

# A Multi Dimensional Look at Immigrant Latino/a Family Involvement in Education

Diane C. Marti, Ed.S. & Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## INTRODUCTION

### Multicultural Contexts:

\*The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse nation. In 2000, 38% of the US population under the age of 18 was non-Anglo whites and nonwhites.

\*One of every five children in the United States is an immigrant, or a child of immigrant parents (Ruggles & Sobek, 2003).

\*Latino/a families are the fastest growing group of immigrants (Shields & Behrman, 2004).

\*Schools increasingly serve diverse student populations; special attention is required to provide the academic and social outcomes of racial-ethnic minority and low-income students (Desimone, 1999).

\*Latino/a immigrants are often characterized as the "at-risk" group for underachievement in American schools (Lopez & Cole, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

\*Parent involvement is a potential point of intervention to combat "at risk" immigrant Latino/a students' educational challenges (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

\*No previous research has addressed the effects of time an immigrant Latino/a family has lived in the United States or their reported language proficiency on the level of involvement across home and/or school based activities.

\*Previous research with specific demographic factors such as education level, income, and marital status has revealed differences in the level of family involvement across home and school based activities. However, no study has determined whether these demographic factors are important for school involvement with immigrant Latino/a families.

### Measure of Family Involvement:

\*The *Family Involvement Questionnaire-Elementary* (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004) measures family involvement in education. It contains 46 items important for elementary students, with responses on a four-point Likert scale (i.e., Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always).

\*Prior research with the FIQ-E revealed three robust dimensions of parent-reported involvement: (1) Home-Based Involvement, (2) Home-School Communication, and (3) School-Based Involvement.

\*The measure has not been validated with Spanish-speaking Latino/a immigrants.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

\*To examine parent involvement with immigrant, Latino/a parents utilizing a multi-dimensional family involvement measure (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004).

\*Specific research questions were:

(1) Does the Spanish version of the Family Involvement Questionnaire-Elementary (FIQ-E) demonstrate acceptable construct validity for immigrant Latino/a families of children in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grades?

(2) What is the relationship between the length of time an immigrant Latino/a family has spent in the United States and their involvement in their child's education?

(3) Are there significant differences in family involvement constructs across demographic characteristics of primary caregiver's socioeconomic status, educational attainment, English proficiency, or marital status?

## METHODS

### Participants and Setting:

\*408 primary caregivers of Latino/a elementary-age children attending Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grades in rural and urban communities in Nebraska.

\*The majority of the respondents were from Mexico (74%) and were primarily mothers (76%) and fathers (22%).

\*Sixty-five percent of the respondents identified their marital status as married, with thirty-five percent reporting as a single-parent household.

\*Twenty-eight percent of the respondents reported having less than an eighth-grade education and thirty-three percent reported having a high-school diploma or higher.

\*The number of children living in the home ranged from 1child (17%), 2 children (33%), 3 children (33%), and 4 or more children (13%).

\*Thirty-six percent of the respondents reported incomes of less than \$16,000, while thirty-one percent reported an income between \$16,000 and \$30,000. Nine percent reported earning more than \$30,000 and seventeen percent reported their income as "unknown".

### Demographics:

\*Potential correlates of family involvement behaviors and included the following: (1) English proficiency; (2) caregiver education; (3) time spent in the United States; (4) family SES; and (5) marital status.

### Procedures:

\*The Spanish version of the FIQ-E (Manz, personal communication, February, 2006) was administered to all participants between May 2006 and January 2007.

\*Primary caregivers were provided with the Spanish translated FIQ-E questionnaire, Spanish translated consent forms and demographic questionnaires. A cultural broker was present at each data collection site to answer any questions of participants.

## RESULTS

### Confirmatory factor structure:

\*A confirmatory factor analysis using Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS; Arbuckle, 1994), the chi-square statistic, minimum value of discrepancy (GMIN/df), root-statistic, degrees of freedom, root-mean-square approximation (RMSEA), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) and Bentler's comparative fit index (CFI) was utilized.

\*Results indicated three-factors were supported by both orthogonal and oblique rotations. Internal consistency of each factor was high, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients consisting of the following:

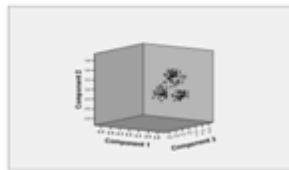
**Home-School Communication = .90**

**Home-based Involvement = .85**

**School-based Involvement = .77**

\*The three factors account for 39% of the variance, with the Home-School Communication factor accounting for the greatest amount of variance (i.e., 26%). These results replicate previous research on the FIQ-E (Manz et al., 2004).

Component Plot



Three-dimensional factor loading plot in rotated space.

### Relationship between time and family involvement constructs:

\*A simple regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between the continuous, independent variable of time (as defined by the number of months an immigrant family has spent in the United States) and dependent variables (the family involvement constructs).

	B	t	Sig.
Home-School Communication	0.056	0.961	0.337
Home-Based Involvement	-0.135	-2.330	*0.020
School-Based Involvement	0.009	0.147	0.883

\*The only effect found for time spent in the United States was a significant negative relationship (beta) with Home-based Involvement.

### Family demographic differences

\*To evaluate if there were significant differences with identified family involvement constructs across key family demographics, an ANOVA was conducted for the level of reported English proficiency. *Single-t*-tests were conducted for reported level of education, level of income and marital status.

	F	Sig.
Home-School Communication	4.355	0.005
Home-Based Involvement	1.881	0.132
School-Based Involvement	1.701	0.166

\*The only effect was found for the level of reported English proficiency and Home-School Communication, with those reporting "Ninguna" English proficiency being significantly different from the other three groups (i.e., Muy Buena, Buena, No Muy Buena).

## DISCUSSION

\*The three-factor solution found in previous research with the FIQ-E (FIQ-E; Manz et al., 2004) was affirmed with immigrant Latino/a families. The factors are: Home-School Communication, Home-based Involvement, and School-based Involvement. The constructs found initially by Manz et al. (2004) are robust.

\*A Spanish version of the FIQ-E has been validated with a new, unique, diverse sample. The availability of a psychometrically supported measure to utilize with this population will allow future empirical studies to assess levels of involvement and effects of parent involvement interventions with immigrant Latino/a families.

\*Contrary to hypotheses, the more time the primary caregiver was present in the United States, the less time they spent on Home-based learning activities. It may be that the more time families spent in the US, the more they relied on schools to assume primary responsibility for their child's learning.

\*Contrary to previous research, no interrelationship was found between the FIQ-E dimensions and educational attainment, SES status, and marital status.

\*There was a significant difference in Home-School Communication between the lowest self-reported English proficiency group and all other groups. Specifically, the least proficient English language category (i.e., "Ninguna") reported significantly lower Home-School Communication than all other categories. This finding underscores a significant language and communication barrier to school involvement faced by immigrant, Latino/a families.

### LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE/FUTURE RESEARCH

\*There were numerous missing items across all surveys. There was no follow-up or qualitative method to further explore this phenomenon or the reason a primary caregiver chose to skip any particular item (e.g., did not understand what was asked or did not want to disclose that information on the survey).

\*Data collection occurred most frequently by sending the materials home with the oldest child in each family. This did not provide an easy method for families to ask questions regarding areas of concern or confusion while completing the materials.

\*Given the sheer importance of ongoing family involvement over time and educational contexts, schools may need to find more effective ways to connect with these families to provide information and avenues to remain involved with their children's learning across environment(s).

\*These findings are significant in that it is important to make no assumptions about immigrant, Latino/a families based on previous research with other groups. These families present unique characteristics, strengths and needs and school involvement interventions should be sensitive to these needs.