not attend school activities by saying that the reasons are

> cultural and religious. Yemeni women are very conservative . . . their husbands don't want them to go outside to work or to meet with people at school. This is from my experience and in the majority of time, women stay home and take care of their children.

Embedded in these traditions are gender roles that paraprofessionals captured in their testimonial interviews that "women stay home and take care of their children" while men take care of matters outside of the home. Fairouz who has been supporting Arabic-speaking students and parents as a paraprofessional in a K-12 setting corroborates Lamis' report stating

> From my experience, since 2005, I have never seen a Yemeni woman coming to school. . It is always men. From my point of view, women will never interfere in the outside affairs . . . . It seems to me that Yemeni parents have strict gender roles: men for outside missions and women for inside the house.

These strict gender-based roles and missions are also noted by Warda, another paraprofessional with more than a decade of experience with Arabic-speaking parents. Warda revealed that "people from Yemen and Palestine are different. I did not see them involved in school. I worked with Palestinians and Yemenis; I never saw them in school for parent teacher conferences or something else." This absence from parental participation in school centered activities like Parent-Teacher Conferences are rooted in differences in parents' perceptions of parental involvement and expectations of schoolteachers and leaders, informed by the previous experiences of parents.

Different Perceptions and Expectations of Parental Involvement

The third sub-theme that was identified under the umbrella of religious and cultural mismatch is that Arabic–speaking parents have different perceptions of parental involvement than what is expected in American public schools. This difference in parental involvement practices based on parents' experiences in their native countries was underscored by Mustafa, a Muslim community leader, who said concededly in his interview when he was trying to reconcile two dissimilar educational systems and expectations of parents, "but again, you're taking your country with you wherever you go, you know." A.S.P.s carried their "country" with them to America; a country of cultural values, a country of educational expectations, a country of clear delineation between the roles of teachers and those of parents in educating their children. The different educational roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents in the countries of origin are rooted in mutual trust, reverence, and competence, and *NOT* in indifference or lack of care for children's education.

When Warda, for instance, worryingly stated that "people from Yemen and Palestine are different. . . I never saw them in school for parent teacher conferences or something else," one cannot help but to further investigate the underlying factors behind what sounds like an alarming finding. This investigation becomes imperative especially when we know that many parent participants in this study zealously reported that one of the main reasons for their immigration was to provide quality education for their children. Amal, a mother of several children, for example, clarified this point by reminding herself and others saying "another thing, we left our country for what? For education! I, honestly, was very well off in Egypt, but there, the educational system is not good." The

same statement was given by Salah who said that “all parents care about their children and their education. We immigrated for our children’s better life and education.”

If better education is a common pushing factor to immigrate to America, then what are the A.S.P.s’ perceptions of parental involvement, and what do schools expect of parents overseas? The data collected in this research reveals that A.S.P.s perceive parental involvement as supportive behaviors that occur at home, rather than at school. Home-based school involvement was found to mean that parents strive to provide support to their children in the form of making ***duaa*** (an Arabic word for keeping someone in one’s prayers and thoughts), minimizing the house chores to maximize study time, providing food, clothes, and shelter, asking for family members or neighbors for academic support at home.

For example, Farida stated that her perception of parental involvement is that she “from the start of the day, I will wake my children up and say some prayers for them and say may Allah (God) make it easy for you today at school.” This daily routine of praying for children to succeed in learning at school is supported by providing both time and place free from distraction for her children to study. The mother stated that she “understand[s] that [her] children need time to study, ask them to call their uncles for help, and keep the young siblings away from their study room.” When this mother was asked by the researcher if she engages in school-based activities, her response was “no,” and commented that in her country, “the principal and the teachers never asked parents to go to school to help students or teachers with learning, the only time parents went to school . . . was to participate in a national or religious celebration.” The practice of

parental involvement in the country of origin was transferred and maintained when parents immigrated to America.

Haroun also described that the way he perceives parental involvement in his children's education is providing, specifically to ensure they have food, shelter, and not asking them to work so that they can have enough time to study. As he put it, "as a father, I will not force my kids to work to help pay the bills or have pocket money . . . I provide food, money, time, and no home chores to get good school reports." When asked about his participation in school-based parental involvement, the father explained, "School is for students and teachers, not parents. I am not trained to teach or advise a teacher on how to teach; that would be disrespectful to teachers." Striving to create home conditions that are conducive to studying and learning while assigning the task of teaching and performing the school-based activities to teachers emerged as a strong element in the sub-theme of perceptions and expectations.

Haroun's efforts to focus on the home learning environment were reportedly used by other A.S.P.s in this study. Parents described how they support their children at home through provision, nurturing, praying for them, minimizing house chores, providing tutoring through community and family members, and creating conditions for study free from distraction. For example, Khadija, who has been a paraprofessional for three years, shared her experience as she testified that

> Parents are helping their kids by having a good house for them, having good food. They take them out to the mall. This is the kind of help they give their kids. They [parents] say we have a car, we have a house, we have money and what else you want us to do. This is my personal experience with my students' parents.

Malak, another paraprofessional with nine years of experience working with Arab parents, agreed that parents provide a nurturing supportive learning atmosphere for their children by "helping them with homework, providing learning tools like a laptop or IPad . . . They also make sure that they can get adequate rest so that they can wake up ready to learn. They provide healthy breakfast." Catering to children's needed home environment conducive to learning was highlighted by Amal as one of the key parental involvement practices she engages in by declaring, "I also provide my children with time to do their schoolwork. I forbade my children to work at McDonald's or Dunkin Donuts because I wanted them to study hard." Another mother, Fatima from Morocco, stated that parental involvement includes supporting her children "emotionally" and she tries to "make them study in very clean environments . . . , take care of their nutrition. . . talk to them about things that bothers them in school." When her children are "overwhelmed with a lot of homework," Fatima provides emotional support or offers organizational assistance by asking her children if they want her to "prepare something . . . organize the papers" to reduce the effect of stress on her children's learning.

Attending to these physiological, psychological, and safety needs at home to accelerate learning is one of the main perceptual strands of parental involvement in children's education that might not be visible to and documented by school staff who do not see parents in Parent-Teacher Conferences because, as Haroun respectfully stated, "School [building] is for students and teachers, not parents." These home-based instead of school-based parental involvement practices that A.S.P.s set in motion are to some extent the product of school leaders' expectations of parents in their countries of origin. Participating parents from different countries converged in their statements that they

obediently executed what the school leaders and teachers advised them to do at home to improve student learning. As Ibrahim from Morocco said, "back home, we still have some respect between the administration and the parents. We admire the principal and his employees, you know, mostly whatever they ask us to do is just do it."

When Yasin from Yemen was asked about the expectations of principals and teachers of parents to support their children in their education, his response was that back in Yemen, "they expected us to teach our children Islamic upbringing and education, manners, the benefits of Islamic religion, and better upbringing." These to- be- honored expectations seem to have traveled with some A.S.P.s to America. For instance, Salah illustrated his understanding of active parental involvement by saying, "I teach my children at home Islamic education, study Quran, teach them manners, send them to the mosque to learn Islam and Arabic." Salah's actions exemplify the implementation- that Ibrahim spoke about- of the principals' expectations in Yemen that Yasin mentioned.

Divergent perceptions and expectations of parental involvement seem to lead to misinterpretations and judgmental assessment of whether or not different parental involvement practices are active or not active, especially when one adds to the mix the frequency and reasons for which Arabic–speaking parents used to participate in school-based activities in their countries of origin. It was almost a unanimous consensus among all participating parents from Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Yemen that the frequency of invitation to attend school-based activities was once or twice a year. As for the rationale for the invitation, it was either related to celebrations or student disciplinary meetings. In response to the interview question about how often schools asked parents to

participate in a year, Salah, Yasin, and Ahmed from Yemen said, "once or twice," "two or three times," "twice a year at the most" respectively.

As far as the reasons are concerned, they respectively attended for "religious holidays like Eids and Ramadan, and sometimes national holiday," "for the celebration of revolution or the day of independence," "one was to celebrate the day of independence of the country and the second time is for a graduation celebration. Nothing else . . . unless the child created a problem at school, or fought with another student. Then teachers would ask for parents to attend." Similar answers were given by Haroun and Zakaria from Jordan who said parents were invited to participate "only when there was an occasion" like "giving gifts to [high achieving] students" and the "meeting and conversation were not about education." Zakaria stated that "parents were not invited to school unless there is an issue or fight. Then, they invite parents . . . not like here after each marking period." The echo of all these statements was heard from participating parents from Morocco where parents were asked to take part in school-based activities on the occasion of "the national holiday of King's assuming the throne" referred to as the "Day of the Throne," "religious purpose" and celebrating student "outstanding grades."

These differences in (a) perceptions and expectations of parental involvement, (b) traditions, and gender roles, and (c) gender mingling serve as a flawless recipe for cultural and religious mismatch that has been cited by all participants- community leaders, paraprofessionals in two different focus groups, and parents- as a primary obstacle to parental involvement in children's education.

When participants were asked about how school leaders can address the cultural and religious mismatch obstacles to parental involvement, they came up with a set of

suggestions for school leaders to become culturally aware and responsive to the needs of Arabic-speaking parents. The suggestions include fostering cultural awareness and responsiveness, cultural appreciation and inclusion, understanding single and cross gender interaction norms, a community partnership that includes Arab school community building and social networking, and partnering with the Arab-Muslim community.

Responding to Cultural and Religious Mismatch

To respond to cultural and religious mismatch obstacles, participants suggested that school leaders engage in fostering cultural awareness and responsiveness. For this to happen, participants want school leaders to develop their cultural skills that will allow for cultural appreciation and inclusion, understanding single and cross gender interaction norms, a community partnership that includes Arab school community building and social networking, and partnering with the Arab-Muslim community. The topics of these suggestions were highlighted by all participants as the most important educational tools to, as Hoda, who is a community leader said, “create more of a family-oriented environment, better communication, a better feeling of, a sense of family for them [parents].”

Hoda also wants the school-based staff to become culturally aware of their student-parent school population and their needs by “acknowledg[ing] the fact that we do have diverse religious practices here on Staten Island.” Hoda has reminded everyone of the importance attached to equity by saying that “one of the things, you know, everyone's always talking about, you know, diversity and equity and inclusion,” but Hoda expressed her disappointment stating, “but there's many, many ways in which we do not feel that our diversity is being addressed in terms of equity.” Cultural, religious, and linguistic

diversity and inclusion that might lead to equity require school leaders and teaching staff to first educate themselves about this existing diversity. Khawla, a mother, "would like if school leaders take a course to get educated on certain cultures/religions, on their beliefs toward issues such as gender mixing."

Khawla's request is mirrored in Ahmed's longing who said, "I wish that the school had a teacher who understands our culture very well who can translate." One of these cultural and religious beliefs that Hoda, Khawla, and Ahmed want to be appreciated by school leaders and translated/ communicated to the rest is Ramadan. Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims when adult Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Adulthood in this context is defined as anyone who reaches the age of puberty. Ramadan-aged Muslims are required to fast the holy month, and non-Ramadan-aged Muslims are encouraged by their parents to practice to be ready when fasting becomes obligatory. Therefore, parents with middle and high school children feel disrespected when students are instructed by school staff to report to the cafeteria during lunch or breakfast times where Muslim students feel tempted. Ahmed, for example, reported that in the absence of teachers who "understand the culture of the child; our children suffer during occasions like Holidays" such as "Eids [religious holidays and celebrations] or Ramadan occasions." Ahmed elaborated, with a tone of disappointment, by sharing a story that occurred to his son. He said:

> For example, during this Ramadan, my son was fasting and went to school, this is before Covid, my son would tell me: Baba, I don't want to go to school because I don't want to go to the lunchroom, but the school would tell them you have to go, you have to go. How can you force and allow someone fasting to go to the lunchroom? If someone understands our religion, then they will allow children to

> go to a different place during Ramadan [than cafeteria]. We enforce fasting at home, but at school, they send them to a cafeteria. School should respect our culture and religion . . . I hope that this point is understood.

Ahmed's petition that schools understand this cultural need is echoed by many participants. Latifa, a mother, also said that "all I wish from them [schools] is to understand a little more about my culture and my religion." Latifa gave an example of cultural and religious understanding, stating that "for example, if I don't want to be alone with a male teacher, or shake hands with him. I don't want them to misunderstand or look at me as disrespectful for feeling that way." Back to Ramadan as a core cultural artifact and practice of Muslim parents that Ahmed wants to be respected and understood, other paraprofessionals emphasized this point. When paraprofessionals in the focus group were asked to share something significant that the researcher did not ask in the interview, Najib immediately pointed out that "another thing you did not ask us about is that during holy Ramadan, the school leaders should put all fasting Muslim kids together in the auditorium or a room." This statement prompted Malak to say, "exactly, yes!" Najib charges the school leaders with the imperative task to "sit them [fasting Muslim students] away from the other kids or other students. This is simple." Najib objected to the fact that "even though they [Muslim students] are fasting, they [school staff] still them with other kids [in the cafeteria during lunch time] and Muslim kids feel like they want to eat, do you understand?"

When Malak suggested that the minimum effort schools should provide is to "separate their –Arab-[Muslim] kids- table from the other kids" if they do not have extra space, Najib firmly stressed and objected, "no, they don't have to be in the lunchroom,

no." Khadija agreed with Malak that "some schools do not have the auditorium to put the kids," at the same time, Khadija upheld Najib's point by conceding, "but they can find a space." In addition to having a separate space for fasting Muslim students, Hoda called attention to the point of educating others about and celebrating Ramadan and other Muslim religious observances. Hoda mentioned that

> Kids have been in public school, and they are being exposed to Jewish holidays, you know, Chinese New Year, and Christmas. But yet, there is no platform for the Muslim Community, the Muslim woman or man, if they want to participate in school activities or even educate the community about what Ramadan is and why kids, some of the kids do fast and how can the schools facilitate that in the system.

Speaking on behalf of the Muslim community as a community-based organization leader, Hoda said that "and we do not, we do not feel included." To expound on this point, Hola compared what school staff allows students to do in schools during other non-Muslim holidays. She said, "Prime example, Christmas. All the kids make Christmas calls; do all this other decorating in school . . . Kids are happy about their holidays." She added, "for Jewish, same thing, they got the menorah up; they got the holiday stuff going on," but Hoda claims that during "Ramadan, Nothing! No conversation; no nothing for the kids to feel comfortable about their fasting; to feel included in practicing their faith as well." She concluded that parents do not feel comfortable about sharing, or educating school leaders about this feeling of exclusion stating, "It is not that all parents feel comfortable in initiating that kind of thing because they don't know how well it's going to be received."

Khadija also stated that school leaders “should include more of our culture in the school and our religion so they [students and parents] don't feel any different.” Khadija evoked the scene when Arab-Muslim students “see Christmas celebrations, like Malak said, Christmas, Halloween, all of that, they feel different. So it would be also nice to include Muslim events and decorations for our holiday and celebrations.” Acutely aware of the non-secular activities that the American school system prevents schools from engaging in, Mariam hopes that school leaders will commit themselves to “enforcing secular education to a minimum and increasing the religious, moral education, where this would upbring a good member of the community.” The desired result of this is that Arabic-speaking Muslim students do not feel culturally, Khadija warns, ‘discriminated against” in a school environment where other religious holidays are celebrated through decorations and exchange of wishes.

To further foster this cultural understanding that Hoda emphasized and fulfill Latifa’s wish for school leaders and teachers to “understand our backgrounds and to understand our culture and religion,” Najib, Khadija, Malak, and Nadia- paraprofessionals who are Arab-Muslims and worked with Arab-Muslim students and parents for years, identified another cultural hallmark that Muslims prioritize in their diet, which is *Halal* food. Similar to Jewish Kosher food, in Islamic culture, Muslims eat halal food-specifically meat. In response to a question about what else they would like school leaders and teachers to know about Arabic-speaking parents that were not asked about in the interview, Najib initiated the topic of halal food by saying

> Lunchtime. Most kids eat Halal foods in our culture. You did not ask us about this. Most parents don't want their kids to eat this kind of meat, this kind of

> chicken, or this and that. Do you understand? Now some schools start doing halal food, but I do not see that much in my school. I don't see any halal in schools. So, they should have halal food.

Malak agreed with Najib and pointed to the fact that the Muslim student population is increasing, which requires a culturally responsive action. She confirmed what Najib said by stating, “that’s true, especially we have a lot of Muslim kids in schools now.” Malak continued to explain why Muslim students need to eat halal food by justifying, “this is important because when kids come to school, they are hungry, they need to eat, and they need to be comfortable. . . You know it is their right to eat food that is halal.” Ahmed, who also mentioned that he knows that “some schools have about 40% of students who are Arabs and Muslims” emphasizes Malak’s point. Therefore, according to Ahmed, “it is expected for schools to know the culture and know what Ramadan means, what Eids mean. . . . It is important for teachers to learn about our culture to teach our children in a good way.”

The above-referenced participants and others underscored that understanding Arab- Muslim parents’ culture will make parents feel “invited to the table,” “included,” and “comfortable.” Furthermore, parents will not feel “blamed” for their lack of parental involvement. Aisha, for example, wants school leaders to recognize, include, and welcome cultural identities represented in their schools to engage parents in profound and meaningful ways. In this context, Aisha said

> I think schools lay too much blame on parents and do not create spaces for families to connect within the community. Families need to feel welcomed and

> that they are respected and appreciated by the whole community. Schools are checking off boxes and need to engage more deeply.

Creating "spaces for families to connect within the community" through understanding some cultural and religious practices will, according to participants, make parents feel a sense of belonging and connection to schools. This connection can lead to parental involvement as perceived by schools as well.

When some of the participants were asked a follow-up question about how understanding and responding to Ramadan, for example, will help parents feel a sense of belonging and develop relationships and multicultural awareness, Khadija said, "because it will change the school system, and take parents' kids' culture into consideration. It would make them feel more comfortable." Najib supported Khadija and stated in advocacy not only for Muslims' religion but all religions observed in schools.

> Yeah, that's right! Now students will tell their parents. The mom or dad will say, see, the school respects our culture, my religion. They put them in a separate room, not in the, you know, same room where other kids are eating lunch. The parents, you know, will now feel comfortable about the place; they feel like it is really good for the school and build a relationship with the administration. They will know that the administration knows about all religions, not only our religion but all religions. So that parents will feel more comfortable.

To conclude, Malak agreed with Najib and Khadija. She also elaborated on how cultural understanding and taking culturally responsive actions will make parents feel appreciated and respected. She stated

> Yes, and that will make, you know, the parents and the kids appreciate what is going on in the school, and make no distance between us and others. We are the same: you have your rights; I have my rights. I appreciate your religion, and you appreciate mine. I appreciate your culture. We are even. When you start to feel that you are even [equal] with other parents and kids, you feel that you are appreciated and respected.

Equality, equity, inclusion, appreciation, and comfort are, according to participants, the byproduct of cultural understanding and subsequent culturally responsive actions taken by school leaders and teachers. For this transformative cultural awareness and understanding to take roots, participants recommend school leaders engage in what Jamila called “cultural rapprochement” practices to, as Aisha advised, “engage more deeply” with the community and not just “checking off boxes.” To stimulate this cultural competence and rapprochement, Aisha also believes that schools “must create more opportunities for families to share about their language, customs, holidays, traditions, so they feel heard, appreciated and part of their new communities.”

Cultural Appreciation and Inclusion

Participants suggested several culturally and linguistically appreciative and inclusive approaches that school leaders can engage in to create “spaces” and “opportunities for families to share” their cultural artifacts and practices. To create these spaces for cultural rapprochement, Jamila proposed the following

> I suggest that schools, if possible, assign certain days as multicultural days when parents from different countries and cultures come to school. Parents can bring some of their cultural artifacts to schools like food, articles, dresses, and flags so that all countries get together and get to know one another. Parents will get closer

> to one another. That is, this will remove cultural and communicative obstacles among parents- fathers and mothers.

Building relationships among parents from intra- and inter-cultural backgrounds is one of the main goals that al- Imam wants both schools and Arab-Muslim parents to achieve because it is a divine instruction. Imam cited in Arabic a verse from the Quran, chapter 49, verse 13 where Allah (God) says what can be translated to

> Oh humankind! Surely, we created you from male and female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Surely, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is the most God-fearing. Allah is surely All-knowing, All-aware.

Based on this verse, Imam urges his Muslim community to get to know their school communities as well. Imam counseled his constituents to integrate and emphasized, “we don't want to isolate ourselves as Muslims,” but at the same time, he warns against assimilation by saying “you don't also want to assimilate,” but “what you need to do is indimaj, integration.”

Imam’s focus and stress on “integration” and acclimatization rather than “assimilation” is in keeping with Ahmed’s previous statement when he said, “I can’t erase my culture because I entered America.” Cultural rapprochement and understanding are, however, encouraged. Jamila urged teachers and principals to attend these “cultural gathering[s] to ask questions and get to know their students’ cultures in general. I am speaking about all cultures and countries, not just Arabs.” In this way, Jamila argues that “all cultures become one culture; that is, they create a cultural rapprochement.” Other participants proposed this suggestion for school leaders to create a space for cultural

events at schools as well. Basem and Zakaria also stated respectively that schools need to "create some stage performances / musical concerts that are based on Arabic language and Arabic music," and to "think of different activities that bring parents' culture into the school rather than leaving that out and just asking them to come when you need them."

Zakaria also advised school leaders to "create an environment where you [school leaders] accept the culture of the parents, and make them feel they fit in and appreciated and celebrated." Najib, Khadija, and Malak also beseeched, in unison, school leaders to establish a safe space for multiethnic cultures to be displayed and celebrated. Najib captured this collective request by stating that "school leaders need to hold multicultural events that can cover our culture as well. Different kinds of celebrations for Arabs." In doing so, school leaders will have established, what Hoda said before, "a form of family-oriented space for people to feel comfortable . . . feel like they're a part of the family." Additionally, Zakaria claims that creating this family-like space will "erase the shame of bringing my culture because I brought it up before and people would ask me about it to understand it. And I will not get that look later because they understand my culture." That frown-upon "look" that Zakaria wants to avoid is associated with a "dress code . . . when it comes to women who have to wear a hijab", or men, even though, Zakaria shared, men's cultural identities "are not identifiable unless, maybe, they have a long beard, or abaya (long dress for men)." When "that look" is delivered, Zakaria concluded that "I just don't want to go anywhere where I don't feel I fit."

"That look" of disapproval due to perhaps lack of cultural understanding, or cultural stereotype affects students' self-esteem and cultural identity as well, which might lead to a feeling of estrangement, at its best, and student bullying at its worst. In either

case, students' learning, and students' and parents' senses of belonging to a school community might be irreversibly damaged and deeply wounded. Khawla and her son, unfortunately, experienced this feeling. Khawla shared

> What I experienced with one of my sons was that students didn't have a good education on different cultures. My son came to school in traditional clothing and the students started making fun of him saying he was wearing a [girl's] dress. They hurt his feelings and made him hate where he came from. I would love if schools had cameras everywhere in their schools because there is abuse that happens in school and often teachers claim they don't see anything.

This psychological damage that Khawla's son felt "made him hate where he came from," made Ibrahim feel that he was treated "like a foreigner," and pushed Warda to say that uneducated parents will be made feel "inferior than [to] the members of the society where they live." This damage can be avoided by cultural understanding and rapprochement. Building this cultural competence and consciousness might be conducive to establishing, Malak thinks, "a good relationship between home and school, between the administrators and parents." This relationship is as Malak said

> So important [so] that . . . I feel that comfortable to go to them [school staff] without fearing that I am wearing hijab, or I have an accent, or I do not speak the language. I need to feel ok that I can go and say whatever. This is the job of administration to be ready to understand the culture.

This experienced hurt, or anxiety, and fear can be spared, minimized, and hopefully, eliminated by school leaders' commitment to organizing cultural and multicultural days

at schools and their dedication to learning and understanding the culture of their student and parent population.

Through these multicultural events at schools where different Arab "cultural artifacts" such as food, music, clothes will be exhibited and explained,
Imam argued that school-based staff would get to know macro-cultural and micro-cultural spheres within which Muslims and Arabic-speaking parents operate. Under the macro-cultural category, some Muslims' behaviors are governed by the religion whose legislative references are al- Quran and prophet Mohamed's Ahadith. Imam explained that "there are things that we know, in general, a Muslim wouldn't do . . . because we have one book [Quran]." Under the micro-cultural level, on the other hand, Imam said, "but there are things that you need to know [about] the culture of particular parents . . . because each Muslim land had their own culture." Some of these macro and micro-cultural levels manifest themselves in single and cross-gender interactions.

Understanding Single and Cross-Gender Interaction Norms

The findings of this research indicate that gender-based roles and rules are adhered to by the participating Arab-Muslim parents and non-participating parents as reported by both paraprofessionals' focus groups. Almost all Arabic- speaking participating parents who are Muslims identified some of the gender-related obstacles to parental involvement in school-centered activities. The gravity center of this gender issue is attached to *al-ikhtilat* (gender intermingling) and *al-kholwa,* which means that two people from the opposing sex are in a secluded/isolated setting. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, the concepts of *al-ikhtilat* and *al-kholwa* are understood and operationalized within a religious framework. In terms of *al-kholwa,* it is required to have a *mahram* (a family member which whom marriage is *haram,* not admissible in Islam if

the husband is not present). As for *al-ikhtilat,* the participants expressed their discomfort for two main reasons: it is against the cultural traditions and norms for some participants coming from Muslim countries such as Yemen and Jordan, and it is religious for those who observe the religious teaching of *ghado al-basar*, which means lowering gazes as it was discussed in the introduction of chapter 4.

Participants who are observing these religious and cultural values suggested several solutions to address these needs. When participants were asked about their suggested solutions for school leaders to maximize parental involvement for this community, they emphasized that there are religious considerations to heed when it comes to interaction between two opposing sexes. Imam advised school leaders to learn more about this community to help “all Muslims who are trying to observe these teachings of God and Prophet Mohammed . . . meet those requirements.” One of these requirements is gender separation. He exhorts school leaders to accommodate for Muslim parents during parent-teacher meetings to “for example, if the parent is a woman, then try to have a woman teacher to meet her”, and “if the [parent] of the kid is male, have another male teacher. You know so that she will feel comfortable.”

Imam’s suggestion to match parents and teachers of the same gender to respond to Muslim parents’ needs is also echoed by male participants in this study. Salah, for instance, suggested, “schools design the school where one wing of the building is for girls and the other side is for boys. For celebrations, for example, men can be by themselves with boys and women by themselves with girls.” Salah went further to suggest that during middle and high school learning, “girls and boys should be separated, and celebrations should also be separated . . . in the same building . . . on different floors, or

on the same floor, but there is a distance." If this single- sex education is not possible, then Salah prefers that "schools invite women and men on different days. This is a better way than inviting men and women together . . . and understand our culture."

In alignment with this cultural understanding, Haroun also proposed that schools could organize their activities by "maybe having sections of men and women, or one day for men and one day for women." In this way, Haroun will feel "more comfortable in communicating with him [a male teacher and/or interpreter], but I do not feel comfortable doing the same with a woman. You know, lowering our gaze is recommended in our religion." This gender separation will put Ahmed at ease because he believes that "without a mahram, it is haram (forbidden) for a woman to sit down with a man who is not a mahram - son, uncle . . . this is the meaning of Maharim in the Quranic verses." *Al-ikhtilat,* gender mixing, is a concern even for participants such Fatima, Jamila, and Fatia who said they do not mind gender mixing because the school activities take place in a public, respectful place, and "because the parents have to be together. If there's father and mother, they have to sit together like if they separate them", and as long as "each woman comes with her husband, a big son, family and they sit next to each other . . .This applies to PTC and PTA." Mariam also suggested that "a school separate for boys and one for girls" because, Yasin said, "the Islamic teaching and education tell us not to mingle with the other sex. Men with men, and women with women."

According to Khawla, gender mixing is a culturally sensitive issue that pushed some parents who did not have the financial means to send their children to a private Islamic school where boys and girls are educated separately in the same building, to "homeschool their kids because of gender mixing," and pushed a father to prevent his

wife from going to school activities “because he thinks mixing is haram.” The fear of committing, or allowing a family member to commit something *haram* propelled Ahmed to assertively stated that “ I personally won’t accept my wife to go to school and sit down with a male teacher even if she speaks English very well- impossible.”

To make it possible for Arab-Muslim parents to participate in school-based activities, school leaders are advised to create gender-based conditions and environments conducive to complying with their cultural and religious values related to gender rules. By doing so, parents will feel “respected,” “included,” and “comfortable” to meet teachers and take part in school events. To strengthen and accelerate this cultural understanding and rapprochement that might lead to equity in parental involvement, participants also suggested that school leaders engage in partnering with Arab-Muslim communities and building their social networks at schools.

Community Building and Partnership

Community building and partnership are the second suggestion that participants provided in this research. All participants who mentioned that school leaders need to understand their culture were asked a follow-up question on how school leaders can deepen and expand their understanding of the culture of Arabic-speaking parents. Participants’ recommendations can be outlined along with these two main approaches: Arab school community building and social networking and partnering with Arab-Muslim community.

Arab School Community Building and Social Networking

Arab school community building and social networking, or rather, “community cross-pollination” as one of the participants named it, is one of the methods that participants proposed as an effective solution to engage parents in parental involvement.

Amal, a Christian mother from Egypt, suggested that parents, especially new immigrants, could benefit from community connections, social networking, and solidarity. For this to happen, Amal stated in response to the researcher's request to elaborate on her point.

> I mean that it is a great idea for principals to create a community network in the beginning of the year where parents who speak the same language, like Arabic, can meet and get acquainted with each other, exchange their phone numbers so that they can reach out to each other and ask for help. Some parents have more experience with schools here, language, and they can support each other and be encouraged to come to school.

Being aware of the cultural norms regarding gender mixing and the American school system, Amal wondered if "it is possible for principals to have a meeting in the beginning of the year for women only, but I do not know here that principals can do that because the society is open and mixed." Amal's suggestion is intended to achieve two goals. First, school leaders will create an environment for Arabic-speaking immigrant parents to build social networks that will be useful at many levels. Second, school leaders will have an opportunity to ask questions about they can help and share the resources for both students and parents that they have at their disposal.

Haroun, a recent immigrant from Jordan responding in Arabic, also suggested a parallel idea for similar purposes. He said,

> To support immigrants, especially new immigrants, schools need to create families at school. I mean schools can identify newcomers, find out about their languages, and invite all parents who speak the same language and have a meeting with them. In this way, parents get to know each other, exchange phone numbers

> and become like a family. They can call each other for help with school, work, and spend time together with their children and families. It is so scary when one migrates and knows no one. That will be a big help. People with expertise and speak the same language can provide advice on how to encourage children, find resources for studying better. When I came here, I used to tell my children, do not count this year because we are still learning many things. But, my family members and Arabic speaking people helped us and my children succeeded because of that.

Starting with a meeting with a group of parents from the same cultural and linguistic background to "create families at school" and to remove that "scary" and intimidating feeling that new immigrants feel when they do not know anyone is one of the goals that Hoda, the community leader, emphasized. As quoted before, Hoda wants schools to "create more of a family-oriented environment" that can facilitate "better communication" and engender "a better feeling of a sense of family for them." Moreover, Hoda suggested that schools begin building the Arab-Muslim community by "at least start[ing] from within" by "invit[ing] the parents . . . it's like the community becomes introduced to the principal and vice principal."

> Furthermore, Hoda proposed that school leaders have a town hall meeting, have a conversation that gives people opportunities to speak with them [what is] on their mind and find solutions collectively to resolve this issue [parental involvement] because this issue isn't going away . . . more Arab population comes to Staten Island. Yep. More diverse. We have diversity in the student population on Staten Island.

Fairouz, a paraprofessional, also urged school leaders to expand the social network of Arabic-speaking parents by encouraging families to come to schools. One of the ways schools can do this is by inviting

> Families who speak Arabic can meet altogether at school. Students who graduated can also come and meet those who are still in school. Parents who passed through these experiences and obstacles and their children went to college and graduated can come back and speak about their communicative problems, but now, they succeeded and can encourage new A.S.P.s. My point is to gather people and parents who went through similar experiences . . . and have family gathering...this will encourage and motivate them more to come to school and pay attention to parental involvement.

This gathering with different parents with similar backgrounds, but different experiences helps parents develop their social capital and navigational skills. Amal shared that when her older children went to International High School Network, she got to know

> People from diverse backgrounds. Because we had common concerns and problems, we, as immigrant parents, started to share these concerns as a group and we would let the principal know and suggested to do something to help our children, give our opinions, and expressed our children’s needs to learn English, to give them extra hours.

During these community building and social networking events, Warda also advised schools

> To inform parents that they have other services for you [parents] like people living in America that can help you if you [parents] have problems. We [schools]

> should have office hours for parents to help them if they have problems with health, income, lodging so that parents will be guided. The point is to draw parents to school buildings for other reasons to make them feel that school is a safe zone. There are solutions to your [parents] problems. This can be done!

Participants believe that inviting parents based on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds to schools for the sake of building and connecting the Arabic speaking community members is one of the effective and inclusive ways to promote school-community connections, community building, and partnership. An additional approach is to partner with Arab-Muslim community outside the school building by attending Arab-community-based events.

Partnering With Arab-Muslim Community

Another approach to develop and extend a profound and transformative relationship with Arabic- speaking parents is, according to participants, to establish partnership with the community. In their response to a follow-up question about what school leaders can do if they are not conversant with the Arab-Muslim cultural idiosyncrasies and attributes, the participants suggested that school leaders forge partnerships with the community outside the school buildings. For example, Mustafa, a community leader, said that one of the effective ways for school leaders to know the community is that "they have to go into the communities . . . and then you [they] start a dialogue" with community members. When asked where school leaders can start this community partnership, Mustafa responded that "the fact is, they would have to talk to somebody like an Imam, you know, who is in charge of a community or a mosque where they have a lot of people."

Connecting with the community leaders such as Imam who knows many people has the potential, as stated by Hoda, to serve as “a liaison in between that can help bridge that gap” between the school and the community. Hoda, as a community-based organization leader who worked for years to connect and serve Muslim and non-Muslim communities, used her experience as an example to highlight the importance and the effectiveness of “go[ing] out and get to know your community” because “ your kids are coming from your community. It doesn't make sense to you not to reach out” to see what is going on in the community. By going into the community school leaders serve, they will have the opportunity to see and learn about things that these communities do. Afterward, Hoda suggested that school leaders can ask the community leaders for help by saying that we “see that you're doing X, Y, and Z in the community, how can you help us educate our families, how can you help us educate our staff?” Seeking help from communities to educate school staff and Arabic- speaking parents will make Arab-Muslim leaders feel “invited to the table. . . Involved” in providing their “input on what's going on” in the community and the school.

The Arab-Muslim community-based organization leaders’ suggestions are supported by the Imam, participating parents, and paraprofessionals. For instance, the Imam invited “the principals and school leaders to come to the masjid and meet with leaders and meet with the community” to get to know the community and the community gets to know the school leaders. Meeting the community in the masjid will, according to the Imam, enable the school leaders to meet many parents since the community members come to the masjid. The Imam also stated that the community members, including

parents, would be comfortable to meet in the masjid because “they know that [their] Imam is here, they are very open, and they are more comfortable in that.”

The Imam also suggested that he and school leaders would also “invite their Muslim leaders and imams to the schools because the Imam believes that meaningful community partnership needs to expand and to become mutually reinforcing. The Imam said meeting “the school leaders is not enough, and not all school leaders can come, but, for example, as we have parent teacher meetings, we need school-Imam meetings” to help Imams know what is going in the school community and to educate school leaders about their community members. The Imam also proposed to invite “Islamic schools . . . leaders . . . [who] can share their experiences with other schools, and they can learn from each other” since “Muslim leaders are with these Muslim people in day to day life.”

In addition to what the community leaders suggested, participating parents also recommended school leaders attend Arab-Muslim events to understand the culture and increase their visibility that will create trust and communal connections. Haroun, for example, wishes that “principals participate in different cultural activities in Arab’s community to get to know them better.” Knowing the Arabic-speaking parents’ culture better will help school leaders, as Zakaria thinks, “create an environment where you [school leaders] accept the culture of the parents and make them feel they fit in and appreciated and celebrated.” Accepting and celebrating the culture of the parents will make him and his parents feel, Zakaria added, not forced, “but encouraged to bring my culture to my school and others and this will erase the shame of bringing my culture.”

Understanding a given culture requires both intensive and extensive training and education. One of the most effective ways to fathom the particularities of a culture is for

a person to immerse oneself in the target culture to experience people's interactive and reactive ways within a specific set of cultural norms. For this cultural immersion and organic understanding to happen, Ibrahim provided an example from the business world. He stated that when Chinese businesspeople want to invest in Morocco,

> They sent a bunch of Chinese, everything paid for them. They learned the language; they learned the style of Moroccans' life. They stayed with them in college, in school, in every school, you know, in everyday activities. . . And they become aware and well known [knowledgeable] of their [Moroccans'] culture, you know, of that country and they get involved easily, nobody looked at them like they are naïve or foreigners because they know everything.

This involvement on the part of school leaders in the target community and culture will, according to Ibrahim, "facilitate that and to break that obstacle" of parental involvement in school-based activities. Ibrahim claims that knowing the culture of Arabic-speaking parents will push "a lot of people coming to the parents' conferences all the time." When asked if learning about a culture can be done through other means than traveling to a specific county, Ibrahim said that school leaders "can learn it online, but it will never be the same." To support his cultural immersion point, Ibrahim gave the following analogy stating

> Okay, for example, can I teach you how to swim, but you never touch the water? I can tell you exactly what you have to do, but I will never let you touch the water. I will tell you from A to Z how to swim. Do you think when you are going to get into the water, you think it's going to be the same thing . . . as I told you?

Ibrahim's analogy underscores the necessity of school leaders to dive into the culture and interact with the community within their culture to become culturally proficient and responsive, which will accelerate access to the community and expedite the process of parental involvement. Understanding the culture of Arab-Muslim parents through community partnership will be, according to participants, buttressed and sustained by hiring Arab and Arab-Muslim teachers who espouse and advocate for the student-parent community values and beliefs.

In addition to cultural and religious mismatch obstacles along with participants' suggestions to address them, communication was another spotted obstacle to parental involvement as expected by school leaders and teachers in the American public school system. Participants in this study identified the communicative barriers and proposed some suggestions on how to address the barriers.

Theme 2: Communicative Barriers

The second overarching theme that emerged from the data analysis in this qualitative research is communicative barriers. Communicative barriers can be defined in the context of this study as the difficulties that participants face in communicating with school-based staff. These difficulties emerge from either limited English proficiency and/or the cultural norms that govern cross-gender communication. Because of cultural and religious instructions regarding cross-gender communication, some Arabic-speaking parents speak English, but they do not want to sit with the opposite gender to talk about how they observe their cultural norms.

Participating parents, community leaders, and two paraprofessional focus groups agreed unanimously that communication in English is a big obstacle to school-based

parental involvement. Under communicative barriers as a central theme, exist three sub-themes. The first sub-theme revolves around parents' English proficiency levels that affect communication about academic matters. The second sub-theme is cultural communication that goes beyond linguistic abilities that include listening, pronunciation, and semantics. The third emerged sub-theme is gender and communication rules that anchors itself in religion and culture as it was mentioned in the first central theme of religious and cultural mismatch. The mélange of these sub-themes underlines the obstacle of communication that participants have recognized.

English Proficiency

English proficiency is the first sub-theme that participants from all groups identified as another obstacle to parental involvement. Since all participants in this research are immigrants, most of them had to learn English after they immigrated to the United States. Learning and communicating in English with limited proficiency is reported to cause discomfort and anxiety that participants prefer to avoid. When Hoda, the community-based organization leader whose mission is to serve the female Muslim community in Staten Island, NY, was asked about the obstacles that Arabic-speaking parents face to participate in parental involvement, she responded that "a lot of the moms have limited English proficiency. So it's, they're not able to feel comfortable to engage themselves in some of the activities." A similar answer was given by Imam who said

> There are many reasons I would say for immigrants, in general, and for maybe Muslim women in particular . . . so many of the immigrants here, they do not have English. English is not their first language. Maybe he [or she] doesn't even know what you're talking about.

The parents may have an inability to feel comfortable with engaging in school activities that Hoda stated because, as Imam explained, participants may not even know what school staff are speaking about due to limited English proficiency was also reported by both paraprofessionals and parents. Several paraprofessionals from both focus groups highlighted the feeling of discomfort, embarrassment, shyness, and inferiority because of a lack of speaking English. For instance, a paraprofessional from focus group 1 emphasized that "this is the problem: even when they try to help their children . . . some parents do not speak English." The language is the obstacle" and the obstacle of not speaking English prevents parents from active parental involvement because "they feel ashamed; they feel shy" as another paraprofessional reported. For those parents who overcome these negative feelings and come to participate, they "just show up to complete the picture [of] the parents, that they are here." This psychologically complicated feeling of being excluded because of language and the feeling of being neglectful of children's education if a non-English speaker and uneducated parent decides not to attend school-based activities is forlornly and hopelessly captured by what another paraprofessional, Warda, said pitifully

. . . but for those parents who are not educated, they already do not know what happens in schools and education. Therefore, why would they come to school-based activities? To come for what? They will not come because when they come, they will find themselves unaware and unknowledgeable about anything. They will be made feel that they are inferior to the members of the society where they live. So, they prefer to spare themselves this embarrassment and stay at home and say to their child:" go my

beloved to school and our lord will make your learning easy, and may God make our affairs easy. I mean this is what I have observed.

These heartbreaking and resignation-like statements from the community leaders and paraprofessionals who work daily with Arabic- speaking parents are the abridged accounts of what the remaining participating paraprofessionals and community leaders shared on behalf of Arab parents in general. Similarly, the participating parents like Ibrahim, Ahmed, Zakaria, Salah, Haroun, and others, voiced their accumulated frustrations and additional concerns related to communication in English. The feeling of being perceived as "inferior" to "the members of the society" that the paraprofessional spoke about was sensed in the undertone of Ibrahim. Ibrahim, an educated parent and works as a high school math teacher and as a technology adjunct professor, shared a chain of his strong feelings of humiliation, shame, embarrassment, and distrust because of his experience with some teachers during his meeting and interaction with them.

> Well, some of the teachers, unfortunately, I am a teacher too, I teach in college, and I teach in high school, some of them, you know, they talk to you, Like, you are a foreigner, no matter what, no matter how much time you spend in this country, you still see that. They talk to you [pause] I don't want to say racism, but they look at you down, . . . you feel it, you feel it in the speech that we will never get it because we were not born here, you know. And that, that really, really hurts me a lot. That hurts me a lot. . . Some of them, they think, you know, they know it all and it's their system. We don't know anything. We [immigrants] just come here to beg them.

When asked about the reasons behind what he perceived as demeaning and patronizing attitude, Ibrahim replied “listen, I don't read their minds, but I can tell. They talk to me like, you know, I don't know anything about the education system . . . , so it's really bad, I just don't like it, and it's happened to me many, many times.” Speaking on behalf of other parents with whom he shared this feeling of belittlement, Ibrahim added that

> I tell you the truth, most of the people, when they don't go there [school building], because they feel ashamed, they feel down, they make them feel down. They make you feel bad, they make you feel exactly bad . . . that means your opinion doesn't count because you don't even know how to express it . . . Yeah. And you know, some of my students, they come to me and they complained about other teachers, what they say to them, you know, it's really nasty. It’s difficult to, it's difficult to explain because . . . it makes me very nervous when I talk about this.

Because of these brooding and agonizing feelings, Ibrahim resentfully and ominously concluded, “I do not want to meet those people. I don't want to look at your [their] faces because they are racist, I really don't want to say it, but they are.” Ibrahim’s feelings description was supported by Malak, a paraprofessional, who said that even though offering translation services to parents “ is not a problem anymore for most of the parents,” but the problem is that “parents themselves do not feel comfortable to come and talk, they are shy . . . they feel like people will look down at them, something like this.”

These undesirable and damaging feelings of diminishing value and lack of sense of belonging to the school community underscore the irony that Ibrahim is a teacher and professor whose navigational skills in the American education system are well-developed, but his, maybe, accent and appearance led to this feeling of exclusion that

shrinks his parental involvement. Ahmed is another parent who stated that "in addition, the language plays a big role in reducing our parental involvement, honestly. . . Parents do not go to school activities because they . . . don't speak the language." Ahmed elaborated on this by sharing his memory that invoked a feeling of regret and self-reproach. He disclosed that one day

> I went to a school Parent-Teacher Conference, but the teachers did not have interpreters with them. The result was that I did not understand anything, that's it. It did not benefit me. I blamed myself and said: what did I benefit from going to school today? What should I do? Should I go and bring an interpreter?

This voice of loss is reverberated by Zakaria and Salah who admitted that communication was another barrier to deal with. Zakaria said that "another obstacle, in the beginning, was language and communication. I do not feel comfortable speaking with the teacher about content or even asking follow up questions. It is difficult." This difficulty was also experienced when Zakaria thought that he could send his wife to attend school activities when he was not able to. He shared that "my wife did not speak English either, and I did not want her to feel bad about herself putting her in that situation when I could not go to school due to work." Salah, on the other hand, drew attention to the fact that speaking social language is not sufficient to fully engage in parental involvement. He stated that "I speak English, but not the language of curriculum. Translator would be helpful."

To summarize the impact of limited English proficiency, Khawla, who said that she "can communicate with teachers in English," admitted "my level of English does limit my participation in school. For example, I feel intimidated to run for spots in the

PTAs." Khawla also shared that "some parents . . . can't go because of poor English speaking capabilities or because the father doesn't let the wife go because he thinks [gender] mixing is *haram*." Haram is an Arabic word that means Islamically illegal. Likewise, Fatima admitted that "based on my experience, the language is the most difficult. Obviously, like the most, the biggest obstacle that the parents have, we have to break it by learning English."

Additionally, a female paraprofessional asserted that "I think it is a language barrier. If they [parents] lack English skills, so they feel reluctant to get in touch with teachers because they feel like they do not understand what is going on." In addition to English proficiency in terms of semantics and accent as a paralinguistic feature that unveils participants' immigration background, which can trigger feelings of alienation and rejection, the obstacle of communication to parental involvement is compounded by cultural and cross-gender communication.

Cultural and Cross-Gender Communication

In our culturally and linguistically diverse schools, knowing and responding to cross-cultural communication etiquettes can add another layer of complexity to communication. Cultural and cross-gender communication emerged as a second sub-theme under the central theme of communicative barriers to parental involvement. Some of the cultural tenets such as gender separation and lowering gaze that were addressed earlier under the religious and cultural mismatch section stretch to regulate communication as well. The ways in which people communicate are influenced by people's cultural practices and, sometimes, by people's religious backgrounds. Thus,

communication can become difficult not because people do not speak English, but because cultural communication is guided by a set of tacit assumptions and norms.

In his response to the question of whether or not he feels comfortable communicating with teachers in English about his child's learning, Ahmed, from whom the phrase "cultural communication" was borrowed, responded "No, of course. I need a translator. This is a very important point," but Ahmed made it clear that he does not want, as he put it, a translator who "just transmits a speech from one person to another"; rather, he wants a "teacher [who] understands the culture of the child." This is because cultural understanding, according to Ahmed, enables the translator or teacher to "translate . . . and explain the curriculum, the level of a student as well, what students are learning, not just language." For this cultural communication to materialize, Ahmed, who used the plural subject pronoun "we" to advocate for all Arab-Muslim school population, said that "we need teachers- Arab Muslim teachers- to translate for us. We need Arab Muslim teachers who understand our culture, traditions," and if this happens, the result will be that "if I am not available because of work . . . my wife will be happy to go to school to a [female] teacher who speaks our language, understands our culture and religion"

Within this cultural communication obstacle, participants asserted that different dialects of Arabic pose a communication challenge even when schools provide translators, especially for parents who did not learn standard Arabic that can be used to communicate when dialects are incomprehensible. Therefore, participants felt that school-based translators are not always an effective choice to translate effectively. For instance, Haroun from Jordan prefers to have a person from his family or country communicate effectively through interpretation to school provided interpreters. Haroun

stated "I prefer to bring someone from my family or a friend because I know them, speak the same dialect and it feels like a family, no protocols. If not available, I will love to have a school-based translator." Salah from Yemen expressed the same desire when it comes to interpreters. He said "I prefer a Yemeni translator because we speak the same way, and we understand each other. If I have an Algerian translator, I will not understand, and he will not understand because of different dialects." Similarly, Yasin favored an interpreter speaking the same dialect by stating

> I prefer to take a translator from the family or a friend to understand the translation better. Sometimes, schools provide an Egyptian, Syrian translator and they do not understand the Yemeni *lahja* (dialect), but when a person understands and speaks with the same dialect, communication is better.

The same justification and preference were given by a mother who reported that "I have to have someone with me, and always women like aunts, or my uncle's wife, and I feel more comfortable and better than having a DOE approved translator."

While dialects cause communicative challenges for A.S.P.s in this research during interpretation, Google translation seems to create communicative problems for written notifications in Arabic. When parents were asked if schools notify them in Arabic, or only English, several participants who opted for communication in Arabic as a preferred language reported that the letters they receive were not comprehensible. Lamis, a paraprofessional, pointed out that "there is another point here . . . the letters must be written correctly. I noticed that there are some letters that were sent, they themselves need to be translated." Ahmed stated that "when they send notifications in Arabic, you

feel that the person does not understand the culture; the person communicates and speaks Arabic to no avail" because the translation did not make any sense.

Yasin confirmed that Google translation is used by schools to send notices and letters, but it is not solving the problem of communication. He stated that "the Arabic is not understandable. I don't know why, maybe they use Google. Sometimes, you read the letter in Arabic, and you don't understand it. It is not the right thing." Making sense of notices conveyed in Arabic using Google, or other translation software depends on the education level of the recipients. For example, Salah positively replied "yes, we receive the notification in both languages. Sometimes the Arabic language is not written well, but I understand it."

In addition to dialects and cultural communication, the communicative hurdle gets higher when cross-gender communications rules get involved. All parent participants who do not speak English were asked about whether they would like to have female or male interpreters. They unanimously preferred and emphasized the imperative of having interpreters of the same gender to facilitate communication and comply with their religious teachings. To these ends, Haroun, who expressed his gratitude to schools that provide interpreters by saying "I will be grateful because I will understand what teachers are saying about my children and I can ask questions," justified why he prefers to have a man interpreter stating:

> I prefer a man because I will be more comfortable in communicating with him. I can look at him as I speak, but I do not feel comfortable doing the same with a woman. You know, lowering our gaze is recommended in our religion.

The need to feel "comfortable" was equally expressed by Salah who said, "I prefer for the translator to be of the same gender; I will feel more comfortable." Moreover, parents who do not speak English do not want to feel "embarrassed" twice at the same time: first, they don't speak English and second, they are sitting with the opposite sex for interpretation without a "*mahram"*, which is *haram* (prohibited). This rationale was provided by multiple participants. For example, Khalil agreed with Khadija saying

> like what Khadija said, most of them do not speak English very well and they do not want to feel embarrassed or shy even though they have translators. And one thing, in the parent teacher conference, if you have a male teacher and sit down with some of the women because in our religion, we are not allowed to sit in one room.

Parents are Islamically "not allowed to sit in one room" with the opposite sex without a mahram during parent-teachers conferences or other school-based activities that are open to gender intermingling is the justification that Malak, a paraprofessional, provided to highlight the cross-gender communication rules regardless of whether or not participants speak English. Malak said that schools "have people to translate. It is not a problem anymore for most of the parents, but the parents themselves do not feel comfortable to come and talk, they are shy." Lamis, a paraprofessional, understood and summarized the gender-based expectations in communication by showing how she tries to support Arabic speaking mothers with getting involved in school activities. Lamis reported, "I did mention to the parents that I am a woman, and the mom can come and speak to me because I know she can't speak with men, but she can speak to me." This cross- gender communication goes beyond, as Yasin reminds us, the setting where

parents and school staff from the opposing sex meet to include dress code as well. Yasin stated that "the second [obstacle] is the clothes people wear here, it is not conservative and decent. This totally differs from our culture."

As Haroun, Imam, and other participants mentioned before, "lowering gazes" is a divine order and if a person looks at the opposite sex dressing in "not [non] conservative and decent" clothes, then observant participants will feel the pressure of the situation. Imam is reminding us that in the Quran, chapters 24 and 33,

> Allah is telling women to lower their gaze, as well as men, especially in sourat [chapter] Anoor, to lowering their gazes not only men or just women, but both men and women are to lower their gazes and cover their nakedness and the nakedness for a man is what could attract people, you know, in his body. And for women to make efforts to cover everything of the body except for the face and hands.

Since most teachers and school staff do not dress according to these specifications, Yasin and others feel the responsibility to spare themselves these situations by not going to school activities. As Imam said "some people, they will not accept it to go to a, for example, parent teacher meeting when the teacher is a male, and the parent is a woman and there is no [mahram], here is no husband or son to be a part of it." To conclude, Ahmed stated straightforwardly and unwaveringly

> This is a culture, and I can't erase my culture because I entered America, no matter what. Even though America is my second country, but I was born and raised in the first country that has a culture in our blood.

Culture and religion that serve as a behavioral navigation system become significant obstacles to parental involvement in school activities if they are not considered in schools' planning. While communication seems on the surface to concern itself with language proficiency, in this research, it is found to be influenced by cultural and cross-gender communication norms that draw their powerful imprimatur from culture and religion.

When participants were asked how school leaders can respond to the communicative obstacles that they identified, they suggested that school leaders engage in hiring Arab and Arab-Muslim teachers to serve as culture brokers and language translators. Participants also feel that hiring male and female Arabic-speaking teachers will help with gender-based communication norms and advise school leaders to hire if needed, both male and female translators during school-based events.

Responding to Communicative Barriers by Hiring Arab and Arab-Muslim Teachers

Another way to promote parental involvement in school activities for Arabic-speaking parents, according to participants, is for school leaders to hire Arab and Arab-Muslim teachers and school-based staff. In this context, Mustafa, a community leader, thinks that hiring "Muslim teachers who speak Arabic can be an asset to the school." Therefore, he highlighted the urgent need for schools to "have some more Muslim teachers within the school system . . . to help the process [of parental involvement] and elevate the entire school system." Mustafa also believes in the efficiency and effectiveness of Arab-Muslim teachers' interventions should an issue arise. He asserted, "when there's an issue, there's somebody on the spot who understands the language, and also speaks English, to be an intermediary in the school right there and then, like doing

things in real time." Recruiting people from this Arab-Muslim community will help schools connect with the target community and will train the rest in the school community on how to establish a culturally and linguistically responsive school environment.

Linguistically, hiring Arabic-speaking teachers, social workers, paraprofessionals, and school aids (school-based staff) will equip schools with personnel who will address the communication barriers discussed earlier. Whether these linguistic challenges stem from an inaccurate translation such as Google translation, result from dialect varieties, or stem from cross-gender communication norms, participants believe that having Arabic-speaking school staff will help surmount these communicative obstacles. As it was mentioned before, Ahmed, like other participants, stated that sometimes he had "receive[d] letters in Arabic that I don't understand. [It must be] Google translation. But if we have teachers who understand both the language and the culture, that would be better." Ahmed continued, "if a school has 10-15 percent of Muslims, it is a must for schools to have 2, 3, 4 Arab Muslim teachers. It should not be a problem."

Ibrahim's suggestion for school leaders is that "they really have to hire people, you know, and they may be a group of people." This group of people needs to be composed of male and female employees to respond in a culturally responsive way to the Arabic-speaking parents based on their gender. This diversity also requires people who are versed in different Arabic dialects and sub-cultures of the parents. This intra-cultural and inter-gender diversity will change the feeling, Malak promised, that "Muslim and Arab kids go to school with fear that something about them is [negatively] different than others." Because of hiring from the community, Ibrahim contended, "the parents, they're

going to be open, definitely, they will be open" to parental involvement in school-based activities.

Hajar and Lamis, paraprofessionals from a Christian faith background, also agreed that school leaders would benefit from hiring Arabic-speaking school staff. Hajar advised schools by saying

> I think we should have Arabic speaking people in schools . . . because in schools around me, they do not have Arabic speaking staff. So, if I am a parent, and I want to go to school, I want to communicate with the administration, for example, I'm gonna feel ashamed again, I'm gonna feel shy and stay away. So provide more Arabic speaking people in the community, in the school, provide more ESL programs to the parents.

Hajar highlighted the emotional support that Arabic-speaking parents feel by having a school staff calling and speaking in Arabic to parents. Hajar said that "just to feel someone speaks Arabic like you makes you feel so comfortable." Feeling "comfortable" instead of feeling "ashamed," or remaining silent when non-Arabic speaking staff try to communicate with Arabic-speaking parents who do not speak English is underscored by Lamis as well. Lamis concurred with Hajar stating, "women will feel comfortable speaking in Arabic. But if you call a woman to come to the office, who will talk to her in Arabic? Who will make her feel comfortable?" Lamis shared the experience of discomfort for some A.S.P.s by asserting, "I have parents who come and stay staring at the staff until I come, and they go, oh my God! At least someone speaks Arabic. I see that with my eyes all the time."

Ahmed corroborated the story that Lamis shared about how useful and helpful for schools and A.S.P.s to have school staff speaking Arabic for better communication. Ahmed expressed his wish that schools can recruit Arabs by stating that

> As a Yemeni person, I wish there were a Yemeni teacher. But, if there is no Yemeni teacher, I wish there were an Arab male and female teacher who know our Islamic culture to communicate with my wife, and make her understand that she needs to be present at school, why she needs to attend the school for her child, and communicate by the phone. This is exactly what we need. I pray to Allah that they help us with this. We suffer, honestly. Our English language is very poor. When a teacher calls, I do not understand much of what is being said. It is difficult to find Arab teachers in schools to help you. This is an important point [hiring Arab teachers] and it is difficult to attend school activities. Schools with Arab teachers can communicate via phone and tell me about my child.

Ahmed's request or preference to have a Yemeni teacher is rooted in the fact that Arabic dialects are diverse, and they become incomprehensible if people come from geographically distant areas and if parents do not speak standard Arabic. Hajar and other participants raised this point. Hajar noted out that sometimes communication in Arabic breaks down "because the translating people do not speak the Arabic we speak; they speak a completely different Arabic that I even do not understand." Hajar said that this type of communication issue happens and is seen "all the time." Therefore, Ahmed prays that schools will hire an Arabic speaking "teacher who understands our culture very well, and who can translate. I can have an interpreter, but if there is an Arabic speaking teacher who understands our culture, the teacher will be able to explain." Linguistic and cultural

proficiencies are instrumental for Ahmed to facilitate open and meaningful communication that will be positively impactful for both student learning and parental involvement.

Culturally, hiring Arab-Muslim teachers and school support staff will, as Ahmed maintains, deepen and strengthen the home-school transformative communication. Ahmed said that Arab-Muslim teachers would know that culturally, there should be “no gender mixing.” Consequently, Ahmed expressed the moral necessity for schools “to find Arab teachers-male and female- who know our culture,” especially, “when there is a large percentage of Arabs, Muslims, Yemenis, or Arabs in general.” Since “a translator just transmits a speech from one person to another,” Ahmed believes that culturally and linguistically proficient teachers will be able to advocate for Arab-Muslim student culture because they understand “the culture of the child.” In addition to understanding the cross-gender rules such as no intermingling, Ahmed thinks that Arab-Muslim teachers will, for example, help “our children [who] suffer during [religious] occasions like Holidays, Eids, or Ramadan occasion.” Students’ and parents’ emotional sufferance due to lack of Islamic cultural competency in the school community made Ahmed insist that “teachers ought to understand our culture.”

In the context of Ramadan as one of the Islamic religious and cultural hallmarks, Ahmed shared the feeling of frustration he had when his son told him that he did not like to go to school during Ramadan because the school “forced” him to go to the cafeteria while he was fasting. He asked surprisingly

> How can you force and allow someone fasting to go to the lunchroom? If someone understands our religion, then they will allow children to go to a

> different place during Ramadan. We enforce fasting at home, but at school, they send them to a cafeteria. School should respect our culture and religion.

Ahmed attributed this action to a lack of cultural understanding and respect. As a result, if schools hire Arab-Muslim teachers and school support staff, then such unintentionally coercive behavior will be avoided because these teachers know what to do culturally. Ahmed also argued that culturally proficient teachers would know that during Ramadan, physical education teachers “should not force students to exert more efforts because they are fasting.”

The culturally cost-benefit analysis indicates to Ahmed that “it is necessary for schools to know our culture” and one of the ways to do so is to hire from the Arab-Muslim community. Ahmed continued to justify the essential need to hire Arab-Muslim teachers by claiming “the Arab teacher will explain that these Yemeni parents can’t attend school activities because they do not understand the language, they have certain cultural values, traditions, they are not educated, they don’t know the educational system.” Ahmed thinks that hiring Arab-Muslim teachers “will be a big solution. How is the principal going to know my circumstances? He will know if there is a teacher who knows my religion, my culture, and knows my language.”

Hiring Arab-Muslim teachers, according to Malak, will also support the Arabic-speaking school population because they will culturally advocate for students and parents. Malak maintained that culturally proficient teachers will “involve the kids themselves. In Ramadan, kids stand up and talk about Ramadan, about what we do during Ramadan. Kids themselves try to teach other kids, and even [teach] the teachers about their culture, about their religions.” Malak also advised school leaders to extend the

invitation to parents to join the classroom, speak, and read-aloud about their cultural events and religious holidays. She said that "even some parents can come to schools and talk about Ramadan. I have some parents… I have my daughter… who helped her kids read, in elementary schools, books about Ramadan, about Eid every year." While Malak knows that teachers, in general, can celebrate other cultures in the classroom by having "kids read about other cultures in the class," she emphasized the need to hire Arab-Muslim teachers like her daughter who brought culturally relevant books about "Ramadan and about Eid every year." By hiring Arab-Muslim teachers, involving kids in reading about their cultures, and inviting parents to speak and read- aloud about their culture, schools will, Hoda and Jamila claim, "establish a form of family-oriented space for people to feel comfortable . . . and everyone feels included," which will contribute to "cultural rapprochement."

The district's rhetorical promise of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" that Hoda spoke about earlier in this research will be pushed forward if schools hire Arabic speaking teachers to teach Arabic as well. Salah suggests "schools should teach Arabic in schools like the way they teach Spanish, why not teaching Arabic?" Teaching Arabic as a world language and as a recognition of a cultural component of Arabic-speaking parents will help, as Aisha said, "create more opportunities for families to share about their language, customs, holidays, traditions so they feel heard, appreciated and part of their new communities." Khadija, Nadia, Najib, and Malak agreed with Aisha that schools "should include more of our [Arab-Muslim] culture in the school and our religion so they [students] don't feel any different. It would be also nice to include Muslim events and decorations for our holiday and celebrations." One of the ways to create this culturally

inclusive school environment, participants recommend that schools hire Arab-Muslim teachers who know the culture, religion, the language, and can train the rest of the school staff on how to respond to Arabic-speaking and Muslim students and parents in ways that make them feel welcomed, appreciated, and included.

To conclude this section, it is useful to share Basem's recommendation for school leaders to create and develop culturally and linguistically compatible activities that might create positive and strong connections with Arabic-speaking students and parents. Basem suggested that

> School leaders might attempt to create more creative cultural activities which cherish the kids' attachment to their roots and insert some teaching materials about the different cultures that these kids represent regardless of their origins and celebrate this diversity. They might also plan a specific day in the year to celebrate the Arab's culture and traditions through clothing, food fair or other methods that support these kids' emotional attachment to their countries.

The school leaders' endeavor to establish learning environments that will help students "cherish [their] attachment to their roots" will be supported by, as Mustafa thinks, hiring "some more Muslim teachers within [the] school system" because "the fact is the Muslim teachers who speak Arabic can be an asset to the school." Hiring culturally and linguistically adept teachers will move schools away from "a translator [who] just transmits a speech from one person to another" to a team of teachers who "understands the culture of the child" as Ahmed eloquently stated. Taking care of the culturally and linguistically related obstacles to parental involvement will pave the path to addressing the logistical obstacles such as childcare and work schedule conflict.

Theme 3: Logistical Barriers

The third central theme that emerged from the data analysis is logistical barriers. Participants from all groups were asked about the obstacles that prevent Arabic-speaking parents from participating in school-based parental involvement activities, and their answers converged to generate the code of logistical barriers. Logistical obstacles are defined as anything that is related to organization and planning; anything that requires management and operation. Under this central theme, there are two sub-themes. The first one is related to childcare. The second sub-theme is centered on parents' work schedule conflict. Parents are challenged by these two logistical problems that limit, if not, prevent them from attending parental involvement school- centered activities.

Childcare

Childcare as an obstacle to parental involvement is the first of the two sub-themes that have been identified from the analysis of the gathered data. When all participants in this research were asked to name the impediments that curb their participation in school-based activities, most of the participating parents, community leaders, and two paraprofessional focus groups collectively stated that child-care is an impediment for parents who have children of different ages at home. In her response to the question, Warda, a paraprofessional, said "child care is a big obstacle. The mother, even if she wants to go to school, can't because who is she going to help, the younger or the older?" Nadia, a paraprofessional, also shared this finding by saying "when it comes to the events, I think it was more about childcare than anything else." The dilemma- inducing question that Warda posed above is pushing parents to make a difficult decision. Fatia, a mother participant, echoed this childcare predicament by stating that "sometimes, you

know, my girls are still young. If I have a conference with one daughter, the other daughter is with me. Sometimes, I prefer if I can stay with her home."

Fatia shared that she has two children: one is in first grade and the other is not enrolled at school yet. Since she has only one child to take care of during the teacher conference, Fatia stated that while she prefers to stay with her daughter at home and conduct her meeting "just by phone" because her "daughter, you know, is still little," Fatia is still able to "take her with me if I have no choice." This flexibility that Fatia has when she has no choice is not available to other mothers who have more children and babysitting is obligatory. In this context, Warda apologetically asserted

> I am sorry to mention this, but parents from this culture have 7, 8, 9 children. So it is impossible to help this child, that child, this child, to get involved with that, to see if this child is studying or not. Even when I call to talk to the mother about her child about school, you hear much noise as if you were in a circus.

Nadia, a paraprofessional, corroborated this dilemma with childcare when mothers are invited to a school-based activity like a show. Nadia said with empathy that

> When I used to give the paper to the mom showing the show in the auditorium, she would say I will try my best to come, but I don't have anyone to watch the other little ones. Her daughter was in kindergarten, and she had three kids like younger. She said it is hard for me to come.

Parents with children find it difficult to join schools in their parental involvement activities. Ahmed shared his and his wife's challenge with childcare, stating, "My wife is working at home. She has young children at home to attend to. Of course, we suffer." Other parents endure this sufferance as well when it comes to childcare and parental

involvement as promoted by schools. Zakaria shared the difficulty of his wife's attempt to participate in school-initiated activities by explaining that

> The mother had a 3 year old child and she could not leave the child by himself to participate in her son's activity whether it is a game or any school activities because no one at home to take care of her children and other obligations she has at home.

To conclude, Mustafa, a community leader, said that based on his conversations with his community members, said, "I think some parents do attend, but not all the parents" because "the fact is the husband is the one normally working, and the wife is home taking care the kids. So they are talking about time constraint." Time constraint is found to be one of the leading causes of not attending the school-based parental involvement activities for the majority of participants.

Work Schedule Conflict

Work schedule conflict is the second sub-theme that surfaced from the data analysis. The time during which school-based activities are scheduled to occur is squarely in conflict with parents' work schedule, which creates conflict and "time constraint." Parents who feel like that they can work around the cultural/ religious guidelines and communicative obstacles are challenged by the work time conflict. Haroun, for example, said that "I should attend my children's school activities, but, honestly, timing is a big challenge. Usually school activities are done during the work time and for me, it is so challenging." Other parents, female and male parents alike, have reported the challenge of a work schedule conflict. Fatia echoed what Haroun said and offered an alternative by

stating that "for me, it is work. I have to work and I can't get off work to attend. That's why I ask the teacher to change the appointment, or face time me, or call me."

Work schedule conflict does not spare parents who are educators as Aisha admitted "work schedules and timing of activities during the school day as an educator" are not conducive to attending school activities. While some parents, especially parents who do not work and stay home, like Fatima and Jamila, do their best to attend school activities "because there is nothing more important than kids' education" and because "it is a must for me to go because this is my children's future. This is my number one responsibility." Time constraint due to work schedule conflict prevents, or at least, limits parental involvement as Ahmed stated, "time-related obstacles of certain activities or due to other commitments during school days sometimes limit my participation in the kids' school activities."

Amal and Salah respectively stated that "the one obstacle that would limit my participation would be Work. Work is an obstacle. When I work, I can't attend school on a weekly or monthly basis. I can't ask for a day off to attend school." Salah first reminded everyone that "all parents care about their children and their education. We immigrated for our children's better life and education," but "work can cause a problem if the financial means are limited." Financial means and work responsibilities influence parents' decision to whether or not to take part in school activities. For immigrant parents who just came to America and are still trying to settle down financially feel like Ahmed stated:

> And our work, we have to work. That is, we came from a different environment, and we work hard, and our situations and circumstances require us to work. You

> find a person working from the morning to night. There is no free time to go to school. At the same time, we are not accustomed to attending school activities. We suffer, honestly, from this.

As it was mentioned earlier in this chapter, gender roles such as women stay home, and men work outside still apply to some Arabic-speaking parents. As a result, women whose household income allows them to stay home, like Fatima and Jamila, are noticed by paraprofessionals. Malak, a paraprofessional, noted that "they are involved, especially women, of course, because fathers work at those times." Khadija, a paraprofessional, also advocated for the parents she worked with and justified their absence from school activities by saying that parents "have to go to work to earn extra so that you can provide for their family." Khadija attributed parents' lack of attendance to "the financial status of the household. Sometimes, parents have two jobs because they are struggling financially;" therefore, they do not have time, you know, to go and leave work to go to school for a parent teacher conference."

Khadija warns, however, people against falling into the trap that these parents don't value their children's education by clarifying that on the surface, "It may seem that they do not care," but in reality, "it is because they do not have another choice, and the dad has to go to work and no one can really go [to school activities]." Najib, another paraprofessional, defended parents who can not attend Parent-Teacher Conferences by blaming the schools because "they have only two early and late P.M. conferences. They make it like this. Some parents don't come to both of them because they are working all day. This does not mean they don't care about their kids. No!" The reality of work schedule conflict becomes a restraining fact that prevent many parents from participating

in school activities the way they would like. Zakaria summarized this by reporting that "in real life, as a father, I did not go to school activities because I work a lot." Logistical challenges such as childcare and work schedule conflict prove to have restrictive effects on parental involvement that requires parents to partake and contribute to school-based activities.

When participants in this study were asked about how school leaders can respond to these logistical obstacles- childcare and work schedule conflict- to support Arabic-speaking parents in deepening their school-based activities as part of their parental involvement in their children's education, participants provided the following concrete suggestions.

Responding to Childcare Needs and Work Schedule Conflict

All participants who asserted that childcare and work schedule conflict are serious obstacles to parental involvement in school-based activities were asked a follow-up question on how school leaders can address these challenges. Participants suggested these two main approaches. First, schools can provide childcare services during school-based activities. Second, schools can hold virtual meetings and conferences for parents whose work schedule does not permit in-person attendance.

Childcare Services

Childcare has been cited as one of the obstacles that hinder parental involvement in school-based activities as perceived by schools. Participants stated that parents with young children are challenged to participate in-person in activities such as Parent-Teacher conferences and other events because childcare services are needed to free them.

Participants shared their childcare challenges and offered the following suggestions to school leaders to solve these obstacles. One participant stated that her challenge is that

> I have a young child and when my high school son had something at school, I could not attend school because of my child and busy with my two 3 and 6 year old babies. If the school can have baby sitting services, [that] will be a big plus for parents, then it will help us to attend.

Amal also suggested that school leaders need to think about how they can provide parents with young children convenient times where parents can arrange with one another, with adult family members, or with neighbors to take care of children while they go to school-based activities. Amal said

> For parents with young kids, if the meeting were after 5 pm, parents would be home. Maybe one parent go to school and the other stay with kids, or if my friends, neighbors, Arab neighbors can babysit while the parents go to school. We as Arabs have the culture of helping each other and asking other Arabs for help without feeling embarrassed, you know the community.

Amal is one of the participants who recommended school leaders to invite Arabic-speaking parents to school to build this social network that can help in childcare situations as well.

Warda, a long term paraprofessional, also said that while she does not think that a “woman will come to school with 3 or 4 children to the school.” She recognizes that “it may be possible” for parents to attend parental involvement activities if school leaders “say: come to school, we have a daycare service in the school for your children.” Providing childcare services at school will also help Fatia attend school activities. She

said, “If I can take my daughter with me to school, and there is child care activities until I finish the meeting.” Otherwise, Fatia would prefer to “do the interview, meeting by the phone.” Ahmed highlights the need for childcare services since his wife and he have “young children at home to attend to” and it is very daunting for parents to get involved in school activities, “especially when one has 4 or 5 children, it is difficult to go to school activities.”

Nadia, another paraprofessional, reported that she knows “many parents [who] can't come to parent teacher conferences because of their other children and need childcare.” If schools provide childcare services, Zakaria thinks that his wife who had “a three year-old child” could “participate in her son’s activity whether it is a game or any school activities,” but unfortunately, she could not “because no one at home to take care of her children.” In the absence of childcare services, Ahmed rhetorically asked the researcher the following question: “will she [his wife] leave them [children] by themselves at home, lock them in, and go to attend school activities?” Therefore, Ahmed concluded that providing childcare is “a very important point” for schools to think about and plan for if they want to engage parents in school-based activities. If schools cannot provide childcare services during certain events, then participants suggest that they switch from in-person participation to virtual parental involvement activities.

Virtual Parental Involvement Meeting & Cultural Considerations

Another logistical obstacle that was addressed before is the work schedule conflict that parents reported. Participants who identified this challenge were asked to propose some recommendations to school leaders so that the obstacle can be leveled. While some parents such as Jamila, and Mariam try to resolve the issue by having to

"reschedule the appointment with the teacher and go," Fatia suggested that if "ask[ing] the teacher to change the appointment" does not work for whatever reasons, then she would ask the teachers to "face time me, or call me." This remote conference with teachers will solve both the challenge of childcare and work schedule conflict. Fatia confessed that she "prefer[s] to stay home with her little daughter" since there is no childcare at home, or at school and she has "to work and [she] can't get off the work to attend."

Haroun also brought up the use of technological solutions to overcome some of the logistical challenges such as childcare and work. Haroun expressed his dilemma with work by saying "when I work far away in Queens and my children are in Staten Island, by the time I get home, it is too late. When the meeting with teachers is afternoon, I am at work." For this reason, Haroun wishes that schools can "just use phone calls and maybe Zoom like what teachers do now with students" during remote learning as a result of COVID-19. Similarly, Amal, who thinks that school leaders "should consider that parents do have a job, so some of the activities should be after the school day, not during working hours," advocated for remote meeting with parents by stating that "schools should make it easier for parents, especially nowadays with the computer and technology. A lot of the activities can be done virtually and online."

Amal also called attention to the fact that differentiation should be made when it comes to the use of technology to solve several obstacles. She recommended that

> Teachers can call parents instead of sending emails. Not all people use emails, I did not learn computer. For those who know computer, then yes to emails, but most people, it is better to communicate with a phone. Parents and teachers can

> ask the same questions without having to travel. This will solve the problems of babysitting, transportation, cultural obstacles like being seen in a group of people different from you, and people who can't drive, you know. Also people who can speak the language, but they can't read or write, this will be a good solution. For example, I have Spanish students who speak Spanish fluently, but they can't read and write.

Zakaria also saw in technology a great promise to solve several problems. He thinks that "zoom will work perfectly for events like that and especially for commute issues." He argued that if "the husband is not available, the women will not take a taxi and go to school. It goes back to the culture that woman will not be with a man in a car," so with technology, "all I can do is to log in to zoom in my room, comfortable and no stress. I think technology will be a positive thing to use and have all my meetings."

Virtual parental involvement as a viable avenue and tool for schools to use in their endeavor to engage A.S.P.s is also subject to cultural norms and considerations. Yasin made it clear that "when my wife is speaking with a teacher, I prefer that a female teacher speaks with my wife. Always, always there must be a woman teacher with a mother and a man teacher with a father." This emphasis on respecting the cultural norms when it comes to cross-gender communication and interaction is shared by Ahmed as well. Ahmed asserted, "we need female teachers to communicate with Muslim women, because a woman can't speak with a man. This is a culture, and I can't erase my culture."

Logistical barriers, communicative obstacles, and religious and cultural norms bond together to create serious challenges that need addressing. Aware of these obstacles, participants created practical suggestions that school leaders could implement to

facilitate and engage parents in parental involvement practices that can support students in maximizing their learning outcomes and enhancing their social-emotional well-being.

Conclusion

The analysis of the collected data in this chapter has illuminated areas of challenges to parental involvement for Arabic-speaking parents in school-based activities. These findings are an attempt to answer the first key research question: how do A.S.P.s (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting? The second research question - what are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s and Arabic speaking students' school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement as expected by American public schools?- will be addressed in chapter 5 under the recommendations section. The findings of this research have been summarized in three major themes. The three themes highlighted the challenges to parental involvement. Each of the themes has sub-themes that expand and explain participants' input.

The key obstacles that A.S.P.s, Muslim-community leaders, and two Arabic-speaking paraprofessionals' focus groups identified are encapsulated in these overarching themes. The first overarching theme tackles the cultural and religious mismatch between the participants' backgrounds and the American public school environments and expectations. This theme encompasses three sub-themes. They are gender-mingling, differences in traditions and gender roles, and different perceptions and expectations of parental involvement. The second overarching theme addresses communicative barriers to parental involvement. This theme includes two sub-themes; that is, English proficiency and cultural and cross-gender communication rules. The third overarching theme

discusses the logistical barriers that cover the sub-themes of childcare and work schedule conflict. All themes addressed both obstacles and a set of suggestions that participants identified to tackle the obstacles to parental involvement in school-based activities that Arabic-speaking parents face. These findings will be discussed in chapter 5, which is the next chapter. Chapter 5 will connect and align the findings with the research questions, interpret the research results, establish relationships between the results and prior research when applicable, and connect them with the theoretical frameworks. Chapter 5 will also discuss the research limitations and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the phenomenon of parental involvement as perceived and practiced by A.S.P.s to support their children's education in the K-12 public schools setting in the North Shore of Staten Island, New York. In addition, this study identifies some key obstacles to parental involvement and extracts recommendations from the participants to guide district and school leaders as they try to engage A.S.P.s through parental involvement. To ascertain the A.S.P.s' lived experience of parental involvement within a real-life context (Yin, 2003), the researcher employed a single descriptive case study to answer the following two qualitative research questions: "How do Arabic speaking parents (A.S.P.s) perceive parental involvement in the K-12 setting?" and "What are the existing barriers and suggested solutions identified by A.S.P.s, Muslim community leaders, and Arabic speaking students' school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental involvement expected by American public schools?"

While the focal point in chapter 4 was to present the three overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data, attention in this chapter will be directed to the interpretation of the research findings. Thus, this chapter will include a discussion of the findings, the connections of the findings to the theoretical framework, the study's limitations, implications for future research and practice, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study was inspired and motivated by a large body of research, as discussed in chapter 2, suggesting that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on children's academic performance, educational aspirations, and sense of school belonging

among other things (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). In addition, parental involvement helps promote learning for immigrant and minority students (Jeynes, 2003). Therefore, this study attempted to explore and describe the A.S.P.s' perception of parental involvement, their lived experiences, and their suggested solutions to help district and school leaders engage them equitably.

Does Epstein's Parental Involvement Model Serve Parents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds?

As explained in chapter 2, the Epstein parental involvement model (1995) outlines six types of parental involvement: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with community. While the components of Epstein's framework seem to be holistic and applicable to all parents, the findings of this research expose several areas of focus for school leaders who employ Epstein's parental involvement framework. First, Epstein's model does not allow parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds such as Arabic –speaking parents to define parental involvement the way they see it. Participants in this research believe that schools are responsible for making administrative and instructional decisions, while parents engage in supporting their children at home by using different personal, familial, and communal resources. Additionally, Epstein's model either overlooks the socio-political realities and forces at play when it comes to school decision-making, or it centers the school decision-making in the hands of those parents who are socio-economically and politically powerful to maintain and promote the ideology and hegemony of mono-cultural groups at the expense of parents from different cultural backgrounds. Parents who are still trying to navigate the school system, policies, and new

life in a new culture. Therefore, school leaders should expand Epstein's model to a dynamic parental involvement approach that allows them to learn from and about families and communities from different cultures.

Second, the component of volunteering in Epstein's model is used by schools to measure parents' care about and interest in their children's education. As a result, the lack of visibility of parents in school-based activities is misinterpreted by school staff as being disengaged and detached from their children's education. The findings of this research show that parents do not attend because of how they define parental involvement, due to religious and communicative norms such as gender mingling, and due to of work schedule and childcare reasons. The participants emphasized that one of the main reasons they left their countries is to secure better education for their children. The Epstein model does not take cultural and religious considerations into account. The model is designed for mono-cultural student and parent populations. Thus, school leaders should avoid using a mono-cultural framework as a rubric to evaluate multicultural perception and understanding of parental involvement. Otherwise, school leaders will fall into the trap of marginalizing and disenfranchising parents and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds such as Arab parents.

Third, Epstein's model does not guide school leaders and does not address how schools can use immigrant parents' previous experiences, cultural and linguistic assets, support immigrant parents in establishing intra and intercultural and social networks at schools that can help both parents and schools access communal resources and leverage them to maximize student learning. The findings of this research highlighted the need for mutual partnerships between schools and communities represented by different

institutions such as houses of worship, community centers, private schools, and community-based organizations. This type of community-based leadership will allow schools to interact with parents in culturally authentic settings to understand and integrate the voices of communities. This can also help school leaders view cultural diversity and different parental involvement practices through an asset, not a deficit lens.

Finally, Epstein's parental involvement model is also mono-cultural when it comes to parenting and communicating. This parental model that relies on Western European ideology (Yosso, 2002) assumes that there is one model that fits all models. For instance, communicating only requires a school staff member to meet, call, or email a parent. But in reality, as participants in this research shared, communication requires both linguistic and cultural proficiencies. The latter requires understanding and respecting cross-gender communication norms, which are not addressed by Epstein's model. Parenting style is also narrow-minded in Epstein's model. Families from different cultures establish home environments differently to support their children in education according to their means and accessible resources. Research shows that maximizing parental involvement requires culturally and linguistically responsive approaches and models (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2016; Reynolds, 2008; Yosso, 2005). School leaders need to revise the Epstein parental model to provide culturally responsive and supportive environments that engage and connect schools to communities and communities to schools.

Three central themes anchor the implications of this study. The first theme is obstacles of cultural and religious mismatch. Embedded in this theme is the sub-theme of different perceptions and expectations of parental involvement. The second theme is

communicative barriers beyond English proficiency and includes cultural and cross-gender communication norms. The third overarching theme addresses the logistical barriers that limit parental involvement. Permeating the themes are descriptions of various stakeholders' experiences, values, and recommendations. Each theme described obstacles and offered suggestions to mitigate obstacles impacting parents. The first theme informs the first research question, while the remaining themes inform the second research question.

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Research Question #1

The first research question in this study was answered by the first theme; namely, cultural and religious mismatch. Under this theme, there are the sub-themes of gender mingling, differences in traditions and gender roles, and different perceptions and expectations of parental involvement. The first research question investigated the Arabic-speaking parents’ perception of parental involvement in their children’s education in the

K-12 setting. The data revealed that the Arabic-speaking parents do not associate parental involvement with attending and participating in school-based activities. Instead, they focus more on home-based support and consign school-centered activities to teachers and school leaders. This perception considers the lived experience of parents in their countries of origin and their understanding of teachers' roles and responsibilities.

In this study, the A.S.P.s explained the differing expectations of parental involvement based on their upbringing and experiences. Participants suggested that support outside of the school was most important and expressed a difference of expectation in US schools, which place a high value on parental presence at school events, and feedback and input on the educational experience. These parents described their involvement, focusing on out-of-school supports such as providing enough time for children to do their homework assignments, teaching them good manners, engaging in Islamic education, and practicing good hygiene. In addition to these forms of involvement, parents perceived parental involvement as anything they could do at home to pave the path for their children's success. This involvement included spiritual supports, such as prayers, limiting chores at home, or ensuring a distraction free environment.

Other parents describe the importance of being involved academically and securing tutoring through family, friends, or private services. Parents in this study felt conflicted by an expectation that parents should weigh in on curriculum decisions. While they feel confident in their ability to support their children, they do not feel equipped to make teaching decisions and defer to the child's instructor this responsibility. The second half of this parental involvement perception is the understanding that parents are not teachers by profession. Thus, it is the job of teachers to support students at school with no

input from parents. Therefore any advice or input from parents to teachers regarding instruction may be considered a sign of disrespect. Finally, parents were not asked by schools in their countries of origin to attend any meetings unless they were for religious or national student celebrations or student disciplinary actions. Most of the participants stated that they attended school-based celebrations once or twice a year.

The first interpretation of this finding is that parents coming from culturally diverse backgrounds do not share the same American definition of parental involvement. While teachers and school leaders in American public schools consider active parents as those who appear to attach great importance to attendance and participation in school-based activities, people from other cultures such as Arabs focus on home-based support. This finding is aligned with other research findings (Garcia Coll et al., 2002; McGrady et al., 2013). The second interpretation is that one should not automatically synonymize visible attendance with active parental involvement and invisible with inactive involvement. Arabic-speaking parents may not attend school based activities, but they do everything possible to support their children at home. Unfortunately, school staff often misinterpret this invisible model of parental involvement as a lack of care or interest in education, which is often at odds with parents' decisions to immigrate to America: to secure a good education for their children.

The third interpretation of this finding is that school leaders and teachers should actively learn from parents of other countries and survey their culturally diverse parents in their preferred language of communication to understand their perceptions and practices of parental involvement. This study's findings offer a perspective that challenges school leaders to expand notions of parental involvement. These may serve to

inform school leaders and researchers on diverse notions of parental involvement, and the impact of cultural origin and religious tradition. The perceptions help to dismantle stereotypes. Expanding and valuing the diverse approaches to parental contribution empowers schools, students, and parents alike. This finding also supports that parental involvement is a dynamic concept that continues to shift and expand as schools become more diverse.

While Epstein's parental involvement contains some of the core elements of parental involvement, some of them are culturally and socioeconomically biased and exclusive. Parenting and volunteering are but two types of the six typologies of Epstein's parental involvement model, and a disproportionate amount of value is placed on these activities. Parents volunteering to aid schools in performing school-based activities is more responsive to White middle class parents than to recent immigrant parents and parents from other cultures and socioeconomic statuses (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2012; Yosso, 2005). This misalignment is, for many mono-culturally narrow, and inadvertently promotes European-American, middle-class norms around parental involvement. In doing so, this value marginalizes other cultural practices regarding both parenting and parental involvement.

Research Question #2

The second research question was answered by the three overarching themes that cover cultural and religious mismatch, communicative barriers, and logistical obstacles. The second research question in this study explored and described the existing barriers and suggested solutions by Arabic-speaking parents, Muslim community leaders, and Arabic speaking students' school support staff (paraprofessionals) to parental

involvement expected by American public schools. The participants highlighted three major barriers to which they proposed a string of solutions. The first finding under this question revealed the cultural and religious barriers that prevent A.S.P.s from engaging in school-based activities even when they try to shift their original perceptions of parental involvement from only home-based to add school-based activities as well. Parents identified gender intermingling as an insurmountable obstacle that runs against their religious teachings and cultural norms. In this cultural context, parents shared another cultural violation that schools unintentionally commit: forcing their children during Ramadan to report to the cafeteria during their lunchtime period instead of another place free from eating temptations. Participants also identified communication barriers that combine English proficiency and cross-gender communication rules. Additionally, participants shared logistical obstacles such as childcare and work schedule conflicts.

The first interpretation based on these findings is that culturally diverse parents come with a set of cultural norms and religious teachings that cannot be compromised to comply with the expectations of the host country. Religious beliefs and cultural values are a kind of laws that govern human behaviors, communications, and interactions. Breaking these religious laws can devastate a person psychologically because it is considered a sin, and socially because if close friends know of such infringement on the religious and cultural norms, then that person's behavior will be socially condemned. In a predominant example, participants were very adamant about gender-mixing and meeting with a teacher from the opposite sex without a mahram because it is against their religious practice that makes both genders uncomfortable. The second interpretation is that if parents feel that schools do not respect their religious values by, for example,

sending their children to a school cafeteria during Ramadan, then they do not feel that sense of belonging and connection to schools. Therefore, school leaders should accept and cherish the cultural identities of families and create intersecting safe spaces for schools and student-parent communities (Khalifa, 2012, 2016).

The third interpretation is that the communication process includes and goes beyond semantics to embrace cultural norms. Parents who do not speak English yet, or feel intimidated to converse with teachers about their children's academic progress need a welcoming and affirming school environment to reduce the anxiety of navigating an unfamiliar school system. Also, English language learning requires a shift in understanding syntax, semantics, and pronunciation, and it is especially challenging for English learners because English is not a phonetic language. Therefore, when A.S.P.s speak with an accent or with errors in pronunciation, school staff should be patient and mindful not to express frustration, which may lead to parents' feelings of shame or inferiority. An additional communication barrier relates to cultural norms when speaking to a person of the opposite sex. For example, Arabic speaking parent participants explained that while some speak English, they could not communicate with teachers of the opposite sex in an isolated space because of religious and cultural norms. These situations are often uncomfortable, and as shared, some parents will struggle. For example, some parents describe being unable to make eye contact while speaking due to mixed gender meetings. Thus, school leaders and teachers alike should use these experiences to assess their cultural responsiveness (Ishimaru, 2013) in communication and in the space where it occurs.

The final interpretation based on the findings in this study is that parents' lack of attendance to school-based activities requiring parental involvement, should not be misinterpreted as if they believe their children's education is invaluable. Participants shared their frustrations when they want to attend school-based activities, but they cannot because their work schedules do not permit, or there is no one to take care of the young children at home. Therefore, school leaders need to investigate the absence of parents to provide them with support, not to blame them. Asset-based instead of deficit-centered approaches will engage parents in school-based activities and build positive and productive relationships with parents and students (Johnson, 2006). Understanding the root causes of parents' absences and providing solutions and resources will build relationships. If the deficit approach is used where blaming the victim is the way to address the issue, then the relationship with parents and community becomes transactional at its best (Poza et al., 2014).

This research question also aimed at collecting the participants' suggested solutions to address the cultural, religious, communicative, and logistical challenges to parental involvement in school-based activities. To avoid redundancy, see chapter 4, theme 4, and the next section.

Relationship Between Findings and Prior Research

This research was anchored in the six typologies of Epstein's parental involvement model (1995, 2007, 2012) and Khalifa's (2016) four strands of culturally responsive school leadership. Through a descriptive single case study, the researcher conducted virtual semi-structured individual interviews of 16 parents, three community

leaders, and two focus groups of a total of eight paraprofessionals to explore the challenges these parents face as they strive to support their children in education.

Research has been consistent in showing that parental involvement contributes to student success. As a result, Epstein (1995, 2002, and 2007) and Khalifa (2012, 2016) advocated for parental involvement using different approaches. Epstein provided a framework that focused on the family, the school, and the community underscoring the importance of six typologies of parental involvement as a guide for school leaders (Epstein 1995, 2001, 2002, 2007; Epstein et al. 2002; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). On the other hand, Khalifa (2012, 2016) centered his attention on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices that enable school leaders to interact with parents in their "indigenous context" and become community leaders by practicing four strands of CRSL. In addition to learning benefits for students, parental involvement becomes an urgent need for schools to meet.

Finding 1: Cultural and Religious Mismatch

This finding reveals that Arabic-speaking parents face several cultural and religious barriers. These barriers manifest themselves in different expectations and perceptions of parental involvement, gender mingling, and lack of knowledge of cross-gender communication rules. As for perception of parental involvement, the Arabic-speaking parents shared that their involvement is confined to home-based support because that is what they used to do in their countries of origin. A focus on home-based instead of school-based parental involvement was also made by Huntsinger and Jose (2009). Their study concluded that there are cultural differences in how Chinese-American and European-American parents supported their children’s education. While

the former was engaged in home-based parental involvement, the latter were more active in volunteering in their children's school-based activities.

This culturally specific behavior regarding parental involvement in their children's education should be considered an asset rather than a deficit and limitation because Arabic-speaking parents do not participate in school-based activities. School leaders should re-evaluate and expand the Epstein parental involvement model to recognize the multicultural aspects of the student and parent-school population. Prioritizing components of volunteering and decision-making as indicators of parental involvement are detrimental to parents from different cultural backgrounds. As public servants, school leaders ought to understand the culture of their school population and differentiate their engagement strategies.

The Arabic-speaking parents' perceptions and practice of parental involvement are rooted in their cultural practices. Additionally, due to these cultural differences, the expectations of schools in the countries of origin and the American public schools present challenges. In this study, the participants shared that they participated in school-based activities in their countries once or twice and none of which involved their children's academic progress discussions. As in prior research, these differences in expectations affect school-home rapports and connections (Turney & Kao, 2009) because schools misinterpret the parents' absence from school-based activities and volunteering as an act of devaluing education (Lightfoot, 2004).

This study found that Arabic-speaking parents respect the authority and competence of teachers; they entrust teachers with their children's education at school without parents' involvement. This aligns with a related study by Abdullah et al. (2011),

who found that Arab parents trust teachers to handle school-relevant and educational matters and decision making; whereas, parents deal with their student's education by upbringing and supporting them at home through different means. In this study, Arabic-speaking parents focus on home-based contributions to their children's education, including providing shelter, food, tutoring, time for study, minimizing house chores, and providing emotional support by praying for their children's success. Since this home-based support is not visible to schools, there is a risk of misunderstanding, a finding described in previous studies (Doucet, 2011; Georgis et al., 2014). These connections occur outside of the US as well. Aghbaria and Kna'ana (2009)'s study on parental involvement in the Arab education system in Israel describes these expectations; namely, teachers expect parents to do their jobs at home and teachers handle the rest at schools.

Teachers' misinterpretations, however, and negative assumptions that parents do not care about education because they do not attend school-based activities (Panferov, 2010; Perriel, 2015) breed a deficit mindset that has the potential to harm home-school relationships. To build positive relationships with the Arabic-speaking parents, schools need to replace the deficit approach due to their lack of cultural understanding with an asset-based approach that will view parents' confidence and trust in teachers and their instructional competence as strengths. To make this mindset shift, schools need to embed more culturally inclusive and responsive parental engagement practices that can empower parents and transform educational outcomes for students (Gay, 2010; Khalifa, 2016).

In addition to perceptions and expectations differences, Arabic-speaking parents who are Muslims also expressed their frustration, discomfort, and unwillingness to compromise their religious norms and values by sitting with teachers from the opposite

sex without a *mahram* (a relative with whom marriage is not Islamically admissible). *Al-kholwa* (sitting with a person from the opposite gender without a mahram) and *Ghado Al-basar* (lowering gazes) are some of the religious teachings that many participants observe, but schools do not, according to participants, provide school environments where such teachings can be performed and respected. Some participants viewed the lack of such environments and expecting parents to attend gender-mixing school activities as culturally oppressive and disrespectful. Participants in the study provided concrete examples such as sending Muslim students during Ramadan to a school cafeteria rather than another location to avoid temptation. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, these practices may be culturally oppressive or alienating, serving to perpetuate the "colonial project" of assimilation (Paris & Alim, 2017) that excludes cultural diversity or downgrades it to minority, which has to conform to the dominant culture in the school system.

These cultural differences and practices of parental involvement challenge the Epstein parental involvement model. While it seems from the surface that some of the elements of Epstein's model such as parenting, communicating, and volunteering are universal truths, in reality, they are culturally biased and condescending, especially when they are used to judge both other parenting and communicating styles. The challenge that emerges from holding a different perception of parental involvement and different expectations from parents should not have been considered a challenge had schools engaged in culturally responsive parental involvement. It is, however, deemed a challenge because American schools are, consciously or unconsciously, still operating

with a monolithic cultural framework like that of Epstein's framework to manage multi-ethnic and multicultural school parent and student populations.

In trying to force and reinforce this outdated mono-cultural framework that centers the Anglo-European system, schools engage in forcing or pushing the parents and students to assimilate and conform to the dominant ideology that engages in culturally exclusive practices that mute and marginalize certain voices (Shulman, 1987) as in the voices of disempowered communities. To become inclusive and culturally responsive, district and school leaders ought to operationalize the four strands of the culturally responsive school leadership framework for which Khalifa (2016) advocates. Khalifa and other researchers in the field of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) maintained that school leaders can have a positive impact on student learning by establishing and nurturing positive relationships with families and communities (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2013). Unlike the Epstein parental involvement model that does not culturally contextualize parenting and communicating styles, Khalifa (2016) urged` school leaders to interact with parents in their "indigenous context" and become community leaders by practicing the four behavioral strands of CRSL. These behaviors include the act of critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting a culturally responsive/inclusive environment, and engaging students, parents, and indigenous contexts (Khalifa, 2016).

Finding 2: Communicative Barriers

As it was explained in chapter 4, communicative barriers combined both limited English proficiency and cross-gender communication rules that are governed by religious practices and cultural norms. Therefore, culture is omnipresent in many social and

behavioral aspects of participants' actions and interactions. Lack of English proficiency causes discomfort in communication for participating parents, which limits A.S.P.s' parental involvement. Communication obstacle is frequently cited as a barrier to parental involvement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Garcia-Coll et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2009). In addition, cross-gender communication norms are highlighted by participants as a greater obstacle to parental involvement for some Arab-Muslim parents. Thus, close attention needs to be paid to the gender of interpreters when schools provide interpretation services to Arabic-speaking parents during school-based activities and other communication and engagement efforts. To be clear, not all Arabic-speaking parents have this cross-gender communication obstacle because it depends on whether or not parents are from the same faith background. As it was mentioned before, A.S.P.s come from more than 20 countries and several religious backgrounds. When Gay (2010) was discussing the importance of culturally responsive teaching, she stated, "no ethnic group is culturally or intellectually monolithic" (p.18). Because of this reality, school leaders need to deepen their knowledge of their Arabic –speaking parents and their sub-cultures they bring with them.

Identifying and addressing the gender-based norms that are conceived and practiced within a specific cultural community is of paramount importance (Geenen et al., 2005). Awareness of these indigenous contexts, (Khalifa, 2016) factors will pave the path towards school-home communication and a two-way cultural bridge, fostering a sense of belonging, respect, and value for parents, which will lead to student success. For this cultural awareness to occur, Khalifa (2016) extolled school leaders to reflect on and assess their leadership behaviors to match their culturally diverse student and parent

populations. Under the strand of critically self-reflecting behavior, Khalifa cited several researchers who arrived at the same findings. For instance, Gradiner and Enomoto (2006) underscored the importance and necessity for school leaders to commit themselves to ongoing learning of cultural backgrounds of their school population to be in a better position to communicate with students and parents effectively and engage them successfully.

Ishimaru (2014) also urged school leaders to elicit input from the parents and community to assess school cultural responsiveness as they deal and communicate with parents. Additionally, for school leaders to develop their culturally responsive leadership, they need to develop culturally responsive teachers (Khalifa, 2016) to strengthen the self-reflection strand of CRSL. By training teachers on inclusivity and culturally responsive teaching and interacting with parents, school leaders will deepen positive relationships with students and the community to promote a sense of belonging and collaboration.

Finding 3: Logistical Barriers

The research participants also identified logistical barriers to school-based parental involvement activities. Childcare and work schedule conflict was emphasized by all participants, and a couple of participants in this study identified transportation challenges as well. Logistical barriers are among the common obstacles to parental involvement which was discovered in prior research (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Poe, 2015; Scribner et al., 1999). In general, working parents have the challenge of balancing work time and school-based activities. Recent immigrants like some of the Arabic-speaking parents who participated in this study, in particular, shared that work schedule is an obstacle as well because they are trying to keep their jobs and avoid any

possible job loss and income reduction if they keep attending school-based activities and being absent from their job. It is also worth mentioning here that some Arabic-speaking parents, especially from the Middle East like Yemen and Syria, came to the U.S.A. as refugees escaping civil war and persecution. Such parents go through a series of challenges, sufferings, and adversities pre, during, and post migration events. Such challenges are similar to those endured by Somali refugees and refugees from other countries (Beiser, 2009; Georgis et al., 2014).

These cultural, linguistic, and logistical obstacles to school-based parental involvement require school leaders and teachers to think of and devise culturally and linguistically responsive parent engagement practices. Strategies are needed that support culturally diverse parents in an inclusive and equitable manner. For this to happen, school leaders should understand the perceptions and cultural norms of the parents they serve at their schools. The following finding summarizes participants' suggestions to create this culturally inclusive and responsive school environment to help Arab-Muslim parents and students.

Finding 4: Fostering Culturally, Linguistically, and Logistically Responsive Competencies

This finding is of weighty significance for district and school leaders in that it provides a roadmap to surmount the hurdles that prevent or minimize Arabic-speaking parents' involvement in school-based activities. Participants proposed various strategies to understand the Arab-Muslim culture and engage and expand parents' involvement in school-centered parental involvement. Arab-Muslim parents, Arabic-speaking

professionals, and community-based leaders recommend that school leaders begin building cultural awareness and responsiveness by employing a set of approaches.

The first approach establishes a culturally affirming and welcoming school environment by creating cultural days when Arab-Muslim parents come to school buildings and display their cultural artifacts such as clothes, music, and food. These surface elements of culture, as described in Hammond (2015) will introduce school staff to some of the observable components of Arab culture that might generate some questions and interactions between parents and school staff. By creating cultural day activities and welcoming parents and community-based organizations to participate, participants will feel appreciated because a part of their identity is valued and accepted (Khalifa, 2010). This cultural day will also help build positive connections and relationships with parents and students, which might be an essential factor in reducing student and parent anxiety levels as they try to navigate a new educational system and expectations, a new culture and language, and interact with new people including school staff from diverse cultural backgrounds (Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016). Participants felt that a cultural day event would also provide school leaders and teachers an opportunity to ask questions about their culture-relevant things about which they want to learn more. By creating such cultural days and asking questions, school leaders will practice their commitment to ongoing learning of cultures that shape their students' and parents' behavior (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

The second approach to building cultural awareness and responsiveness is for school leaders to engage in building Arab-parents community and social networking, establish partnerships with Arab-Muslim community-based organizations, and hire Arab-

Muslim teachers. Participants proposed that school leaders should invite all Arabic-speaking parents to schools in the beginning and throughout the school year to get to know one another. Some participants reminded school leaders to have parents separated by gender to be culturally respectful. The purpose of the gathering of Arabic-speaking parents is multi-faceted. First, parents will develop new relationships with parents from the same linguistic and cultural background that can serve as resources in the future. Second, resources for tutoring, interpreting, job opportunities, childcare, and transportation since Arabs tend to, as one participant stated, help one another. Building these social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) can help Arabic-speaking parents connect and build the six types of cultural capital that Yosso (2005) outlined: aspirational, linguistic, familial, and social navigational, and resistant capitals.

One participant suggested that school leaders should identify successful Arabic-speaking alumni and invite them to speak to the parents about their past challenges and present success to nurture their educational aspirations, hope, and dreams. Some participants also thought that getting the Arab parents together can help equip them with navigational skills (Yosso, 2005) in a new culture and school system because more experienced parents will show and share resources with new parents. Creating a welcoming and safe space for Arabic-speaking parents to build and expand their social network will send a positive message to parents that schools leaders recognize, appreciate, and leverage "indigenous" cultural and social capital (Khalifa, 2012) of parents, and by implication, of students as well. Fostering and advancing such Arab-parents community building with a positive and intentional emphasis on inclusivity, cultural appreciation, and learning about the parents and students' cultures and fund of

knowledge will serve as cultural tools to educate students in better ways (Paris & Alim, 2017).

The third approach to build cultural awareness, capacity, and responsiveness is for school leaders to partner with Arab-Muslim community-based organizations and Islamic schools. Participants proposed that school leaders and teachers should collaborate with community leaders to learn from them, share resources, and learn about the Arab-Muslim culture in authentic ways. One of these learning ways is for school staff to attend community events, cultural and religious celebrations and ask community leaders and parents any questions related to cultural practices. By adopting this strategy, school leaders and staff will utilize the community events as a professional learning space to deepen their understandings of the culture of the students' parents and the community they serve at school (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Additionally, school leaders and teachers can use these community events and spaces to learn about parents' experiences with schools in their native countries, connect with parents, and educate them about the educational system in America. School leaders were also advised to partner with Islamic schools to learn from them since they deal with the Arab-Muslim student and parent populations in a culturally responsive way. Creating and nurturing individual, interpersonal, and inter-organizational relationships will be conducive to building social and cultural capital, which can lead to a community transformation (Mediratta et al., 2009).

The fourth approach to build cultural awareness, capacity, and responsiveness is for school leaders to hire Arab-Muslim teachers. Recruiting and retaining Arab-Muslim teachers will serve as a role model for and a reflection of Arab-Muslim student culturo-

linguistic identities, and as a bridge between two different cultural and educational systems. Participants believe that bringing teacher diversity to schools will facilitate and promote cultural responsiveness between parents and teachers. Such recommended hiring practice was found to support schools in creating a sense of belonging for culturally diverse school populations and developing culturally responsive teaching (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). More Arab-Muslim teachers can be hired for professional learning opportunities about cultural diversity and values related to Arab-Muslim parents and students. For instance, such teachers can raise awareness of culture and religion-specific behaviors during Ramadan, cross-gender communication, sub-cultures, parental involvement experiences, and expectations, reducing biases and using cultural and linguistic differences as assets instead of deficits (Gay, 2018; Yosso, 2005).

Furthermore, the research found that recruiting and retaining teachers of specific ethnic groups helps attract more teachers of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Simon et al., 2015). Finally, Arab-Muslim teachers can, some participants believe, provide “cultural communication/ interpretation” services, teaching English to parents, and help school leaders in advocating for Arab-Muslim students and parents, identifying, sharing, and aligning community-and-school resources with the needs of students and parents (Khalifa, 2012). Prior research also found that hiring parental coordinators who speak the language and understand the culture of the predominant school student and parent populations can be a great asset in addressing the cultural and linguistic obstacles (Scribner et al., 1999). Research also shows that hiring school staff from multi-ethnic and multi-lingual backgrounds that reflect student/parent populations supports parents and

students in sustaining their cultures and languages while accessing the dominant culture and developing their cultural and linguistic dexterity (Paris, 2011).

In addition to the culturally and linguistically recommended responsive practices, participants proposed some logistical solutions to address childcare and work schedule conflict obstacles. To tackle the childcare challenges, participants suggested schools provide childcare services in the school building during the school-based activities. This childcare service can be provided by the school-based staff or through a partnership with community-based organizations. Providing this service will contribute to transformative leadership, social justice, advocacy for community needs, and inclusion of parents in parental involvement activities (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Khalifa, 2012).

Another way to address childcare and work schedule conflict is to deploy technological resources and conduct school-based activities remotely using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other audio-visual conference platforms. Using this approach, participants claim that it will also solve transportation needs for some parents who don't drive and think that public transportation is not convenient. Virtual parental involvement meetings and childcare services are some solutions that schools can adopt to respond to parents' needs and engage them instead of passing judgmental statements which suggest that parents do not care about or value education. If school leaders fail to understand the cultures of a minority or "minoritized" students and parents, they tend to view linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse children and families through a deficit approach (Calabrese et al., 2004; Carvalho 2001; Lightfoot, 2004; O'Connor, 2001).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study reside in the small sample size, difficulty to access female parents due to cultural norms, and the conducting of virtual instead of in-person interviews due to COVID-19 restrictions. While this research succeeded in recruiting two focus groups that comprised of eight paraprofessionals, three community leaders, and 16 A.S.P.s, it is still considered a small sample size that can limit the validity of the findings. Despite the fact that the researcher was thoughtful and strategic in collecting data from Arabic speaking participants coming from different countries, religions, and gender to ensure representativeness, the issues of reliability and generalizability due to the small sample size are the limitations to be addressed in future research (Yin, 2018). In addition, most of the participating Arabic-speaking parents in this study are Muslims, whereas there are other Arabic speaking students and parents who come from different religious backgrounds. Such parents need to be included in future studies.

The second limitation of this study lies in the scarcity of female voices due to cross-gender cultural and religious norms. Since the researcher in this study is a man, he could not have access to female parents from certain countries like Yemen, Palestine, and Jordan. Although the researcher was successful in securing virtual interviews with seven female paraprofessionals (5 from Egypt, 1 from Palestine, and 1 from Jordan), one mother from Egypt, two from Morocco, and one from Jordan, the remaining female parent participants responded in writing instead of an interview. Thus, collecting data through e-mail correspondence limited the richness of data collection that might be explored through virtual interviews. Nevertheless, using the e-mail method of collecting data was accepted because it is the researcher's ethical duty to respect the cultural norms

of gender separation and to include the female voice in whichever ways are culturally possible.

The third limitation of this study is the inability to conduct in-person interviews due to COVID-19. This research was conducted in 2021 when maintaining social distancing was recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This lack of in-person interviews to collect data limited the researcher’s ability to collect field notes such as participants' body language that could enrich the data. Due to cultural norms, most female participants who agreed to have a virtual interview turned the camera off during the Zoom interview or preferred to have a phone call interview. In addition, some male participants preferred to have a phone or camera-less interview because they wanted privacy for their wives and female daughters at home. Virtual interviews due to COVID-19 might have also had a limiting effect on building trust and comfort between participants and the researcher, which could have restricted the willingness to share more data. To address the limitations of access to female parents and the small sample size, the researcher will offer recommendations to future researchers under the Implications for Future Research and Practice sections.

Implications for Future Research

This study was inspired and motivated by a large body of research, as it was discussed in chapter 2, suggesting that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on children’s academic performance, educational aspirations, and a sense of school belonging (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). In addition, academic studies have also found that parental involvement helps promote learning for immigrant and minority students (Jeynes, 2003). In light of these findings and that the student population has

become more culturally and linguistically diverse, this research attempted to explore and describe the A.S.P.s' perception of parental involvement, their experienced obstacles, and their suggested solutions to help district and school leaders engage them in ways that will reap the same benefits that research has documented.

To further study the phenomenon of parental involvement perception, obstacles, and solutions from the perspectives of A.S.P.s, future research can build on the findings of this research and expand the research sample size. New research can recruit more A.S.P.s, community leaders, and paraprofessionals so that the findings can be more reliable and generalizable to the same study population. To achieve this purpose, future researchers can recruit more participants from more Arabic speaking countries. Since Arabic is spoken in more than 20 countries, the more countries represented, the more representative and generalizable findings become for A.S.P.s. While the initially stated overarching purpose of this study was to recruit only A.S.P.s, it might be more effective and generalizable to expand the pool of participants by including Muslim participants since the cultural obstacles and solutions were found to revolve more around religious guidelines.

Another suggestion for future research would be to employ a mixed methods research design. Future researchers can employ this study's qualitative research methodology and add a quantitative method where surveys can be created to measure the Arabic-speaking parents' perception of parental involvement in school-based activities. This mixed methods study will help enlarge the sample size of participants and yield more representative and generalizable findings. Future researchers can also use this mixed methods approach to compare and contrast the findings across and within

participants. Additionally, future researchers can recruit more female participants. Due to cultural values and religious teachings regarding cross-gender communication and interaction, the researcher in this study was unable to either have an interview with potential female participants or have an in-depth interview with participating mothers from specific Arabic-speaking countries such as Yemen, Palestine, and Jordan. One recommendation to gather more data from more female participants is to conduct a joint research study with researchers available to serve the population in culturally sensitive ways.

In addition to the need for more female participants and a larger sample size, future researchers and literature will benefit from conducting a similar research with a focus on participants with differences of micro-cultural differences in traditions and customs. Also, in the future researchers should consider studies that offer opportunities to conduct their in-person interviews and observations of at-home or at-school parental involvement. In-person interviews might also establish more trust than virtual interviews between the researcher and the participants. As stated earlier, in-person interviews and social interaction require gender separation and gender matching- female researcher with female participants and male researcher with male participants.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct this research in a different location or in a set of different locations. The rationale behind this recommendation is the hypothesis that culture does not expire or have boundaries. As one of the participants stated in the interview, “this is a culture and I can’t erase my culture because I entered America.” The last recommendation for future researchers is to conduct research on more Arabic-speaking parents whose religious background is one other than

Islam. In this study, most of the participating Arabic-speaking parents are Muslims, whereas there are many Arabic speaking students and parents who come from different religious backgrounds such as Christianity, Judaism, Druze, Sabian, and Baha'i. While most A.S.P.s are Muslims (93% according to a Google search), there are Arabic speaking populations who follow other faiths. Consequently, one should be careful in generalizing the findings to all Arabic-speaking student and parent populations.

A possible future study could focus on a comparative study to see if there are significant common cultural similarities among Arabic-speaking parents regardless of their faiths. Out of academic curiosity and for the purpose of reliability, validity, and generalizability, if the findings of future research in terms of cultural and religious mismatch and cultural recommendations emerged, then the literature about parental involvement for A.S.Ps. will be richer. Research will suggest guidelines for district and school leaders on how to engage A.S.P.s in a culturally responsive way that will support Arabic speaking students in maximizing their learning and fulfilling their educational aspirations and other advantages of parental involvement.

Implications for Future Practice

In the field of parental involvement, Epstein's is one of the most frequently parental involvement models that schools have used to engage parents in their children's education. Epstein's model foregrounds six components: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. On the surface, the components of Epstein's parental involvement model sound comprehensive, holistic, and applicable. Therefore, if parents "communicate" with schools through parent-teacher conferences, "volunteer" to attend and participate in school-based

activities, attend school workshops on "parenting" and child-upbringing skills, then parents are considered by the school to be actively engaged and attentive to their children's education.

Prior research shows that parents from racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds are engaged in supporting their children's education and schooling in different ways (Garcia-Coll et al., 2009; Glesne, 2016; Khalifa, 2012; Mapp et al., 2013; Yosso, 2005). Because of a culturally and linguistically diverse student and parent population, district and school leaders should and ought to diversify their parental engagement strategies using diverse parental engagement models and frameworks. Moreover, higher educational institutions need to train pre-service teachers, social workers, and other future school and district staff on culturally responsive practices to meet the needs of the school student and parent population. Colleges and universities need to partner with local community-based organizations, district, and school leaders to examine the cultural needs of the school community and devise culturally and linguistically responsive strategies. This type of community-based leadership can help school leaders deepen their relationships with the communities they serve and satisfy the parental engagement requirement by ESSA in a meaningful and transformative way rather than just checking off the compliance piece.

The findings and recommendations in this study unveil the moral imperative for educational policy makers, district, and school leaders to re-examine the parental involvement and engagement models they use and improve them to create a differentiated approach to engaging parents in their children's education. Recognizing and honoring the differences in perceptions and practices of parental involvement can lead to creating a

welcoming and supportive environment for Arabic speaking parents and parents from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To establish this welcoming and affirming environment, higher educational institutions, educational policy makers, district, and school leaders need to invite Arabic speaking community leaders and learn from them and with them how to create sustainable systems of strengthening the existing parental involvement practices and engaging and supporting Arabic speaking parents in supporting their children in culturally compatible ways.

The findings of this study show three major obstacles to school-based activities in which district and school leaders desire to get more parents involved. The obstacles include cultural and religious mismatch, communicative barriers, and logistical challenges. To respond culturally, linguistically, and logistically to these parents' needs, district and school leaders should enact the following recommendations as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Recommendations for District and School Leaders to Connect with and Engage Arabic-Speaking Parents

Obstacles	Recommendations
Cultural and Religious Obstacles: *Different Perceptions & Expectations* *Gender Mingling* *Differences In Traditions & Gender Roles*	***Foster Cultural Competence by:*** **Learn** about Arab-Muslim culture to build cultural awareness (a book study, Arab-Muslim club…) **Partner** with Arab-Muslim community leaders for mutual learning **Partner** with principals from private Islamic schools and ask them to provide professional development series on Arab-Muslim culture that includes, but not limited to, gender-based roles and social interaction rules, cross-gender communication norms, developing positive relationships with Arab-Muslim community using culturally responsive strategies, parental involvement perception and practice, educational system in the Arab-Muslim home countries, parents' expectations of teachers

	and understanding the teachers’ expectations of parents in America, religious events and behavioral expectations-Ramadan, Eid as an example
	Attend and participate in Arab-Muslim community events to interact with and learn from the community members in their indigenous spaces
	Establish an Arab-Muslim community networking events at school by inviting gender-based parents twice or thrice a year to meet, greet, and get to know one another to expand their social network/capital for school support and otherwise
	Build cultural brokers from the Arab-Muslim community to help schools in providing culturally and linguistically responsive support
	Establish a community engagement task force to create cultural events at school for community members and parents to share and educate the rest about their cultures and resources to facilitate cultural rapprochement, appreciation, and inclusion
	Create school-community leaders committee to discuss school-related matters and curricula and receive input from the community leaders such as Imams, CBOs leaders.
	Involve parents from the community in the Parent-Teacher Association, and allow the community to organize their events in schools
	Recruit Arab-Muslim teachers and school-based staff such as teachers, paraprofessionals, and guidance counselors to train the rest
	Engage higher education institutions to train in-service teachers and administrators on culturally responsive practices and involve them in local communities.

The first finding of this research is centered on the cultural and religious mismatch found in public schools. Participants agreed that lack of a culturally responsive school environment and lack of reciprocal understanding of what constitutes an active practice of parental involvement in children’s education hinder Arabic-speaking parents’ participation in school-based activities. Based on this finding, district and school leaders should engage in reflecting on and assessing their leadership practices to measure

whether or not they employ culturally responsive strategies to engage their student parents and community in student education. For such engagement efforts to succeed, school leaders should primarily understand the Arabic-speaking parents' perception and practice of parental involvement back in their countries.

The past experiences and practices of parental involvement seem to drive the present parental involvement practices, which may appear to be partially incompatible with what school leaders expect from parents in American public schools where too much focus is on school-based activities. For instance, the perception of parental involvement that participants revealed is that parents provide home-based support and schools are entrusted with school-based support. Home support ranges from fulfilling children's basic needs such as food, clothes, and shelter to providing study space free from distraction, praying for children's success, asking family members or friends to tutor and help with homework assignments, reducing home chores, and preventing children from work to maximize their time for study. As for meeting with teachers during the Parent-Teacher Conferences and other school-based events, the participants stated that schools in their countries expected them to attend only religious, national, and high-achieving student celebrations, which happened once or twice a year. Some participants also clarified that they are not trained pedagogues to support teachers with recommendations, and it is the job of teachers to handle any instruction-related tasks.

In addition to perceptions and expectations, participants highlighted the need for schools to establish a culturally responsive school environment to attract A.S.P.s to school buildings. Some parents shared that they cannot compromise their cultural values and religious teachings to attend school activities in a gender-mixed milieu. Based on this

finding, school leaders should promote gender-based meetings and gatherings to encourage Arabic-speaking parents who observe gender separation norms to attend school activities. Creating a single sex environment will reduce parents' anxiety, increase their comfort, and develop positive relationships with parents grounded in cultural understanding and respect. School leaders should also promote culturally inclusive practices by partnering with Arab-Muslim community-based organizations and Imams who can advise school leaders on many cultural and religious matters that can expand or limit parental involvement in school-based activities.

Furthermore, school leaders and teachers should attend/participate in Arab-Muslim community events to experience some aspects of the culture, interact with the community, learn more and make parents feel that their identity is respected and appreciated. Finally, school leaders should recruit Arab-Muslim teachers and other school staff- males and females- to promote diversity and inclusivity. Hiring these school staff members will provide cultural and linguistic resources to the rest of the school. In collaboration with Arab-Muslim community leaders, such staff can provide professional development on culture and culturally appropriate ways to engage students in learning and parents in school activities. Parents may feel a sense of belonging and connection if they meet an Arabic-speaking teacher, see a teacher wearing a hijab indicating her religion, see a community leader entering the school building, or see school leaders attending their community events. Fostering cultural awareness, understanding perceptions, and expectations, and responding in a culturally compatible manner can facilitate the process of engaging A.S.P.s in school activities and strengthen their home-

based parental involvement that will maximize student academic learning and social-emotional well-being.

The second finding in this study reveals that communicative barriers are another obstacle to parental involvement in school-based activities. These communicative barriers combined English proficiency and cross-gender communications norms. Therefore, the implications for practice to address this area of challenges are as follows. First, school leaders should provide free English learning classes to parents to tackle one of the root causes of communication barriers: limited or no English proficiency. This English teaching program, held in the school building or offsite, would partner schools with community-based organizations. Ideally, the program would include considerations for single-sex classes and other cultural and religious norms. In addition, a variety of class times with consideration for work schedules and childcare options would promote participation.

Second, school leaders should provide gender-based interpreters during school-based activities or meetings. By having both male and female interpreters, school leaders can leverage the interpreters to make parents feel comfortable communicating. Third, it is also advisable for school leaders to seek volunteers through community-based organizations from the Arab-Muslim community focusing on diversifying the gender and nationalities of Arabic speaking interpreters. By recruiting from the community, the likelihood of having a meaningful interpretation and "cultural communication" is more representative of the shared values of the school community. This strategic recruiting will address both the sub-culture and the dialect of parents as they interpret for them. Finally, school leaders should recruit, retain, and support Arabic-speaking staff. These

professionals are essential to interpret and educate parents about social norms, expectations, and opportunities within the American school system.

The final finding in this research showed A.S.P.s' logistical challenges when attending school-based activities. The logistical obstacles include childcare, work schedule conflict, and transportation. There are various implications for this finding. . First, school leaders should provide childcare services during school-based activities and events. The second implication for practice is for school leaders to conduct virtual parental involvement activities and meetings to cater to those whose childcare needs cannot be solved. This remote parental involvement should also take into account the cultural and cross-gender communication considerations. Finally, remote opportunities to participate in school activities provide an opportunity to address the challenges of work schedule conflict and transportation for some parents.

In conclusion, if school leaders operationalize these recommendations and implications that target perceptual, cultural, religious, linguistic, and logistical needs, they will have built a solid foundation to engage Arabic-speaking parents in school-based parental involvement. However, more importantly, they will have created a welcoming and validating school environment that will nurture the sense of belonging, inclusion, diversity, comfort, and respect that participants yearn for in their children’s schools.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the increasing need for school leaders to reconsider how parental involvement is measured and valued within their school communities. The participants in this study represent stakeholders committed to children's education, many

of whom have made significant sacrifices to provide better opportunities for their families. Despite this, the population in this study described feeling misunderstood and excluded from the larger school community.

School leaders should deploy genuine efforts to "bring the invisible culture of the community into the school through parent participation, hiring and promotion of minority group personnel, and in-service training for the school staff" (Gazden & Leggett, 1976, p. 17). School leaders should also collaborate with community leaders to develop a culturally responsive framework and guidelines to learn, respond to, serve, engage, and leverage parental and community resources to support students in learning in a culturally welcoming, affirming, and validating school environment

It is worth restating here that as public servants, public school leaders bear the responsibility to ensure that all students have equal and equitable access to learning opportunities regardless of their backgrounds. Therefore, enacting culturally and linguistically responsive practices that support parents and students, school leaders are advised to combine the Epstein parental involvement model and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework. By embedding the four strands of culturally responsive school leadership, school leaders will be in a better and more empowering position to effectively respond to and engage Arabic- speaking parents and other parents in parental involvement practices.

In a diversifying society, school leaders must improve their efforts to engage culturally and linguistically diverse parents by educating themselves and their school-based staff about the culture of the parents and students they serve daily. By reflecting on their school leadership styles, building learning partnerships with communities and

training school staff in cultural diversity, and engaging with parents and students in culturally appropriate ways, school leaders will play a role in developing cultural competence. This cultural competence will allow school leaders to respond effectively to parent and student needs and leverage resources by interacting with the community members. In addition, the knowledge building can lead to staff cultural capacity to balance perspectives and become inclusive of all parent subgroups. This cultural inclusivity will also support students in maximizing their learning outcomes and increasing their sense of belonging. Finally, listening to parents' experiences is essential to increasing community and mitigating the biases, prejudice, and stereotypes that can negatively impact student learning.

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONCENT (INTERVIEWS)

Invitation and Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Interviews)

Dear Potential Participants:

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by a Doctorate candidate from St. John's University. As part of Aziz Elabida's doctoral study, his faculty sponsor and Chairperson is Dr. Parnther from the department of education at St. John's University. You must be 18 years or older to take part in the study. While your participation is voluntary, you need to sign the consent form and return it to participate. You will be given a copy of this form.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this study is to explore Arabic speaking parents' perceptions and practice of parental involvement in their children's education and school-based activities. The study will also strive to identify the participant's obstacles and suggestions to increase parental involvement.

Procedures
Your participation will entail virtual interviewing, but if you feel that virtual interviewing will compromise your cultural norms, then you can participate using audio responses, or written responses to the questions. Due to COVID-19, the interview will be remotely recorded and transcribed. The medium of interview will be either on the phone, or by using Zoom as a platform where you and I will see each other during the interview that will be recorded with your permission. The interview will take approximately 25 to 40 minutes, and the time and date will be determined according to your preference. You will have the choice to be interviewed in Arabic or English. You can also code-switch if that helps you express your ideas clearly.
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked 13 questions. During the interview, you will be also asked other questions as a follow up on some of your ideas and information. You may review your interview recording and request that all or any portion of the recording to be destroyed.

Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation in this research; however, if you feel some discomfort at answering some questions, please feel free to ask to skip the question.

Potential Benefits to You as Subjects of This Research

Although you will receive no direct benefits, your participation might help school leaders, educational policy makers, and teachers to understand your perceptions of parental involvement, obstacles, and your recommended solutions. The findings of this research will support your efforts and school efforts to help your children and the children of other Arabic speaking parents maximize their learning outcomes and improve their social and emotional experience at school. Another intangible benefit for you is to use this opportunity to make your voice heard and published that could be very influential in school-wide decisions that support Arabic speaking student community.

Payment/ Incentives
You will not receive any payment for your participation in this research.

Potential Conflicts of Interest
I do not have any financial interest in the topic being studied.

Confidentiality
Any information that is obtained in this research will remain confidential and will not be disclosed unless I get your permission. Your information will be mixed with other ideas obtained from other participants. The information will be categorized and coded thematically. If you are to be quoted in the study, a letter will be assigned as your name to protect your confidentiality. For example, I will quote you by stating, "Participant A suggested that…." Any information that has your identifiable information will be kept separately from the rest of data or deleted.

Participation and withdrawal
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. For the interview, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer and you will remain in the study. I may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise that may warrant doing so.

Alternatives To participation
Your alternative to participation is not to participate.

Your rights To Explanation
If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Aziz Elabida at 718-864-2670, or at aziz.elabida18@stjohns.edu. The researcher speaks Arabic and English should you prefer to speak in Arabic.

Yes, I agree to participate in the study described above.

Participant's Signature______________________ Date _____________

Researcher's Signature______________________ Date______________

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Should you have further questions, please reach out to me using either the phone or the email address listed below.

Sincerely,
Aziz Elabida
718-864-2670. Aziz.elabida18@stjohns.edu

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (PARENTS)

Interview Protocol for Arabic Speaking Parents

Opening:
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview regarding Arabic speaking parental involvement in children's education. Your participation in this research will help school leaders, teachers, and future researchers to understand your perception of parental involvement, your experience with it, challenges, and recommendations to overcome the existing obstacles to effective parental involvement. If you decide at any point during the interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

Overview:
During this interview, I will ask you about 15 questions and possible follow up questions if clarification is needed. This interview might take between 25 to 40 minutes. With your permission, I will record the interview so that I will be able to transcribe your thoughts accurately. Your participation is confidential. Your real name will not be used in the research when analyzing your input. I will use pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality. Thank you again for your participation. Do you have any questions before we begin our interview?

Interview Questions:
1. Back in your country, what did school leaders (principals, teachers) expect you to do to support your children in their education?
2. In your country of origin, how often did the school ask you to participate in a year?
    2a.What type of activities did the school have for parents? How often did you participate?
3. If you participated in school-based activities in your country, please describe how the school organized the activities.
    3a. (Did the school organize them by gender? women-only and men-only sections or mixed? which one did and do you prefer and why?
4. In American public schools, do mixed gender environments limit or increase your involvement in school activities? Why?
    4a. If mixed gender environment limits your involvement in school-based activities in American schools, what do you suggest school principals and teachers do to remove this obstacle?

5. In your opinion, what do you consider as active parental involvement in your children's education in America? Give examples.
6. Please describe what you have done to help your children in their education and school activities in American schools?
7. Has your level of involvement in your children's school activities changed based on your children's age and level of education (elementary, middle school, high school)? Why?
8. Are you comfortable communicating with teachers in English about your child's learning? If not, would you prefer to bring a person with you to translate or to have school-based translators? Why?

8a. Would your level of English limit your level of participation in school even if you have an interpreter? Why? Do you prefer a female interpreter or male interpreter, why?

8b. Do schools communicate with you in Arabic and English when they send you emails, letters, notices, and phone calls? If yes, may I get a copy of the written communication?

9. What obstacles limit your participation in school-based activities for your children?
10. What do you suggest school leaders do to help you and other parents of your gender logistically, culturally, and linguistically to become more involved in your children's school activities?
11. What efforts do you make to strengthen the types of parental involvement you practice?
12. Some people think that if parents do not participate in school-based activities and do not show up for parent-teacher conferences and other events, then those parents do not care about their children's education. What is your response to this claim and why?
13. What else would you like to share that I have not asked you in this interview?

Closing:

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about your perception and practice of parental involvement, the challenges and solutions to enhancing parental involvement. Your input will support school leaders and teachers in understanding and hopefully responding to Arabic speaking parents' needs regarding parental involvement

Interview Protocol for Paraprofessionals of Arabic Speaking Students

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Protocol

Opening:
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview regarding Arabic speaking parental involvement in children's education. Your participation in this research will help school leaders, teachers, and future researchers to understand your perception of parental involvement, experience with it, challenges, and recommendations to overcome the existing obstacles to effective parental involvement. If you decide at any point during the interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

Overview:
During this interview, I will ask you a few questions and possible follow up questions if clarification is needed. This interview might take between 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I will record the interview so that I will be able to transcribe your thoughts accurately. I will keep your participation confidential. The only people who know about your thoughts are the people participating in this focus group and I request that what is said here stays here to ensure complete confidentiality. Your real name will not be used in the research when analyzing your input. I will use pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality. Thank you again for your participation. Do you have any questions before we begin our interview?

Focus Group Questions

1. How long have you been supporting Arabic speaking students and parents?
2. Based on your experience with both Arabic speaking students and parents, can you describe the ways Arabic speaking parents have participated in parental involvement in their children's education?
3. Based on your experience with Arabic speaking parents, what obstacles that prevent them from participating in school-based activities for the students you have supported?
4. Based on your relationships and understanding of the needs of the parents whose children you support, what do they and you suggest school leaders do to help Arabic speaking parents to become more involved in their children's school activities?
5. What else would you like to share that I have not asked you in this interview?

Closing:
Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about the perception and practice of parental involvement, the challenges and solutions to enhancing Arabic speaking parental involvement. Your input will support school leaders and teachers in

understanding and hopefully responding to Arabic speaking parents' needs regarding parental involvement

APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY LEADERS PROTOCOL

Community Leaders Protocol

Opening:
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview regarding Arabic speaking parental involvement in children's education. Your participation in this research will help school leaders, teachers, and future researchers to understand your perception of parental involvement, experience with it, challenges, and recommendations to overcome the existing obstacles to effective parental involvement. If you decide at any point during the interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

Overview:
During this interview, I will ask you a few questions and possible follow up questions if clarification is needed. This interview might take between 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I will record the interview so that I will be able to transcribe your thoughts accurately. I will keep your participation confidential. Your real name will not be used in the research when analyzing your input. I will use pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality. Thank you again for your participation. Do you have any questions before we begin our interview?

Community Leaders Questions

1- How long have you been living in Staten Island, and what have you noticed about the Arabic-speaking Muslim population?
2- Based on your experience as a community leader, what are the challenges and obstacles that prevent Arabic speaking women and men from attending school-based activities?
3- What suggestions would you give school and district leaders to engage Arabic speaking parents in school-based activities?
4- Based on your experience with Arabic-speaking parents, what do they do to support their children in education?
5- What else would you like to share that I have not asked you in this interview?

Closing:
Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about the Arabic-speaking parents' practice of parental involvement, the challenges to parental involvement, and the suggested solutions to enhance Arabic speaking parental involvement. Your input will support school leaders and teachers in understanding and hopefully responding to Arabic speaking parents' needs regarding parental involvement

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Apr 20, 2021 2:00:53 PM EDT

PI: Aziz Elabida
CO-PI: Ceceilia Parnther
Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2021-376** *Arabic Speaking Parents' Perception of Parental Involvement*

Dear Aziz Elabida:
The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Arabic Speaking Parents' Perception of Parental Involvement*. The approval is effective from April 20, 2021 through April 19, 2022.

Decision: Approved
PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

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