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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

THE EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH-SPEAKING LATINA IMMIGRANT MOTHERS WHEN
PARTICIPATING IN THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN FOR THEIR
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of the
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Veronica Ferrufino

April, 2023

Reyna Garcia Ramos, PhD.–Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Veronica Ferruffino

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant women in my family and to all who have been in my life during my growth. I have observed the determination and hard work to improve their lives and the life of their families. These women have demonstrated ways to be proactive, and had the drive to motivate their children to succeed in life.

In addition, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmothers, Cristian Andrade and Rosa H. Ferrufino, who were self-determined Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. Their effort in planting the seed of hard work, and the desire of having a better life in America, has been seen within their grandchildren and grand grandchildren in the pursuit of higher education while building enriching careers; in turn, this has been a blessing in their lives as they become productive members in society.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to all the mothers in my family that have stepped out of their way to investigate and educate themselves to support their children so they could be provided with higher quality education. You have done an awesome job. ¡Buen Trabajo!

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First, I would like to thank my Heavenly Father, and my Lord Jesus for the inner strength, motivation, and guidance He gave me when I felt weak, tired, and with limited strength to continue on this journey. Without His daily doses of strength, it would have been impossible to reach this milestone in my life.

9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

–2 Corinthians 12:9

The journey of completing this dissertation has been a challenge, but at the same time rewarding. Having had the opportunity to meet different scholars and educators along the way has molded my perspective of how I embrace life. I would not have been able to accomplish this journey without all of their words of encouragement and motivation. Thank you. Also, thank you to all of my friends who, at one point, crossed my path during this journey and provided me with words of motivation to continue and not give up.

Secondly, I would like to thank the non-profit organization that connected me to the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who were generous enough to participate in this study. I am grateful to each and every one of you for making time out of your busy schedules and share your stories, thereby contributing to the field. Your contributions make a difference in the lives of future Latina mothers who have children with disabilities. ¡Muchas Gracias!

My deepest appreciation and gratitude are saved for my chair, Dr. Garcia Ramos, and my committee members, Dr. Castillo-Garrison and Dr. Green. Words cannot express how grateful and blessed I felt by your support in offering your time, dedication, and feedback, and

encouraging me to finish this doctoral journey. Dr. Garcia Ramos, I'm greatly indebted for your support, encouragement, patience, and countless hours you dedicated to reading and re-reading this dissertation and provide me with productive feedback to succeed in this journey. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Castillo-Garrison and Dr. Green for agreeing to be a part of my committee. Your knowledge and feedback during this process were immeasurable.

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I want to thank my family for their moral support, and to my parents for instilling in their children the perseverance of working towards higher goals. Thank you for doing chores, cooking and supporting around the house throughout the years I was focused my education. I could have not been able to complete this journey without your spiritual and moral support.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank my best friend for his prayers, words of encouragement and support when I couldn't advance in the past years. Thank you for the time spent in motivating me as well as helping me understand myself, and to never give up. Dios te bendiga.

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ABSTRACT

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there has been an increase of students receiving special education services in U.S. public schools in the last 20 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Parents are active participants in the educational decision-making process for their children with disabilities, providing Federal laws procedural safeguards for parents to participate in and make decisions concerning their children's education. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to research the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities attending public school in California. This study sought to recount the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who attended individualized education plan (IEP) meetings as they interacted with school personnel. With the purpose of answering three main research questions and using a data collection method for a phenomenological study, 12 participants were located through a nonprofit community-based organization and interviewed using eight approved semi-structured interview questions. As a result, 19 themes detailed the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences. The themes identified the participants' experiences, awareness of, knowledge of, barriers to, and the motivation to understand special education and the IEP process. The findings showed ways Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers utilized concepts of self-determination to learn about special education and advocate for their children's schooling despite the barriers and challenges they faced. It was found that Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers seek education to established programs that educate culturally and linguistically diverse families, and provide necessary resources, and promote independence for their children so they are able to become self-sufficient adults.

Keywords: special education, Latina immigrant mothers, advocate, IEP

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In recent years, the Latinx population in the U.S. has been growing quickly. Per the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), between 2000-2010, more than half of the total population growth in the U.S. was due to an increase in the Latinx population (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). This increase in the Latinx population can also be observed in the educational school system in the U.S. where many Latinx children attend public school. Latinx students enrolled in schools, colleges and universities increased by approximately 10 million within the last 10 years.

With the increase in the Latinx population, there is a need to explore how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities attending public school experience the educational system in the U.S. Mueller et al. (2009) noted that little research had been conducted regarding Latinx parents' feelings, views, and perspectives regarding their children's disabilities. Their study identified some of the challenges Latinx parents experienced within the school system, such as having a hard time understanding the information presented to them due to language barriers and not understanding the educational system. Research has demonstrated different barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families in special education (Gomez Mandic et al., 2012; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Pearson & Meadan, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2014; Shapiro et al., 2004). These barriers may include perceptions or beliefs of disability or special education, jargon and specialized vocabulary, formal and informal communication styles, and legal system barriers.

Moreover, most Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers are not familiar with the differences between special education and general education, nor are they familiar with special education law, special education programs, or the process of special education that can serve their children with special educational needs due to their disabilities. Most of the information

shared during individualized educational plan (IEP) meetings is guided and directed by the teacher or administrator, and parents are most likely to take a passive role (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). CLD families tend to experience difficulty forming relationships with professionals, sharing ideas and resources, and making decisions that will benefit their children with disabilities (Mortier & Arias, 2020). Thus, Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers might encounter difficulties knowing or understanding what services can help and are needed to support their children's special educational needs.

According to Monzó (2013a), the most common descriptions that research label for Latina immigrant mothers are "limited in English," "submissive and unassertive," "uneducated," and "lacking knowledge about the education system" (p. 83), which are observed as not being able to advocate for their children's educational rights. Therefore, given the difficulties that Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers face in navigating special education programs, it is of great importance to add to the research the ways they experience special education and how they advocate for their children, as well as investigate their understanding of ways in which the special education system functions. Finally, Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers are aware of their children's disabilities; it is essential to understand what motivates them to learn more about special education to support their children.

During the 2018-2019 school year, in California, 54.9% of Latinx students attended public education and 12.8% of these students were enrolled in special education services. Per the California Department of Education (CDE, 2022), in the 2018-2019 school year, California provided special education services to 795,047 children from birth through 22 years of age. These students received instruction in different placements and settings, such as daycare,

preschool, regular classrooms, specially designed education, and community schools in the least restrictive environment.

Statement of the Problem

In the U.S., public schools provide many services and support to students with different disabilities. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, in 2018, the U.S. served 27.18% of Latinx students between the ages of 6-21 years. Moreover, California, New York, Texas and Florida served more than 50% of students. According to Morgan et al. (2018), over the years, research has been conducted on parents' perspectives and their views and participation in special education meetings and decision-making. In addition, parents have to make educational decisions based on their child's needs and abilities. Thus, there is a need to explore and investigate the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who are navigating the special education process and programs to support their children who have different needs and disabilities, including physical, behavioral, academic, and social challenges.

Mueller et al. (2009) described a group of Latina mothers who reported positive outcomes when attending their children's IEP meetings, expressing satisfaction with their communication with school personnel. The mothers said participating in the support group helped them feel as if they were a family because they could obtain more information and receive greater emotional support in contrast to the support received from school personnel alone. However, there are no other perspectives from Latinx mothers in the literature, which is necessary to have because the population of Latinx children who attend special education classes is growing. The issue needs to be explored to document this population's needs, as well as what may be missing in meeting the requirements of this growing sector within the U.S. school

population. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology can be described as the demonstration of the experience. It refers to understanding the way a phenomenon is perceived along with its meaning on the subject's knowledge. This specific phenomenological study sought to add meaning and context to the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers of students in special education programs.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers attending IEP meetings as they interacted with school personnel. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have a child or children with disabilities in special education and their understanding of the process of the IEP meeting regarding their children's education. This study sought to provide information regarding the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers during the IEP process, as well as their awareness of, knowledge of, barriers to, and motivation to understand special education laws, procedures, and related services that are involved in an IEP meeting as they interact with school personnel (i.e., teachers, principals, service providers, administrators). Specifically, the research sought an understanding of how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experienced this critical process to secure resources for their children with disabilities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers utilized concepts of self-determination to learn about special education and advocate for their children's educational needs.

This research study collected information from Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to develop an understanding of their experiences when attending IEP meetings while

learning about special education services to support the growth and development of their children with special educational needs. In addition, Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed their views concerning their opportunities to participate the decision-making process for their children's special educational goals, related services, and placement. Once published, this study could enable Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to share their experiences and motivation to continue participating in the IEP meetings and the educational decision-making process regarding their children with disabilities.

Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers shared their experiences as they worked with schoolteachers, administrators, and other supporting staff and were informed about the availability of special education services for their children with disabilities. The researcher studied Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences as they became more and more familiar with special education programs and ways in which they collaborated to support their children with disabilities and enabled them to succeed in school. This study can guide other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to learn about the special education process and laws that will support them during IEP decision-making. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide helpful resources and guidance to Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to advocate for and ask for clarification, as well as learn to overcome barriers when discussing their children's abilities, needs, and related services while attending special education programs and participating in the IEP process.

Importance of the Study

This study largely addresses the support necessary for immigrant Latina mothers in understanding the process of special education, such as terminology, related services, educational goals, class placement, and procedures during IEP meetings. This study can help Spanish-

speaking Latina immigrant mothers expand their knowledge and abilities within their community to guide other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities. It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to become proactive in seeking clarification and overcoming barriers when discussing their children's educational future regarding special education services in schools. Specifically, this study aimed to explore the experience of immigrant Latina mothers' determination to advocate for their children when they must make special educational decisions.

Theoretical Framework

This phenomenological study utilized the work of Guadalupe Valdes's (1996) *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools* as a theoretical framework to understand the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. In order to understand CLD families, one needs to understand their culture. Some studies on CLD families explain how a particular culture views certain thoughts, ideals, and customs, as well as how or why they are valued (Valdes, 1996). Fowler et al. (2019) conducted a survey and found that special education teachers have difficulty engaging with CLD families.

Additionally, the study utilized the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, who are best known for their work in developing self-determination theory (Pink, 2009). Self-determination theory helps describe how humans are motivated intrinsically to grow and take up challenges for their psychological and personal growth; this study studied precisely that phenomenon among Latina immigrant mothers advocating for the personal and psychological growth of their children with disabilities.

CLD mothers can describe their engagement in their children's education in a variety of ways. A study conducted by the Child Trends Hispanic Institute (Moodie & Ramos, 2014)

identified critical findings regarding how Latina mothers support their children's education and reflects their cultural values and beliefs, such as *sacrificios* (sacrifices), *consejos* (advice), and *apoyo* (moral support). These methods of support may be less apparent to the larger school culture. To Latina mothers, the goals of these forms of engagement are to increase their children's motivation to do well in school and encourage them to succeed in their education. The theoretical frameworks of this study will help educators understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' culture influences their experience with public education and how self-determination influences their motivation in learning and advocating for their children's rights in special education programs.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?
- RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education?
- RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process?

Given the minimal research regarding the experiences of immigrant Latina mothers in the special education system within the U.S., particularly when advocating for resources for their children with disabilities, this study examined their lived experiences in the educational decision-making process for their children. Per IDEA, parents participate in IEPs to be part of the decision-making process that will best support their children's success in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Parents or caregivers are members of the IEP team and have the right to agree

to evaluations, placements and related services (Mortier & Arias, 2020). According to Trainor (2010) and Turnbull (2005), parental participation in the IEP meetings are legal mandates that were established to protect children with disabilities and strengthen parent involvement. However, the accountability for the education the children receive is usually placed on the school, putting parents in a challenging role in terms of contributing to educational decision-making.

Latina immigrant mothers might have difficulty fully understanding what supports and resources can benefit their children. Therefore, it is vital to first understand their own experiences with special education and their motivation to comprehend the special education system fully before understanding the supports and resources they require for their children with disabilities.

Limitations

The target sample size was 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. A limitation in this study was that each participant described their own experiences according to their specific experiences, motivations, perspectives, and feelings related to the IEP process. The participants answered the interview questions based on their involvements in IEP, and the results they experienced after the meetings, as well as their determination and motivation to advocate for their children's educational goals.

Delimitations

This study was limited to Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have a child or children with a disability and were willing to participate in an interview. Their child's disability was one of the following: (a) autism, (b) specific learning disability, (c) other health impairment, (d) speech impairment, (e) Down syndrome, and (f) cerebral palsy. Additionally, the

mothers had some experience attending IEP meetings and participating in the process in the State of California within the previous 5 years. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers either had children currently attending public school or had a child who attended public school previously within the last 5 years. These delimitations were established in order to obtain adequate information about Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences during the educational decision-making process in the IEP meeting when discussing their children's academic support.

Assumptions

An assumption in this phenomenological study was that the participants had experience in attending and being present at an IEP meeting, as well as collaborating in some form during the decision-making process for the educational support of their children with special educational needs. Also, it was assumed that all the participants had Latinx background, language, and culture. It was also assumed that the participants would answer the interview questions in a truthful manner, and provide information about their experiences during the IEP process.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this dissertation:

- *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Families*: Minority families who are born inside or outside the U.S. and are identified with characteristics related to race, class, ethnicity, language, and disability (Rossetti & Burke, 2019).
- *Disability*: A physical or mental impairment that limits a person's movements, senses, activities, or learning (Salas, 2004).

- *Education of All Handicapped Children Act*: Law passed in 1975 to support the states in protecting children's rights with special educational needs and their families, Public Law 94-142 (Keogh, 2007).
- *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*: Under IDEA, FAPE is an educational program designed to fit the specific needs of children with special educational needs or children who qualify for special education services (Bateman, 2017; Jameson et al. 2020; Yell & Bateman, 2017).
- *Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)*: An education plan developed for students with special educational needs and mandated by IDEA (Salas, 2004).
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*: A federal law that requires school districts to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children with special educational needs. Special education and related services are provided as described in the individualized education program (in English, known as an IEP) and under public supervision to a child at no cost (Yell, 2019).
- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*: Students who have disabilities are to be educated alongside peers who are nondisabled that is as appropriate to the extent possible, as determined by the IEP. Thus, students with disabilities must have access to the education, the curriculum and other programs that are also available for their nondisabled peers. This is based on the individual needs of the student. As such, it is imperative for educational administrators to learn alongside their nondisabled peers as this provides the best opportunities of integration among their nondisabled peers. (LAUSD, 2017).

- *Latinx*: A term used to describe a Latino or Latina that was changed to Latinx to represent an all-inclusive identification that is not based on gender binary model (Cardemil et al., 2019).
- *Procedural Safeguards*: Federal Laws that school districts provide to parents informing them about the district's decisions in identifying, evaluating, and providing accommodations and related services for their children. The district also provides parents with information about informal complaint resolutions (Gray et al., 2019; Moore, 2010)
- *Spanish-speaking Latina Immigrant Mother*: A female of Latin American origin or descent who lives in the U.S. An immigrant mother born in Mexico, Central America, or South America or who has at least one parent that is Latino/a (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2015).
- *Related Services*: Per IDEA, services to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. Services include transportation, speech-language pathology, audiology services, interpretation, psychological, physical therapy, occupational therapy and etc. (Yell, 2019).
- *Special education*: Specially designed instruction to meet the needs of a child with a disability at no cost to the parents. Teaching can be provided in a classroom, home, hospital, institution, or other settings (Copenhaver, 2004).
- *Special educational needs*: A physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning disability, or other impairment that causes an individual to require additional or specialized services or accommodations in school or any other place (Alkahtani, 2016).

Organization of Study

This phenomenological study was presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study by providing background information, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the theoretical frameworks, and the research questions. Special education terminology was defined and the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of this study were presented. In Chapter 2, the literature review described the historical background of special education, the roles of Latinx parents, and barriers Latinx families experienced in receiving an education within the U.S. Moreover, CLD families are described specifically regarding how they view education in the U.S. Chapter 3 described the research design, participants, data collection, instrumentation, analysis, and subject considerations. Chapter 4 discussed the findings from the interview process, including the themes and participant information as well as tables and figures supporting the findings. Finally, in Chapter 5, the research questions were summarized and answered based on the thematic findings from the data analysis process, concluding the overall study.

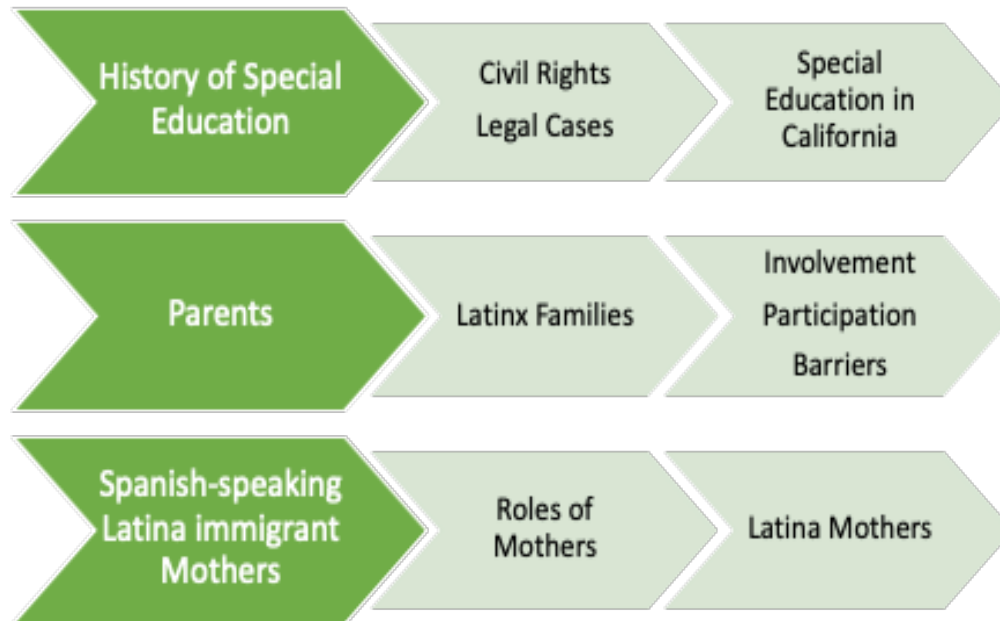
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to investigate the literature on special education history and the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers when participating in the IEP meeting on educational decision-making on behalf of their children with disabilities. CLD families who have children with disabilities might experience a disconnection between the school culture and the home culture, which may result in different views in how to approach behaviors at school and at home (Hill, 2010; Whitford & Addis, 2017).

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section describes the theoretical frameworks that were used to guide this study. The second section begins by exploring the historical context of special education, both nationally and in the context of laws in California and legal cases supporting the IDEA of 2004. A detailed description of IDEA is offered to understand parents' safeguards, rights, and involvement in the special education decision-making process regarding their children with disabilities. The third section discusses CLD families and the roles they play in their children's education.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework was derived from Valdes's (1996) work on CLD families and its connection with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Studies on CLD families explain how a particular culture views and values education (Valdes, 1996). Deci and Ryan (1985) described how humans are motivated intrinsically to grow and fulfill their psychological potential in self-determination theory.

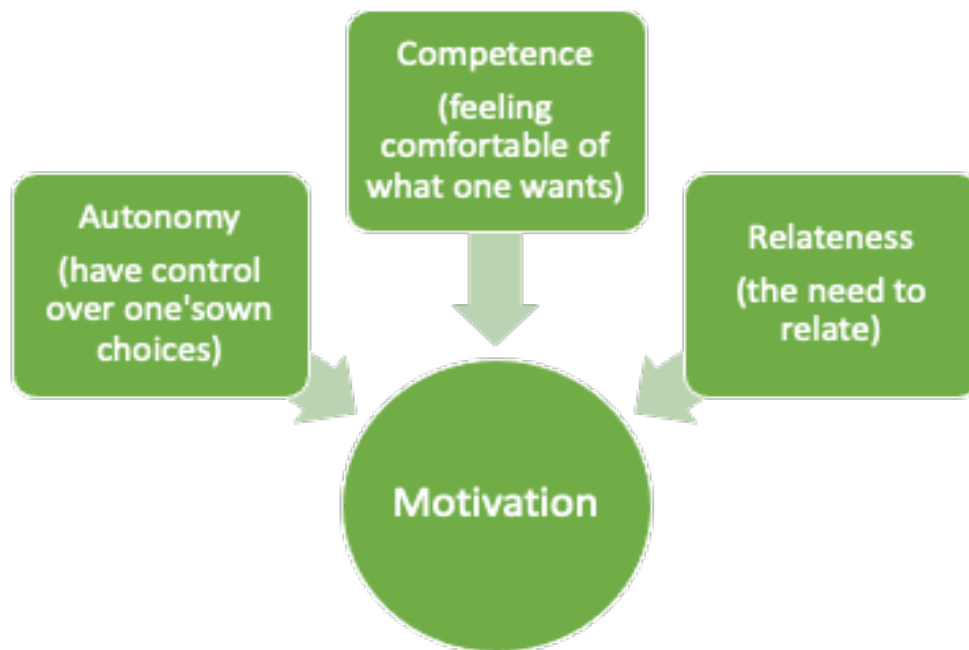
Figure 1*Overview of Literature Review****Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families***

Guadalupe Valdes's (1996) book titled, *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait*, analyzes the lived experiences of Mexican families who crossed the border looking for better job opportunities for themselves and better education for their children. CLD families value education, but in ways that are different when compared to White families. Valdes found that Mexican mothers do support their children at school and try their best to help them. However, when other family issues arise and need urgent attention, they must redirect their focus immediately. Mexican mothers tend to view education as teaching their children moral values and how to behave around adults; these mothers tend to support their children's education. Thus, in Valdes's study, the mothers supported their children by providing moral guidance and teaching family culture and values. There are variations in how the mothers encouraged their children to succeed, yet

school administrators may perceive those diverse ways of helping children as not caring about their children's education.

Additionally, Valdes (1996) reported that the Mexican family way of demonstrating how they value education is different from how non-Mexican Americans view education. In this research, the Latinx families' method of participating in their children's education is to raise children to excel and become well-behaved adults. Valdes described the Mexican mothers' views of education and the role they took as providers to teach their children how to behave in school; live life according to morals, values, and ethics; and the importance of behaving well so they would not cause problems in the classroom. Therefore, Valdes described the role of the mothers in Mexican families in the Latinx culture as being responsible for the moral teaching of their children and their development into friendly, productive members of society. For this population, moral education include guiding, modeling, providing consejos (advice), and supervising children carefully. Although the families in this study struggled to survive, had little formal schooling themselves, and had only basic knowledge about educational expectations in schools, they still valued education greatly.

Furthermore, due to the cultural values and beliefs of the Mexican families in Valdes's (1996) study, they believed and felt that they were supporting and teaching their children to be successful in school. The mothers in this book told stories describing how the two different cultures perceived success in the U.S.'s educational context. Valdes explained that understanding families' different cultural/linguistic values would increase a school's chances of successful collaboration.

Figure 2*Self-Determination Theory***Self-Determination Theory**

In addition to the aforementioned framework regarding the CLD families, this study was grounded in the framework presented by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's self-determination theory of motivation (Pink, 2009). Deci and Ryan (1985) identified three core psychological needs: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness. According to this theory, these are the motivational needs a person must meet to grow, gain fulfillment, make choices, and have control over their lives (Cherry, 2018). Self-determination theory can be applied to parents' motivational behavior because it describes the psychological needs that lead a person to choose specific behaviors and actions. According to Pink (2009), intrinsic motivation guides autonomy (having control over one's own choices), competence (feeling comfortable of one's wants), and relatedness (the need to relate). When the three psychological needs are fulfilled, a person is intrinsically motivated, productive, and satisfied. Based on Deci and Ryan's

self-determination theory, as cited in Pink's research, "Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined and connected to one another" (p. 71).

Self-determination theory can be applied to the behavior of parents when it comes to their children's education. When parents feel their psychological needs are met, they can achieve more and speak up for their children's rights. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2008), the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are based on the social environment that supports basic human needs. Deci and Ryan (1985) described the first need for autonomy as self-regulated behavior, where people need to have control over their choices and directions. The second need of competence is met when an individual feels comfortable interacting with the environment, therefore persisting in completing what they have been motivated to do. The third is human need, which is relating to people; relatedness refers to having a desire to connect and interact with others (Garn et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When people feel related to others around them, they feel close and connected, increasing their intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Both Valdes's (1996) work with Mexican mothers and Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory provide the theoretical framework that was used to understand Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers as they navigate the special education system to support their children with disabilities. Self-determination and the need to rely on familial and cultural systems are vital elements that may encourage Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to become better advocates while making decisions they believe will best serve their children.

Additionally, self-determination theory explains where Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers develop the skills and dispositions to navigate and advocate for their children's education. Given that the self-determination theory of motivation describes

individuals' three basic needs, this theory supports the developing understanding of Latina immigrant mothers' autonomy, where actions and choices surface during decision-making to support their instincts (Deci & Ryan, 1987). In self-determination, individuals pursue and advocate for their own goals, or those of someone close to them. Self-determination theory can be applied to individuals who are determined to research and advocate for the rights of others.

Together, Deci and Ryan's (1987) self-determination theory and Valdes's (1996) study of cultural and linguistic factors frame the importance of cultural values and motivation to advocate for their children's education. Thus, this study sought to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers utilized concepts of self-determination to learn about special education and support for their children's educational needs.

Historical Background of Special Education

Special Education History

The literature review of special education in the U.S. begins by providing a historical overview of special education systems internationally and in the U.S. specifically. Essential court cases that have led to the passage of critical special education laws are investigated, as well as the emergence of regulations over the decades that were passed to support parental engagement and participation in the educational decision-making regarding their children with disabilities. The literature review investigated the U.S. laws and procedures that have evolved throughout the years, exploring how parents have become part of their children's educational decision-making process when attending special education programs. In the beginning of the 20th century, students with disabilities did not receive the same support and related services as children with disabilities receive today (Kirby, 2017). Currently, the support and related services that children with disabilities are currently receiving have developed over the years through the emergence of

the Civil Rights movements and Supreme Court cases that led to laws mandating special education services for students with disabilities (Martin et al., 1996).

Before the mid-18th century, children or individuals born with a disability did not have equal rights to education (Nepo, 2017). According to Winzer (2007), during the first half of the 18th century, individuals with disabilities were treated as inferior and were not provided with the same rights or privileges in education. In addition, children with disabilities received instruction in isolated locations, far away from classmates. However, by the end of the 20th century, due to parents' demands, the U.S. began implementing laws to care for children with disabilities and built institutions for this population to receive special education and care (Nepo, 2017).

Civil Rights

Special education services for students with disabilities evolved toward the end of the 20th century due to the various court cases coming out of different states, addressing equal rights to receive education for all students with disabilities (Nepo, 2017). Before 1975, individuals with disabilities were not receiving an equal education in all the states; many were excluded from public schools and many were not receiving educational services that were appropriate to their needs (Yell et al., 2007). According to Bicehouse and Faieta (2017), special education law can be traced back to 1960, at which time schools were to provide students with disabilities specialized instruction to meet each child's individual and unique needs. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, many advocacy groups, made up of parents of children with disabilities, emerged and demanded equal education for their children. These advocacy groups fought hard to receive federal funds that would support students with disabilities and enabled them to receive a free public education (Collins & Ludlow, 2018).

In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to provide educational opportunities for underprivileged students who were not receiving an education equal to their same-age peers from a higher socioeconomic class. The law implemented resources to ensure that students had access to quality education (Wright, n.d.). The following year, in 1966, Congress amended the ESEA, adding Title IV, which provided funds and established programs and resources supporting children with disabilities. Between 1965-1968, Congress revised ESEA a few times to modify specific details. For example, federal funds were given to the states, and the states then distributed those funds to the local school districts; the districts spread the funds to support related services for students with disabilities (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017).

Before 1970, students with disabilities received education, but with minimal assistance from teachers. In 1970, President Nixon signed the first education law federal law for students with disabilities known as the Education of the Handicapped Act (EAHCA), which provided states with more funds for resources and support for students with disabilities. In 1975, Congress passed the EAHCA, which stated that all children attending school in the U.S. were required to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE; S. J. Hernandez, 2013). The law also mandated the collaboration process, where school professionals and related services had to work together to develop and implement an IEP for all students with disabilities. After the law passed in 1975, children with disabilities were able to attend schools with same-age peers for the first time instead of being relegated to private institutions. During this time, several teachers began to explore best practices and developed policies to support students with disabilities. The EAHCA of 1975 was passed into law due to the different investigations and lawsuits made by parents and

advocates, mandating and ensuring that all students with disabilities would receive a FAPE, including due process rights (Collins & Ludlow, 2018).

During this era, the outcomes of essential court cases also influenced the education of students with disabilities. The first notable case was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 1954, which encouraged parents of children with disabilities to fight for equal education rights. The second case was *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PARC)* of 1972. PARC was a case about the exclusion of students with disabilities from public education settings. The third case was *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*. The Mills case was about how the District of Columbia failed to provide support in education and the students were suspended and excluded without due process (Russo et al., 1994).

The PARC Supreme Court of 1972 demanded public education for students with disabilities (Li, 2013). In this case, PARC sued the state of Pennsylvania for denying education to a student with a disability who had not yet reached the mental age of five. PARC won and children ages 6-21 with disabilities were provided with free public education in the state (Li, 2013).

A critical case that made it to the Supreme Court and made an impact in providing more related services to students with disabilities was *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* of 1972, which built on the PARC case (Chinn, 2004). The case supported children with needs related to behavior, hyperactivity, and mental and emotional problems who were denied education due to their behaviors. The District of Columbia claimed that they did not have enough funds to support and provide education to students with different disabilities. Mills argued that they had a legal right to receive an equal education. The court ruled that no child

should be left without an education, regardless of their disability (mental, behavior, or hyperactivity), and that insufficient funds from the districts are no excuse to deny the students public education. It resulted in adjusting and dividing the funds to serve all students equally. These cases opened doors for new laws to emerge, which now support students with disabilities in receiving an equal education and the same opportunities as every other student attending a public school (Forte Law Group, n.d.).

Due to the many violations of special education procedural rights, special education litigation has increased during the last decade and continues to rise (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017). Special education law mandates that every school district provide FAPE to every student with a disability who has an IEP. However, some school districts have failed to provide FAPE and resources to most students with disabilities, resulting in lawsuits and court cases where the courts have concluded that the parents' procedural rights have been denied.

Throughout the years, the federal government has passed different laws supporting individuals with disabilities to receive a free public education. However, the first special education Supreme Court case that described and identified a FAPE was the *Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* (Tucker, 1983). The case was about a young child named Amy Rowley who was deaf and had an IEP. She received 1 hour a day of interpreter services; however, her parents were seeking more interpreter services because they saw that Amy was not learning to her potential with the minimal support received, and she was not advancing in her classes (Zirkel, 2013). The Rowley case set a foundation for the term FAPE, a central piece in the current IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), which mandates school districts throughout the country to provide each student with a disability placement in the least restrictive environment (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017).

The Supreme Court case of *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro* of 1984 (O'Hara, 1986) opened the door to provide education to students who need special services (e.g., physical therapy, adapted physical education). This case was about a child named Amber Tatro who had spina bifida and needed to be assisted by a nurse for her medical condition. The school denied the services because they claimed they were not a medical facility but an educational institute. However, under EAHCA, the district receives federal funds to provide students with disabilities related services (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, transportation) that support the student in special education classes. The case won and schools were mandated to provide related services to students with medical needs in the classroom. This was the first case where a child with a disability needed medical care, a nurse was assigned to her, and she could attend school with the required medical support in the least restrictive environment. Another major Supreme Court decision case that influenced how the funds for special education programs are distributed was the case of the *School Committee of Town of Burlington, Mass v. Massachusetts Department of Education* (1985). Parents of children with disabilities were reimbursed for school expenses when their children attended a private school because the school district could not meet the definition of FAPE.

Many of the changes and mandated law currently in place were forged by parents advocating for their children's educational rights. Due to some negligence from school districts in supporting and providing a FAPE, parents have sued school districts so that their children and other children with disabilities or special needs could receive an education regardless of their disability. Parents have been the primary resource in supporting their children and knowing what related services will best serve their children. Parents participating in educational decision-making demonstrate that they are determined to fight for their children's educational rights.

Table 1*Landmark Supreme Court Cases for Students With Special Educational Needs*

Dates	Landmark Supreme Cases	Implication
1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	Segregated public schools.
1972	<i>PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</i>	All students with disabilities benefit from educational programs, free public programs appropriate to the child's capacity.
1972	<i>Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia</i>	Expanded PARC and the district had to provide funds to provide related services to the students with "mental, behavioral, physical or emotional handicaps or deficiencies."
1982	<i>Board of Education Hendrick Hudson School District v. Amy Rowley</i>	First case that identified Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
1984	<i>Irving Independent School District v. Tatro</i>	School health services and medical services and related services required in schools.
1985	<i>School Committee of Town of Burlington, Mass v. Massachusetts Department of Education</i>	Parents waive their rights to reimbursement if they decide to place their child in a different placement (schools), unless the placement (school) is agreed in the IEP meeting.

The legislation implemented throughout the years has changed special education in the U.S. Laws have evolved to provide more benefits and describe in detail the support students with disabilities must receive at school. These laws and rules have helped students with disabilities receive the most appropriate education possible according to their needs. Over the years, the laws have changed and improved to provide the most appropriate related services to students based on their needs, enabling many students with disabilities to succeed in many areas. Some students have gone on to attend college and became independent adults in society. These court cases demonstrate that parents are determined to advocate for their children's educational rights,

building knowledge of related services that will help improve their children's education regardless of their limitations and abilities.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The passing of IDEA was the turning point for children's educational rights in the U.S. IDEA supports states in protecting the rights and meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities in receiving an appropriate education. The two parts that determine whether the district meets FAPE are called procedural and substantive (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017). The first procedural point refers to the question of whether the school district has complied with the various procedures, such as notifying parents in advance of IEPs, arranging a time where both parents and district personnel can meet, and having parents participate in the IEP meeting. The second substantive point refers to the IEP, describing the educational benefits the child/student will receive in their school (i.e., related services).

Special Education Law

This section discusses special education law and its federal mandates to serve all student with disabilities, support parent involvement in educational decision-making, and promote the educational rights of children with disabilities. A summary of the parental safeguards and meaning of an IEP process and guidelines for parents to be aware of will be presented subsequently. According to Cavendish and Conner (2018), IDEA of 2004 clearly states the expectation of parent involvement in educational decision-making for their children with disabilities. Per IDEA, parents are equal partners in the educational decision-making process (Landmark et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 1997, 2004). The following process describes parents' involvement in the process per IDEA according to Siegel (2017), such as:

- prereferral,

- referral,
- identification,
- eligibility,
- development of the individualized education plan, and
- implementation of the IEP.

During the last 40 years, new laws and policy changes have occurred under the EAHCA and family engagement has been federally mandated (Rossetti et al., 2017). In 1990, an amendment of the EAHCA changed its name to the IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In 2004 IDEA was amended; Part B and Part C were added. These sections of IDEA included early intervention for children younger than age 3. Overall, the changes made to IDEA in 2006 established standards and structure procedures to help students with disabilities obtain an individualized education according to their abilities. IDEA of 2006 also emphasizes collaboration and partnership with CLD families during the IEP process (Rossetti et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In general, however, families have described a lack of collaboration during the IEP process, resulting in them advocating for outside related services that their children need (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). Table 2 offers an overview of significant legislation related to special education laws. These laws represent the most critical and impactful legislation in the U.S. that has shaped current teaching and serving students with disabilities in schools.

Table 2*Legislation Passed to Support Students in Special Education Programs*

Date s	Legislation	Implication
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)	Provide the opportunity for underprivileged students who were not receiving an equal education.
1970	Education of Handicapped Act (P.L. 91-230)	Provided states with more funds for resources and support for students with disabilities.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) P.L 94-142	Children attending school in the U.S. were guaranteed and enforced to receive a free and appropriate public education. Provide unique education suited to the need of the disability the student had in the “least restrictive environment.”
1990 1997	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Re-authorization of 1997. Revisions- individual education plans (IEP) for all special education students and the individualized transition plans (ITPs) were established. Students were provided with school options and individualized attention as needed. Standards were established.
2004	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Specialized services to children with disabilities from age birth to 21, equal access to education, technology assistance and loan programs were added to support the schools.

Special Education in California

In California, IDEA, the special education law is followed at the federal level. California has 13 special education qualifications by which a student can meet criteria for special education services. States can offer more protection or educational services to children with disabilities but cannot provide less than what the federal laws have established. The CDE ensures that all the school districts that serve students with disabilities follow federal rights and guidelines. In

addition, the CDE (2022) has established parents' rights as the procedural safeguard for students with disabilities. During an initial IEP introductions parents receive a resource booklet describing the disabilities for which a child can qualify and the special education services available.

Per the CDE (2022), parents have the right to participate in developing their child's IEP and receive prior written notice in their native language whenever a change needs to be made in the child's IEP. Parents have the right to provide written evidence if they agree for their child to be assessed or if any changes need to be made in the child's special educational services. The district must make sure that the parents understand the process of the IEP and make arrangements for an interpreter if one is needed. The parents also have the right to refuse to consent. Children who are assessed for special education must be given a nondiscriminatory assessment through methods that are not culturally biased or discriminatory. Parents also have the right to request an independent educational evaluation if they disagree with the district's results. Parents also have the right to access their child's academic records for review.

In California, when parents disagree with an educational placement decision, the law supports the students and the child remains in their current school placement until the dispute is resolved. The parents have the right to be given a hearing regarding disagreements about FAPE in the IEP and have an attorney or advocate present for them during the due process hearing. Parents are also provided with information on mediation, where they can consider settling their disagreement through voluntary mediation in which both parties agree mutually to a solution regarding the child's education program. If parents still feel that the district has violated the law, they can file a complaint with the CDE, investigating any violations of noncompliance with IDEA and the state's special education laws (CDE, 2022). Some barriers experienced by CLD

families during the IEP process could be due to the school staff's lack of cultural responsiveness, unwillingness to provide appropriate accommodations to translate or have a translator present during the IEP meeting, or providing limited or unclear information to families (Rossetti et al., 2017).

The Role of Parents

In 2004, the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) recognized the vital role of parents and families and the need to involve them in educating their children with disabilities. Parents' involvement in their children's IEP process refers to the collaboration or input they have with the special education teacher and other service providers (speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, adapted physical education; Olivos et al., 2010).

In addition to attending general education meetings, parents of children with disabilities participate in meetings to discuss their children's educational support, rights, and proper classroom placement. When parents are raising a child with a disability, their decisions about their education require more awareness and understanding of the different programs and resources available to support them. The children are placed in schools and programs that best facilitate their learning conditions and overall development (Kirby, 2017).

Under educational laws, parents are mandated to participate and become involved in educational decision-making (Fish, 2008; Lalvani, 2012). IDEA required that parents who have children ages 3-21 with a disability have specific educational rights and must be active participants in the decision-making regarding their children's education (Fish, 2008; Tamzarian et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Under IDEA, parents' rights are called procedural safeguards. Parents have the right to participate in decision-making regarding their

child's IEP and schools are mandated to maintain a collaborative relationship with parents (Lalvani, 2012; Tamzarian et al., 2012).

The collaborative relationship between parents and school professionals should persist throughout the IEP development process (Lalvani, 2012). IDEA mandates that parent involvement is part of the planning and decision-making for their child's education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Therefore, school districts need to establish methods by which they can support and acknowledge parents as part of the decision-making for the IEP team.

According to the IDEA legislation, students who attend schools in the U.S. must be offered a FAPE, which means that all students with disabilities are entitled to the same education as their peers/classmates (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). IDEA refers to the concept of LRE, where all "students with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent possible, alongside their typically developing peers, with the provision of support needed" (Lalvani, 2012, p. 475). For example, it appears that Latinx students with disabilities are often served in more restrictive environments. Pérez et al. (2008) reported that Latinx students are overrepresented in a separate classroom setting and are underrepresented in traditional classroom settings.

Latinx Families

According to Moreno and Bullock (2015), Latinx had become the largest ethnic minority group, representing more than 16% of the general population (U.S Census Bureau, 2013). In U.S. schools, Latinx students represent 23.9% of students enrolled in grades K-12 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). Although the Latinx population is increasing, the overall population of school faculty remains homogeneous. Additionally, 86% of U.S. teachers are white females under the age of 40 (Moreno & Bullock, 2015). Given this data, Latinx students are overrepresented when referred to special education for learning disabilities or speech/language impairment. Some

referrals of Latinx students to special education are made due to a lack of understanding of the Latinx culture and assuming that parents are not involved in their child's education. According to Grace and Gerdes (2019), Latina mothers reported having limited experience with the school system. Latina mothers reported not understanding the school's policies and procedures, stating that sometimes they were unable to attend IEP meetings due to transportation issues.

Parental Involvement

Epstein and Salinas (2004) described several different types of parental involvement and parent participation as well as the influence of these factors on students' achievement. However, minimal research has been conducted regarding how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers participate in or are involved in their children's special education or how active their participation is in educational decision-making regarding their children with disabilities (Mueller et al., 2009). To ensure school accountability, parents must participate actively in their children's education. Epstein (2001) recommended six types of parent involvement that help parents become involved at home and school to help meet students' needs, given families' busy schedules. The types of involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. Epstein described a form of parenting classes to support the family and enable them to understand their children's developmental and life milestones, as well as for the school to understand families' cultures, goals in life, and backgrounds. Interaction between the teachers and parents another creates two-way communication and involves families in school programs and student success. Volunteering involves including families in school activities and training by volunteering and supporting the school. Learning at home involves families with their children participating in homework activities where the whole family can share and discuss topics of interest. Decision-making

includes the families in committees and parent organizations where they can make decisions to support the school. In collaborating with the community, schools task community groups and agencies (such as universities or local nonprofit organizations) with providing resources and information to families.

When families become active participants in their children's education, it enhances their children's learning in school and outside. Research has shown that programs that help parents be involved and participate in their children's academic work help students succeed in school (Epstein et al., 2009). According to Epstein et al. (2009), one of the main reasons for creating a school-family partnership is to help all children succeed in school and life. She described three overlapping spheres that support students' success: school, family, and community. When these three spheres partner to organize, share ideas, and responsibilities, they work together, helping students be productive members of society.

When students feel cared for, they engage more in learning and are more likely to complete their assignments. As such, students are encouraged to learn about different subjects and are motivated to stay in school (Epstein et al., 2009). Family influence plays a vital role in children going to school because children believe and listen to their parents. Therefore, when parents are involved in their children's education by attending meetings, parent conferences, ceremonies, and volunteer work, children feel encouraged. When children observe their parents taking part in their education, they are more motivated and enthusiastic, ready to learn and succeed. Children feel protected and safe when they are with their parents. Additionally, children care about their parents regardless of their socioeconomic status (SES), skin color, or position in life. Thus, when a parent is involved in the school and community, it is most likely that the child will succeed. Researchers have demonstrated that parental involvement has a positive effect on

children's educational progress and academic outcome. When parents become involved in their children's education, children show increased engagement in school performance and academic achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick et al., 2000; Jeynes, 2007). Research shows that parental involvement is related to student achievement, achieving an eighth-grade reading level, and lower school dropout rates (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Hossler et al., 1989; Perna, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005).

However, it is important to consider the role of the mother in school involvement, especially that of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. Hence, looking at what the research says about mothers in general and Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in particular when participating in their children's education is vital toward understanding this study of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers and the IEP experience. One barrier Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experience when becoming involved in their children's education is language. In a study by Grace and Gerdes (2019), parents reported that they were unable to immerse themselves in school activities because they could not communicate regarding asking about volunteering or attending special events (Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Terriquez, 2012).

Another study by Walker et al. (2011) regarding Latinx parents' motivation for involvement found that 55% of the Latinx parents reported being involved in-home activities and 49% were involved in school-related activities. The study found three culturally related forms of Latinx parental involvement in their children's education:

- Latinx parents were involved in supporting their children at home.

- Latinx parents showed greater involvement at home rather than at school because, at home, they have the opportunity to help their children at any time of the day. When compared to school, there are specific hours/times for events.
- Latinx parents were motivated to participate in either home or school activities.

However, if Latinx parents received specific teacher invitations in order for them to participate at school, they would be more engaged (Walker et al., 2011). In conclusion, Latinx parent involvement is seen more at home than at school (Valdes, 1996). Supporting from home with activities makes it easier for parents to help their children. Latinx parents are less likely to attend school meetings or other activities at school due to the many aforementioned challenges.

Parental Participation and Collaboration

Williams-Diehm et al. (2014) conducted another study on parent involvement and participation in the IEP process to determine if the environmental setting (rural, urban and suburban environments) affects the levels of parent participation and involvement in the IEP meeting and process. The researchers compared rural, urban, and suburban settings to determine differences in the level of parental participation. According to Brownell et al. (2006), most participants (teachers, related services staff) in the IEP are not prepared to work collaboratively with all the team members. In an IEP meeting, the participants (school administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, students and other related services) are meant to collaborate and communicate effectively and agree on appropriate goals to support the students' educational needs.

Additionally, Williams-Diehm et al. (2014) sought to determine the difference in levels of collaboration and participation in the IEP process between teachers and parents in different environmental settings. They concluded that students from rural school districts had a higher

level of student involvement. Parents reported that their involvement required more time and being more aware of their child's needs. In an IEP meeting, the process can constrain parents' communication because of their limited proficiency in the English language (Tamzarian et al., 2012). Also, not fully understanding the language and the special education terminology can limit parents' ability to comprehend the meeting fully.

According to Tamzarian et al. (2012), school professionals can overlook nonverbal communication, leaving parents with a minimal understanding of the IEP meeting. Furthermore, professionals can ignore or be unaware of the families' cultural beliefs, affecting the families' participation in IEP meetings. To foster a successful meeting and collaboration, professionals need to understand both parents' verbal and nonverbal barriers, such as how parents express their concerns and agreements through verbal and non-verbal expressive communication. According to Hughes et al. (2008), Latinx families reported that their level of involvement in their child's education was different and more complicated when compared to their involvement in the education of their non-disabled children.

Barriers to Parents' Engagement

Parents are active participants in making educational decisions for their children with disabilities. Parents' participation is essential when it comes to deciding their children's educational placement and related services. A child with special educational needs will benefit from enrolling in or attending a school/class that matches their development and abilities. The federal law IDEA mandates that schools help parents be active participants in planning their children's education during IEP meetings (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, studies have shown that parents who do not speak English are unlikely to be included fully in the IEP process. Differences in culture limit communication between parents and professionals

during IEP meetings, although professionals may assume that the parents understand the information provided (Tamzarian et al., 2012).

According to Olivos et al. (2010), one of the barriers to collaboration between the school and CLD families is that the school personnel view more academic success as supporting students with disabilities, whereas the parents are more motivated their personal experiences. This barrier prevents parents from collaborating with teachers or service providers because they view their progress differently. Understanding CLD families' culture, language, race, and SES is key to engaging in collaboration. Parents' cultural backgrounds have a strong impact on the decisions they make.

According to Valdes (1996), barriers such as language and communication differences make it difficult for parents and school staff to communicate effectively with each other. Due to the different cultural beliefs and acceptance of children with disabilities, parents also have a difficult time with collaboration and involvement in their children's education. According to Olivos et al. (2010), the framework illustrates how school and CLD families with children with disabilities can foster an environment of collaboration.

Factors that may influence how CLD parents understand their children's disability include their belief system, cultural values, views of the disability, and engagement in their child's education (Harlin & Rodriguez 2009; Ijalba, 2015). According to Gonzales and Gabel (2017), one barrier that limits CLD parents from participating in school functions is childcare compared to White parents. However, they found studies showing that CLD parents do participate. CLD parents' involvement and participation in school look different in that they join with their children more at home (Bower & Griffin, 2011). In a study of parents with special education children, the teachers perceived that the Latinx parents were not involved because their

involvement was not visible and not what they traditionally observed from other parents (Geenen et al., 2001). A study conducted by Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) found that Latinx parents shared oral stories about their past experiences, which is how they passed their knowledge to their children. Other activities involved attending church, visiting parks and extended family members, sharing culture, and celebrating religious holidays.

Latinx parents experience different barriers in the school system when they have a child with a disability. Some parents have difficulty communicating with the school to support their children with school homework and resources. One study conducted by Hughes et al. (2008) found that Latinx families desired to see increased communication between the school and home. The Latinx families expressed that they wanted to see more communication regarding classroom activities and felt frustrated when they could not understand the English language. They also said that, at the time, they were not aware of what was going on in school, which made it difficult for them to support their children at home. The study also found that Latinx families wanted the school to provide them with more resources regarding how they could assist their children at home with more activities, such as higher educational work to meet their goals.

In Lalvani's (2012) study, low SES parents reported knowing less about or being unfamiliar with special education laws and not fully understanding classroom placements that could be considered for their children with disabilities. These parents were also less familiar with the term LRE; their children were usually placed in a self-contained classroom separate from the general education population. The study also found that the parents were familiar with inclusion programs but did not believe it would be a good fit for their children due to their disability. When comparing children from low SES backgrounds to children of similar disabilities from the high SES group, it was noted that the higher SES children attended classes that were less

restricted and were in inclusive programs even when the two SES groups attended the same school.

A few barriers found in the IEP process by Williams-Diehm et al. (2014) study are the IEP time scheduled, which at times makes it difficult for parents and supported services providers to meet. Also the differences in opinions from the team, which resulted in conflict between parents and school personnel and a lack of group participation. Only 12% of the teachers from the study in the rural environments reported that they did not have enough time to collaborate with parents due to conflict with time and scheduling arrangements. However, in suburban and urban environments, 25-30% of parents collaborated in the IEP process. Although parent participation was high for all three environmental settings, the percentage of the collaboration process was higher for rural with having teachers participate more with the parents, about 87%.

The Role of Mothers in Education

Ratelle et al. (2021) described parents as having the role of the first actor; they are their child's first educators and the first to make educational decisions. Parents (both mother and father) play different roles in raising and educating their children. According to Ceka and Murati (2015), parents have different functions when raising their children; they care for their health, physical development, education, moral values, and attitudes, and teach them about their culture. Mothers play different roles when raising their children because they have to teach them, educate them, and help them be productive members of society.

Role of Latina Mothers in their Children's Educational Development

Latina mothers have a different view of their role when it comes to their children's education. The women who Valdes (1996) interviewed viewed their role as mothers as

encompassing teaching their children moral values, ethics, and how to behave with adults (i.e., be respectful and obedient). Gulman et al. (2007) described Latina mothers in the U.S. as passive. They are also described as racial and linguistic minority women who do not have a profession and depend on others to guide them (Monzó, 2013b). However, Monzó's (2013a) paper on mothers' humiliation was written to support Latina mothers and challenge the belief that Latina mothers are not interested in their children's education and have little knowledge of school policies. If school staff take the time to listen to their concerns, they will have a different understanding of how Latinxs' engage in education—understanding that Latina mothers come from different cultures and worldviews of education is crucial in understanding their participation.

The literature review conducted by Poza et al. (2014) reported findings on the perspective of school personnel towards Latinx immigrants' parents. The school perceived the parents as uninformed and not engaged or prepared to support their children's education. However, Poza et al.'s study found a different point of view from parents. Based on their interviews, the Latinx parents did demonstrate an interest and involvement in their children's education in ways that are not as noticeable to school personnel, for example, asking if they have completed their homework, taking them to school and telling their children to be obedient and follow directions. Nonetheless, parents also reported some obstacles that impede them from participating precisely as the school expects them to. A few of the challenges that impeded Latinx immigrant parents from participating in school functions were the language barrier, different schedules (working hours), and limited financial resources (paying for childcare).

A study conducted by Mueller et al. (2009) investigated mothers' experiences with the educational system and the support they received when participating in a parent support group.

The participants in this study were eight Spanish-speaking mothers who had children receiving special education services. When asked about the school and their children's teachers, the mothers expressed positive views and said that they were kind and cared for their children but did not understand their culture.

Additionally, Mueller et al.'s (2009) study shared about the experiences mothers had when participating in a parent support group. The eight Spanish-speaking mothers who participated in this study had children who qualified for special education services. The participants were interviewed in their primary language, Spanish. The findings from this study offered the mothers' perspective of the parent support group. The mothers reported that the support group provided them with networking opportunities, which the district did not. It also enabled them to talk about their daily stresses and the language barriers they experienced living in the U.S. The mothers also described how they felt alone in the special education system before joining the group, which enabled them to share similar experiences and support each other.

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the literature review of previous works exploring special education cases and laws in the U.S., particularly in California. This chapter also tried to present sources that have documented parent engagement for families with children with disabilities. Furthermore, this chapter also explained the theoretical frameworks for this research study. Specifically, this work drew on the history of special education and its impact on CLD families. It also focused on Latinx families and Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers and their participation in the special education services of their children with disabilities. The literature also reviewed works on the engagement of Latinx parents who have children with disabilities and the barriers they face when making educational decisions for their children with disabilities.

There is limited research found on Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers providing input into the special education meetings to support their children. Thus, after reviewing the literature, it was concluded that this study was necessary to further understand the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in the special education system.

The literature further demonstrated that special education in the U.S. has evolved by modifying federal laws to support parent participation and involvement in educational decision-making regarding their children with disabilities. The legislation that led to IDEA mandated that parents be actively involved in the education of their children with disabilities. Mothers are the primary caregivers; thus, they know their children's best interests and have valuable information that can support children with disabilities in their development and success throughout their education. The limited studies available were examined to complete this literature review to understand the ways Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have participated in the IEP process and make educational decisions for their children with disabilities. Specifically, this literature review investigated Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' perspectives and experiences in the educational decision-making process in special education.

An essential part of IDEA is that parents become active participants in their children's educational decision-making process. Hence, during the IEP meetings, parents have the right to be engaged in the process, from the evaluation process to determining how the related services will be delivered (Mueller et al., 2009). Research demonstrated that there have been conflicts in collaboration during this process, especially with families who are CLD (Harry 1992; Harry et al., 1999; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Studies have shown that Latinx parents and mothers who only speak Spanish have difficulty communicating and engaging in

their children's education (Grace & Gerdes, 2019; Moreno & Bullock, 2015) due to the lack of understanding of the language and special terms used to describe their children's disabilities.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers attending IEP meetings as they interacted with school personnel. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children in special education and their understanding of the process of the IEP meeting regarding their children's education with disabilities. This qualitative phenomenological study provided information regarding the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers during the IEP process, as well as their awareness of, knowledge of, barriers against, and motivation to understand special education laws and procedures involved in an IEP meeting.

Specifically, this phenomenological study sought to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experienced this critical process to secure resources that addressed their children's special education needs. Thus, the goal of this study was to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers became familiar with special education programs and how they collaborated to support their children's special educational services.

The phenomenological research study collected narratives from Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers through interviews to develop an understanding of their experiences with special education in general and, more specifically, when attending IEP meetings and learning about special education services to support the growth and development of their children with disabilities. Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were able to express their views regarding their opportunities in decision-making for their children's special educational goals, related services, and placement.

Research Approach and Design

This study was based on the qualitative tradition, specifically using a phenomenological research approach. Phenomenology supports researchers in understanding the in-depth lived experiences of the sample, asking the participants to describe their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology is an early 20th-century philosophy established by Edmund Husserl (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). According to Sokolowski (2000) and Stewart and Mickunas (1974), phenomenology involves the descriptions and analysis of lived experiences to understand the meaning of interaction with the environment that shapes people's perceptions of the world. "The goal of phenomenology study is to describe the meaning of lived experience of a phenomenon" (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1,373). Phenomenological analysis involves close examination of people's experiences and its goal is to capture the meaning of common experiences and the truth of the event (Creswell, 2014)

In qualitative research, the researcher collects and analyzes data. Qualitative research involves face-to-face (or virtual) interaction and participants answering the interview questions. The data is usually collected in the participant's natural environment and then analyzed to generate specific themes so that the researcher can determine the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

During this research, qualitative notes were collected through personal interviews; the participants described their experiences as Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in relation to their familiarity with special education and determination to support their children in IEP meetings. Thus, Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were able to describe their experiences and knowledge regarding the educational process of their children with disabilities. Additionally, the researcher observed how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers'

motivation and self-determination helped them participate in the IEP meetings and advocate for their children with disabilities in special education programs.

Another key goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities as they navigated the school system, including what motivated them to continue participating in IEP meetings. Accordingly, this study determined whether or not Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers received resources, support, and the opportunity to participate and collaborate in decision-making regarding their children's academic edification in special education programs. Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were asked to describe their experiences, feelings, and perceptions before, during, and after an IEP meeting. Additionally, this work inquired about the opportunities that motivated Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in the decision-making process regarding their children's educational goals.

Restatement of Research Questions

The following research questions also had corresponding interview questions that were provided to participants before the interviews. Each research question had two to three interview questions. The research questions and corresponding interview questions were as follows:

- RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?
 - What understanding do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have in the area of special education?
 - How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers define special education?

- Has the time spent on special education issues built their understanding of special education?
- RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education?
 - Do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers feel a welcoming approach when working with special education personnel?
 - If participation has occurred, has it been with school personnel and has it made a difference in their experiences with special education?
 - How did the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers become aware of special education terminology?
- RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process?
 - Are Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers able to address concerns with school personnel?
 - What can be done differently to support their children and families?

Research Design and Rationale

This research study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology to better understand the lived experiences and perspectives of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have been and are currently involved in the special education process of their children with disabilities. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with the mothers regarding their participation and experiences in the IEP process.

The information provided by the participants were private experiences that were subjective to each individual. Each person described her point of view of being a Spanish-

speaking Latina immigrant mother in the special education system and participating in decision-making regarding their children with special educational needs. As noted by Bernard and Ryan (2009), behaviors and thoughts of humans everywhere can be seen and heard in text or speech. For instance, people's thoughts can be found in diaries, speeches, and interviews. The data permits the researcher to analyze the information many times to answer different research questions. According to Bernard and Ryan, when a set of questions are arranged, it ensures that all the participants respond to the same set of questions. Thus, the participants answered the same interview questions and were able to extend their answers based on their experiences. Narrative responses were collected from 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who described their experience in their children's IEP process.

Neubauer et al. (2019) explained that it is vital for researchers to learn from the experiences of others. They further explained that research involves detailed studies of samples (individual, groups, society) to analyze information and reach a new understanding of the participants and their experiences. As such, the participants were asked to describe their experiences when partaking in their children's school personnel in IEP meetings. The objective of phenomenology is to recount the meaning of the experience in two forms: what was experienced and how it was experienced (Teherani et al., 2015).

The participants told the story of their personal life experiences, describing how they felt during the IEP meetings and their experiences when making educational decisions for their children with disabilities. Each participant answered the interview questions based on the feelings, personal growth, and emotions they have experienced by being part of the collaboration process when making decisions regarding their children's education. The narratives addressed the central research questions by allowing the participants to describe their experiences as

Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers engaged in the educational decision-making regarding their children with disabilities.

Sources of Data

This study collected data from a nonprofit community-based organization by the pseudonym of Collaboration Community located in Southern California. The nonprofit organization provides parents of children with disabilities with resources and current information on supporting their children. This nonprofit community-based organization was established in 2018 to help families with children with disabilities. The person directing this nonprofit community-based organization is a Spanish-speaking woman who provides resources and information to families with children with disabilities. She has established relationships with parents and meets with them virtually on a weekly basis, providing parents with information and related services available in the state to support their children with disabilities.

This nonprofit community-based organization connects with parents through various Regional Centers in California. The nonprofit community-based organization works with a team of people who dedicate their time to guiding families individually or in groups. The organization has provided training throughout the years to parents with children with disabilities. They also provide the families with the latest resources and information from the state.

In California, the Department of Developmental Services is responsible for implementing and coordinating different services for California residents with developmental disabilities. The services are provided by the 21 locally-based regional centers located throughout the state. Regional centers are nonprofit private corporations providing local resources to help individuals with developmental disabilities find services available to them and their families (California Department of Developmental Services, n.d.).

The nonprofit community-based organization provides guidance and support to parents of children with disabilities. It also helps promote self-advocates and parents promote equity and equality for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The researcher explained the phenomenology research study to the organization's director and asked for permission to participate in one of the weekly virtual meetings. The researcher recruited participants from a community-based organization by attending a weekly virtual meeting at which she introduced the phenomenology study. The researcher shared the flier with the potential participants in the virtual Zoom meeting.

Participants, Sample and Sampling Procedures

As stated previously, this phenomenological study solicited participants from a nonprofit community-based organization that serves the Latinx community and Latinx parents who have children with disabilities. The research pursued approval from the director of the community-based organization. The researcher interviewed 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers across California who have children with various disabilities. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have experience attending IEP meetings and have supported their children's development and education. Additionally, these mothers experienced overcoming barriers to receive the appropriate related services for their children with disabilities. Phenomenological research was deemed the most appropriate approach because this study targeted a small group of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have experience participating in the decision-making process regarding their children's education.

The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother participants who were interviewed for this phenomenological study live in California and have children attending public schools in California. The experiences of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers differed based on

their children's disability and their own knowledge of special education. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers must have had children attending kindergarten through 12th grade or have had children attending a California public school within the past 10 years and have attended at least one IEP meeting.

The target population for this qualitative phenomenological study was Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers living in California who had at least one child with special educational needs (i.e., learning disability, multiple disabilities, autism). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the criteria for potential candidates should be completed in advance of the collection date in order to ensure the participants qualify. For this study, random sampling was conducted and the sample included mothers who participated in weekly Zoom meetings offered by the nonprofit community-based organization. Information was provided to prospective participants through emails and a letter explaining the study and research process. The researcher described the purpose of the study and the importance of learning from their experiences with special education and attending IEP meetings.

The researcher invited more than 20 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the study with the aim of recruiting 12 participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological study may include five to 25 participants. The participants were chosen depending on their participation in the IEP meeting process because they needed to have experienced the same phenomenon to demonstrate a shared understanding of their lived experiences in the process. The researcher participated in a weekly Zoom meeting held by the community-based organization and identified immigrant Latina mothers.

Criteria for Participation

This study required that all the participants had to meet the following criteria of inclusion in order to be eligible for the study:

- they were required to be the biological mother of the child,
- they were required to be Spanish-speaking Latina immigrants,
- they must have been part of an IEP meeting at least one time,
- their children needed to have attended public school in California,
- their children were required to have a disability and have an IEP, and
- they needed to have experience with the IEP process.

Additionally, the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers must have had children in grades K-12, or had children attending a California public school within the past 10 years, and have attended one IEP meeting.

After receiving approval from the director of the community-based organization to participate in one of the weekly virtual meetings to make an invitation, the researcher sent the recruitment letter to the potential participants via email. Until the number of participants as established, the researcher continued to send daily emails to potential participants. Once the a participant agreed to participate, the informed consent form was provided.

Human Subject Considerations

Prior to conducting the research study, the researcher received the CITI human subjects certification (see Appendix A). Following this, the proposal was submitted to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. The researcher submitted to the IRB an exempt research application to meet Pepperdine University's guidelines. Pepperdine University promotes and facilitates the protection of human research participants by

protecting their rights, welfare, and dignity. Pepperdine University complies with all federal regulations, state laws, university policies, and standards when human research participants are involved. Pepperdine University's policies require that all research involving human participants needs to be conducted following accepted ethical, federal, and professional standards for research. The university's IRB department must approve all research involving human participants. The letter of informed consent was submitted to Pepperdine University's IRB for approval. Approval was granted on March 8, 2022 (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

The researcher designed an instrument interview protocol that served as the data collection instrument to address each research question and ensure a valid research project. The instrument interview protocol was designed with the support of an instrument interview protocol created by A. Hernandez (2018). The instrument interview protocol consisted of three semi-structured interview questions, each of which had additional questions to support the research question.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual participants virtually via Zoom or by phone. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews are an appropriate data collection method for a phenomenological study. The interview tool helped to answer the research questions by having participants conduct interviews based on their availability. The instrument for this study was a set of researcher-developed interview questions that sought to answer the research questions; with permission from A. Hernandez (2018), questions were modified to best fit this phenomenological research study.

The researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure validity and reliability with the research questions. The researcher met with a parent of a local church who had a son with a disability.

The parent was a Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother. She had lived in Los Angeles, California, for more than 20 years. Her son has a disability and she has attended multiple IEPs in her home school district. The researcher asked the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother the interview questions that answered the three research questions during the pilot interview. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother's answers were limited and her responses were mostly "yes and no." She also reported that she did not understand the IEP process. She could not elaborate on the research questions and responded that she agreed to the teachers' and administrators' decisions. After completing this pilot study, the researcher determined to add follow-up questions supporting the main research question to motivate parents to elaborate on their responses.

Validity

For a study's findings to be considered valid, the researcher needs to obtain the same information from experts on the subject or topic. The researcher in this study is a Spanish-speaking Latina special education teacher who has experience in special education and participation in IEP meetings, and understands the process and procedures of the IEP meetings. The researcher has been responsible for developing and implementing educational plans while participating in IEP meetings. Reviewing data such as parents and IEPs from experts in special education clarified any areas in special education and IEPs that needed clearer understanding. Additionally, experts in special education can provide the researcher with new themes that might have been missed at the beginning of the data analysis process.

Reliability

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), reliability in qualitative research is part of the research because it relates to coding during data analysis. The researcher was the primary

coder and allowed other peers to support or review the data as peer reviewers. In Creswell's (2013) description of reliability, he recommended using different measures when there is a concern regarding the study's reliability, such as comparing codes with the data, having a clear definition of the codes, and reviewing the transcripts for any minor mistakes or missed information. Thus, it was imperative to ensure both validity and reliability during the data analysis conducted by the researcher and the use of peer reviewers to provide consensus, or suggestions on the coding of the data.

Data Collection and Data Management Procedures

Data Collection

The researcher gathered data for this qualitative study by interviewing the participants, asking the interview question and open-ended responses in order to answer the research questions. Participation in this study was voluntary. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in this study were informed of their rights and were permitted to withdraw from the study for any reason without explanation. The interview lasted no more than 60 minutes per session; if needed, a second session of 60 minutes was scheduled to continue the interview. The interview took place at a time and location that was most convenient for the participants.

The researcher invited Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities to participate by providing a letter written in both Spanish and English. The researcher identified community-based support groups that serve the Latinx community. The community-based support groups provide guidance and services to Latinx families to support their children with disabilities. The participants were part of the community-based group where they receive support and guidance when participating in educational decision-making in IEP meetings and services to assist with the education of their children disabilities.

A total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in the interviews. The researcher used Zoom, a video and audio conferencing software, to interview them the participants recording their responses. Because the study was focused on Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, it was assumed that the mothers spoke Spanish with minimal understanding of English. The interview questions were asked in English and translated to Spanish for the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to understand. The responses were provided in Spanish and the researcher translated their answers into English with the help of a translator.

Data Management

The data management procedure begins with the researcher planning, organizing, and developing a process for how the data will be collected and kept secure before data collection. Lin (2009) described data management in qualitative research as the “designed structures for systematizing, categorizing and filling the materials to make them efficiently retrieve duplicates” (p. 6). As part of managing qualitative data, the researcher converts the participants’ verbal responses into written reports and maintains the information in a secure location, restricting the publication of the data to a minimum.

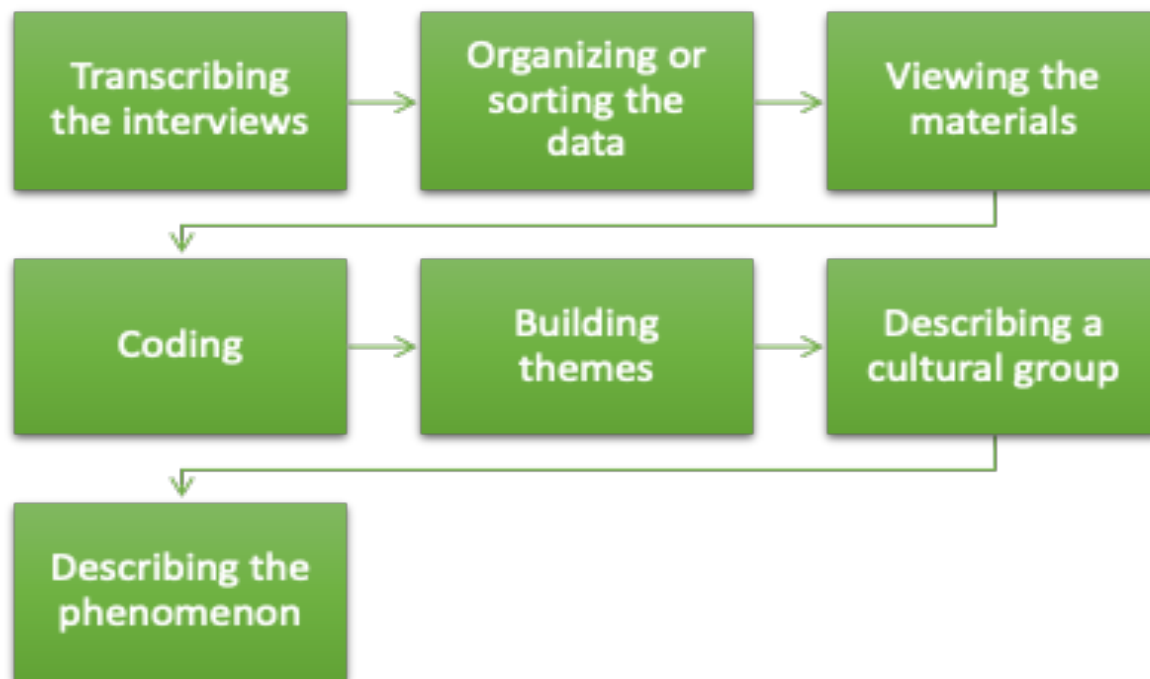
The researcher collected data by interviewing participants on Zoom to record the mothers’ responses. The recordings were transcribed subsequently. The data was transcribed and kept secure in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s home office. Any physical documents used to take notes were scanned and stored in an external hard drive, then secured with a password. For confidentiality purposes, the researcher used a pseudonym for each participant. Finally, the participants were notified that their responses to the interview questions would remain confidential.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using data gathered from interviews, audio/video recordings, and notes taken during the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the data was collected, it was analyzed in codes and themes were identified. For this research, the data analysis process established themes through codes as part of the phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Putman & Rock, 2018). According to Holloway and Galvin (2016), the process of analysis goes through certain stages, such as:

- transcribing the interviews,
- organizing or sorting the data,
- viewing the materials,
- coding,
- building themes,
- describing a cultural group, and
- describing the phenomenon.

Figure 3 depicted the stages of the data analysis the researcher conducted in a visual format for a better understanding of the process.

Figure 3*Data Analysis Stages*

Transcribing the interviews is one of the first steps in data analysis (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). The data analysis is read and coded with themes and descriptions, creating linking themes and descriptions of the findings. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative researchers collect a large quantity of data consisting of narratives from the interviews and different notes regarding the phenomenon being studied. The researcher reported the results by describing the common themes found as a result of coding the participants' responses. The researcher explained the results of the analysis by focusing on the data and findings only. The researcher also checked for the accuracy of findings by using multiple validity procedures. For example, the researcher reviewed the questions to establish accuracy, credibility, and internal validity in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It requires organization and management for the research to establish order when collecting a significant amount of data, which will help in the final data analysis (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Positionality

The researcher is a Latina woman who grew up in the community from which she sought Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to volunteer in this study. She is a special education teacher who has been working with students with different disabilities at the elementary level for the past 15 years. The researcher currently works in the Resource Specialist Program as the Resource Specialist Teacher in a large urban Southern California school district. At the time of this study, the researcher was teaching students with specific learning disabilities at the mild to moderate level (autism, other health impairment, processing difficulties). The researcher is responsible for developing and implementing an IEP for all the students in the school who have IEPs and for monitoring and developing strategies to support students in progressing toward their educational goals. In addition, the researcher is also responsible for supervising paraprofessionals who work as behavioral interventionists to help students with autism.

The researcher has attended multiple IEP meetings, where she has experienced and observed many Latinx families be part of the IEP process. During the IEP meetings, the researcher has observed that Latinx parents experience difficulty understanding different process points. The researcher has heard Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers express concerns about not completely understanding their children's disabilities and having difficulty understanding the process of an IEP and terminology used. However, some Latinx families have been well-informed and understood the IEP process, advocating for resources that would benefit their children's development and educational progress.

This study was important to the overall research in this field. The researcher has attended public education in the community and remembered seeing students who were in special education programs on campus, but not completely aware of their disability, education, and

related services they received. The researcher anticipated that this study would inspire new teachers to be more attentive to Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities and who are also receiving necessary support and related services when attending public schools.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodology and procedures of this phenomenological research study of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' perspectives on their experiences in attending IEP meetings. Their experiences provided new insights about a particular phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). This chapter described the research methods, approach and design, data source, criteria for participation, and sample procedures in addition to the instrumentation (interview questions), validity, reliability, data collection, and data management procedures. Chapter 3 also included a discussion of data analysis procedures and the positionality of the researcher.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to describe in detail the findings of the phenomenological research study on Spanish-speaking Latina mothers with children with special educational needs and their varied experiences with the IEP process. This chapter reviews the research, questions, related interview questions, and study design. The following paragraphs describe the participants' demographics, data results and analysis. Finally, the researcher identifies the themes from analyzing the data and the participants' interview responses, and discussed this throughout the chapter.

Purpose Statement

This study described the experiences of 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' who attended IEP meetings and interacted with school personnel in support of their children in special education. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children in special education and sought to understand the process of IEP meetings regarding their children's education with special educational needs. This qualitative phenomenological study provided information regarding the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers during the IEP process, as well as their awareness of, knowledge of, barriers against and motivation to understand special education laws and procedures involved in IEP meetings.

Specifically, this phenomenological study sought to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experienced the critical process of securing resources to address their children's special education needs. Thus, this study strove understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers became familiar with special education programs and how they collaborated to support their children's special educational services.

In this phenomenological research study, the researcher collected narratives from Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers through individual interviews to develop an understanding of their experiences with special education. This included the participants' experiences attending IEP meetings and learning about special education services to support the growth and development of their children with disabilities. Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed their views regarding their decision-making opportunities regarding their children's special educational goals, related services, and placement. This study sought to provide Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers a platform to share their experiences of participating in the IEP meetings and engaging in decision-making regarding their children's education.

Research Question

Three research questions guided this phenomenological research study:

- RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?
- RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the process of special education?
- RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to be proactive in the IEP decision-making process?

Research Design

This research study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology to better understand the lived experiences and perspectives of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have been and are currently involved in the special education process of their

children with disabilities. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with the mothers regarding their participation and experiences in the IEP process.

The interviews were scheduled from April through June 2022 using the Pepperdine Zoom videoconferencing platform. The interviews ranged in length from 30-60 minutes per participant. Additionally, the interviews were conducted after receiving participants had signed the informed consent form. Finally, the interview recordings were recorded and saved in a secured password-protected drive on the researcher's computer. During the interview process, the participants read the purpose of the study and before starting with the interview questions the participants were asked if they wanted to continue with the interview. They had the option to end their participation if they felt uncomfortable during the interview at any time. The participants agreed to participate and shared their experiences.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher in Spanish. The instrument interview protocol was designed using a similar instrument by Hernandez (2018). The instrument interview protocol consisted of three semi-structured interview questions, each having additional questions to support the research question. The researcher asked the questions to participants in Spanish and the participants responded in Spanish. After the interviews were transcribed in Spanish, the researcher translated them into English.

During the interviews, the participants told the story of their personal experiences, describing how they felt during the meetings as well as their involvement when making educational decisions for their children with special educational needs. Each participant answered the interview questions based on her understanding and comprehension of the questions, feelings, personal growth, and emotions they have experienced by being part of the collaboration process when making decisions regarding their children's education. The

researcher asked questions addressing the central research questions by allowing each participant to describe her experience as a Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother engaged in educational decision-making regarding her children with special educational needs.

Sources of Data

The researcher searched for a nonprofit community-based organization serving the Latinx community and parents with children with disabilities. The study data was collected from each individual participant who participate in the nonprofit community-based organization in Southern California. The nonprofit community-based organization, Collaboration Community (pseudonym), was established in 2018 in Los Angeles to help families with children with disabilities. Additionally, Collaboration Community provides Latinx parents of children with disabilities resources and current information on how to support their children. The director of Collaboration Community is a Spanish-speaking Latina woman who advocates for families with children with disabilities. She began reaching out to parents virtually during the pandemic in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic affected many families who have children with disabilities. Therefore, establishing weekly virtual meetings was the best method to provide them with up-to-date information. The directors have established relationships with parents and meet weekly via Zoom, providing parents with information and related services available in California to support their children with disabilities. The families participating in the weekly virtual meeting live across California. The researcher communicated with the director and her assistant to grant permission to participate in one of the organization's weekly virtual meetings.

Data Collection

On March 31, 2022, the researcher had the opportunity to present the phenomenological study virtually to a group of Spanish-speaking families. The director of the nonprofit

organization allowed the researcher to present the research study's purpose to their weekly Zoom meeting, where Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers and families were in attendance. The director introduced the researcher and presented a brief introduction to the phenomenological study. The researcher explained the phenomenological study to the potential participants present in the virtual Zoom meeting. The director concluded by reinforcing the researcher's explanation of the study. The interested volunteers communicated with the researchers by typing their emails and phone numbers in the chat. Six Spanish-speaking Latina mothers responded and expressed interest in participating. The aim was to reach 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. The researcher communicated with the director to reach out to six more Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, which she did; those mothers then recommended several more individuals who were part of the group. During the meeting, the researcher virtually shared the recruitment marketing flyer (see Appendix C).

The process of how the director supported this study by connecting with other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers evolved as follows. The director connected the researcher with a member of the nonprofit organization. The organization's member connected the researcher with Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers that fit the study's criteria. The person assisting the researcher spoke with the potential participants and asked if they would volunteer for the research. Once the potential participants agreed to be part of the research, the person assisting provided the researcher with their contact information. The researcher was able to communicate with the participants by phone and arranged a date and time for the interviews to be scheduled. This process took about a month due to the potential volunteers' availability. Most of the interviews were conducted during the month of May 2022.

After extending the virtual invitation for volunteers and communication with the director, the researcher provided information to prospective participants through emails, texts, and phone calls. Once participants were identified, data demographic of each participant was collected. Their demographic information (including their level of education, number of years living in the United States, country of origin and their child's grade level) can be found in Appendix D. The informed consent form was emailed to the Spanish-speaking Latina mothers before the interviews (see Appendix E). The researcher described the purpose of the study and the importance of learning from their experiences with special education and attending IEP meetings. Additionally, the interview protocol was provided to the participants in both English and Spanish (see Appendix F). The researcher reached out via email and sought permission to use the interview questions based on Hernandez's (2018) study that was similar to this research (see Appendix G).

This researcher interviewed 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers with children with various disabilities attending public school. The participants had experience attending IEP meetings and have supported their children's development and education. Additionally, the participants experienced overcoming barriers to receiving the appropriate related services for their children with disabilities. The participants interviewed for this phenomenological study were all residing in California at the time of this study. All Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' children attended public schools in California. The experience of these participants differed based on their children's disability and their personal knowledge of special education. The participants had children who were attending kindergarten through 12th grade and had attended at least one IEP meeting.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the criteria of inclusion for potential candidates should be completed before the collection date to qualify the participants. The participants met the following criteria:

- they were the biological mother of the child,
- they were Spanish-speaking Latina immigrants,
- they have been part of an IEP meeting at least one time,
- their children have attended public school in California,
- their children have a disability and have an IEP, and
- they needed experience with the IEP process.

Participants' Demographics

As previously discussed, 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers participated in this study and their demographics can be seen in both Figure 4 and Table 4. The participants have lived an average of 21 years in the United States. The minimum number of years lived in the United States was 5 years and the maximum was 35 years. All participants confirmed they were Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers of a child with a disability. Five participants were born in El Salvador, one participant was born in Columbia, and six participants were born in Mexico. The participants have children with disabilities attending California's elementary, middle, and high schools.

The mothers' level of education ranged from minimal to some high school to graduating from high school, having a bachelor's degree, or having a master's degree. One mother reported having very little education. In her country, she attended school until the second grade. Another mother reported attending high school but did not finish. Five mothers have a high school diploma and two mothers have a GED. Two mothers have a Bachelor's degree from their

country of origin and one mother has a Master's degree from her country. Table 5 provides a list of participants' information and the dates the interviews were conducted.

Figure 4

Participants' Years Living in the United States

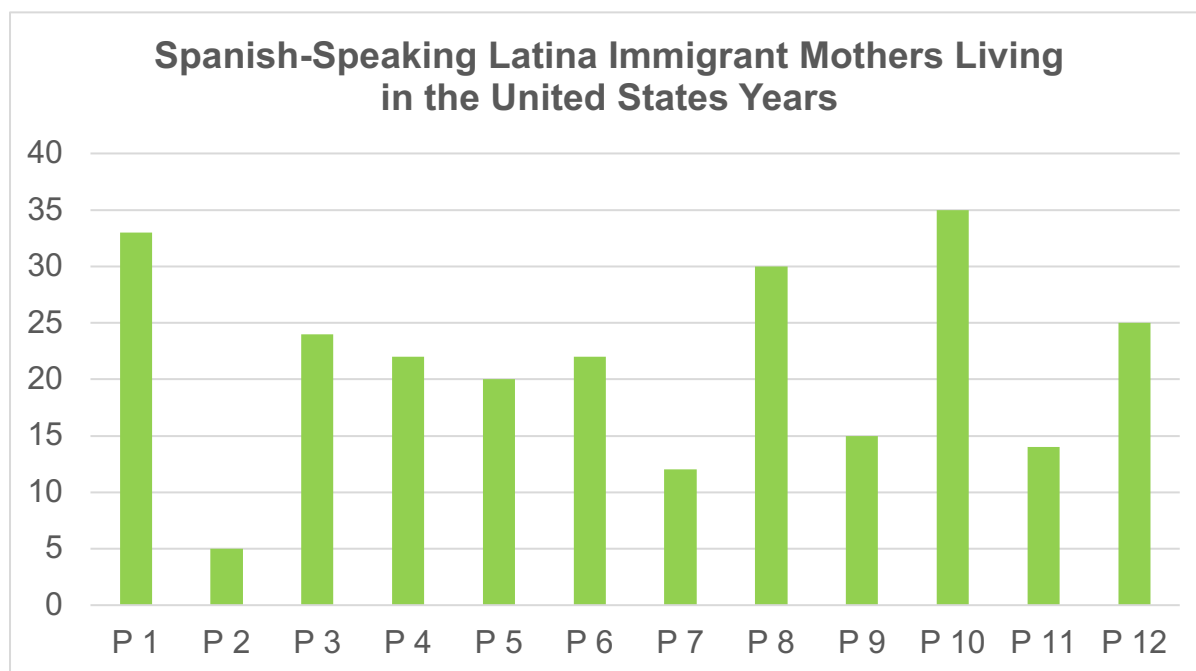


Table 3

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Mother's Level of Education	Country of origin	Number of Years in the U.S	Child's grade level
Parent 1	High School	Mexico	33	11th
Parent 2	GED	Mexico	5	1st
Parent 3	Bachelor (Accounting)	Mexico	24	8th
Parent 4	High School	Mexico	22	9th
Parent 5	High School	El Salvador	20	9th
Parent 6	Master (Communication)	Columbia	22	6th
Parent 7	High School	El Salvador	12	Kinder
Parent 8	High School	El Salvador	30	9th
Parent 9	Two years of elementary education	El Salvador	15	4th
Parent 10	Few years in High School	El Salvador	35	11th
Parent 11	Bachelor (Accounting)	Mexico	14	6th

Parent 12	GED	Mexico	25	5th
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Table 4*Participants' Information*

Participant	Role	Location	Interview Date
Participant 1	Mother	Southern California	April 5, 2022
Participant 2	Mother	Southern California	April 6, 2022
Participant 3	Mother	Southern California	May 2, 2022
Participant 4	Mother	Southern California	May 9, 2022
Participant 5	Mother	Southern California	May 10, 2022
Participant 6	Mother	Southern California	May 10, 2022
Participant 7	Mother	Southern California	May 12, 2022
Participant 8	Mother	Southern California	May 16, 2022
Participant 9	Mother	Southern California	May 19, 2022
Participant 10	Mother	Northern California	May 19, 2022
Participant 11	Mother	Southern California	May 19, 2022
Participant 12	Mother	Southern California	June 2, 2022

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using data gathered from the interviews. The participants' interviews were saved in the Pepperdine Zoom video conference platform, which included audio recordings and notes. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data can be gathered from the interviews using audio recordings and note-taking. For this research, the data analysis process was to establish themes through analyzing similar phrases, responses, and keywords from the participants.

The data was analyzed by ensuring the translations and transcriptions were accurate to the records of the interviews. The data analysis began with the researcher listening and taking notes of the 12 discussions of Spanish-Speaking Latina immigrant mothers with children in special education, evaluating for common phrases and keywords to establish themes. The coding

process included putting together a list of short phrases and keywords from the interviews. Reviewing the research question and interview questions yielded a set of themes.

Each participant's recording was transcribed into Spanish and English to analyze the data. The researcher analyzed the responses across all the interviews to find the most prevalent themes. Afterward, again, each participant's responses to the second interview research question were analyzed. Lastly, the responses from the participants were recorded and analyzed to answer the third interview research question. The researcher analyzed the participants' responses, arranged the keywords in themes, and identified similar phrases or keywords. Overall, the answers were grouped in themes as the overall response for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

Inter-Rater Review Process

Once the data was analyzed from each participant and the answers were transcribed in both Spanish and in English, the researcher conducted a peer review with a graduate student who possessed an English literature degree from the University in California. The graduate student had experience with English grammar and background knowledge of Spanish grammar. The peer reviewer was provided with the participants' answers transcribed in Spanish and English as a Google document. The peer reviewer evaluated and analyzed the transcriptions from the participants, then made corrections and provided the researcher with feedback on the same Google document. The researcher reviewed the grammar of both languages for clarity.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a peer review of the researcher's study provides an opportunity for an external source to evaluate the study from a different viewpoint. After the participants' responses were transcribed from Spanish to English, a Pepperdine doctoral student with experience in qualitative research checked the validity of codes and themes. The peer reviewer was asked if she would participate in reviewing the codes that generated three themes

for validity in answering the research questions; she agreed to do so, and the researcher shared the codes and the themes. The peer reviewer was asked if the codes correlated to the themes found were relevant to the research questions. In addition, the peer reviewer also reviewed the codes that have been established to themes. The peer reviewer was also asked for recommendations for additional themes from the codes if she felt it was necessary or if she thought another theme might emerge.

Table 5

Interrater Review Coding Table

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions	Themes Modified
RQ1: What understanding do Latina mothers have in special education?	How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers define special education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher theme - Program Failure • Peer Reviewer suggested <i>Lack of Support</i> • Theme changed to Lack of Support

Data Display

The data for this research study was organized into the research questions and the following supporting interview questions. The themes were identified by grouping participants' phrases, keywords, and responses. After the data was summarized, bar charts were created to illustrate the results. Each bar chart was organized by research question and frequency of the answers (keywords) the participants provided. The identity of all participants was kept confidential. Each participant was identified using a pseudonym, such as Participant 1 and Participant 2, all the way through Participant 12. The data was reported according to (a) the research question and (b) the corresponding interview questions that were aligned with the study's purpose. Research question 1 was labeled as RQ1 and the interview questions

were labeled as IQ1, IQ2, and IQ3. The themes are presented from the most frequent participant responses to the least frequent responses.

Research Question 1

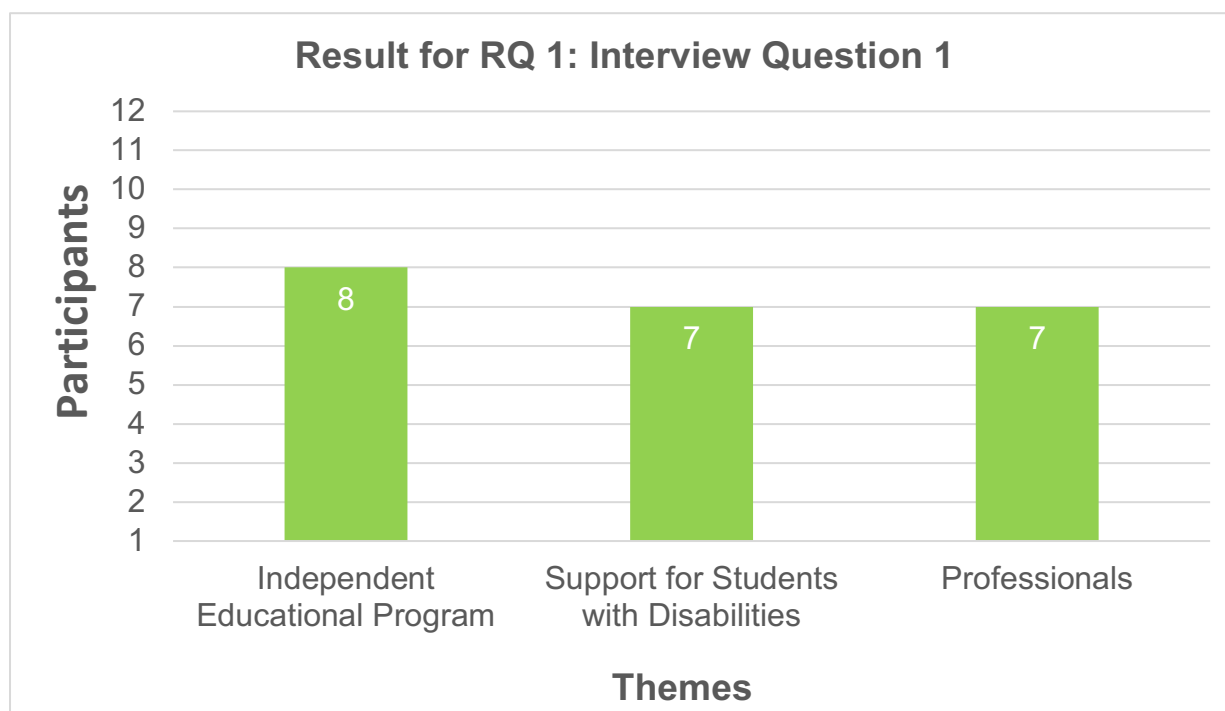
RQ1 asked, what experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education? The participants were asked three related interview questions related to RQ1:

- IQ1: What understanding do Spanish-Speaking Latina immigrant mothers have of special education?
- IQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers define special education?
- IQ3: Has the time spent on special education issues built Spanish-Speaking Latina immigrant mothers' understanding of special education?

Interview Question 1. IQ1 asked, what understanding do Spanish-Speaking Latina immigrant mothers have of special education? After analyzing their responses and coding the most frequent phrases and keywords used, three themes emerged: (a) independent educational program, (b) support for students with disabilities, and (c) professionals. The themes were discussed in further detail; Figure 1 displayed a bar graph showing the answer counts per theme.

Figure 5

Results for IQ1: Interview Question 1



Independent Educational Program. When the participants described their understanding of special education, the theme of independent educational programs in education was the most common response. Phrases and keywords related to different programs were expressed by eight of the 12 participants (66%). The participants used keywords such as different schools, places where students with disabilities are, independent programs, and special classes. For example, Participant 1 understood special education as:

Spanish: Un programa muy independiente de educación general, donde todos los niños están incluidos. Es otra categoría, donde ponen a los niños que tienen necesidad. Por ejemplo, necesidades como médica o neurológica.

English: An independent program from general education, where all children are included. It is another category, where they place children who have needs. For example, such needs as medical or neurological.

In addition, Participant 4 understood special education to be,

Spanish: Otra forma de enseñar comparado a un niño típico.

English: Another form of teaching compared to a typical kid.

Furthermore, Participant 7 understood special education to be a place where,

Spanish: No pueden estar con niños que son típicos.

English: They cannot be with typical children in a traditional classroom setting.

Support for Students with Disabilities. The second theme was support for students with disabilities. Fifty-eight percent or seven of the 12 participants described special education to be a place for students with disabilities to learn. The participants used keywords such as opportunity to learn, and they will help my child with different forms of teaching. For example, Participant 9 described special education thusly:

Spanish: Yo diría que es un programa que se dedica a ayudar a los niños que tienen problemas.

English: I think that it is a program dedicated to help children who have disabilities that pose academic challenges.

Participant 10 defined special education as follows,

Spanish: Para mí la palabra especial tiene muchos significados. Yo pensaba que mi hijo iba a estar en una clase especial específicamente para él. Que él iba a recibir la educación correcta para darle el apoyo que él necesitaba.

English: I think the word special has many meanings. I thought my son was going to be in a special class specifically for him. He was going to get the right education as well as give him the support he needed.

Professionals. The third theme that emerged in relation to IQ1 was the word professionals. Seven of the 12 participants referred to special education as a place where specialists and professionals are present. Keywords such as accommodations, a specialist with experience, a teacher who will take care of him, and different processes with adaptations were heard in the participants' responses. For example, Participant 3 described special education as:

Spanish: Una clase donde hay varios especialistas, que tienen varias experiencias y saben cómo dar instrucción académica a mi hijo.

English: A class where there are several specialists who encompass various experiences and know how to display academic instruction to my son.

Similarity Participant 5 said that special education is,

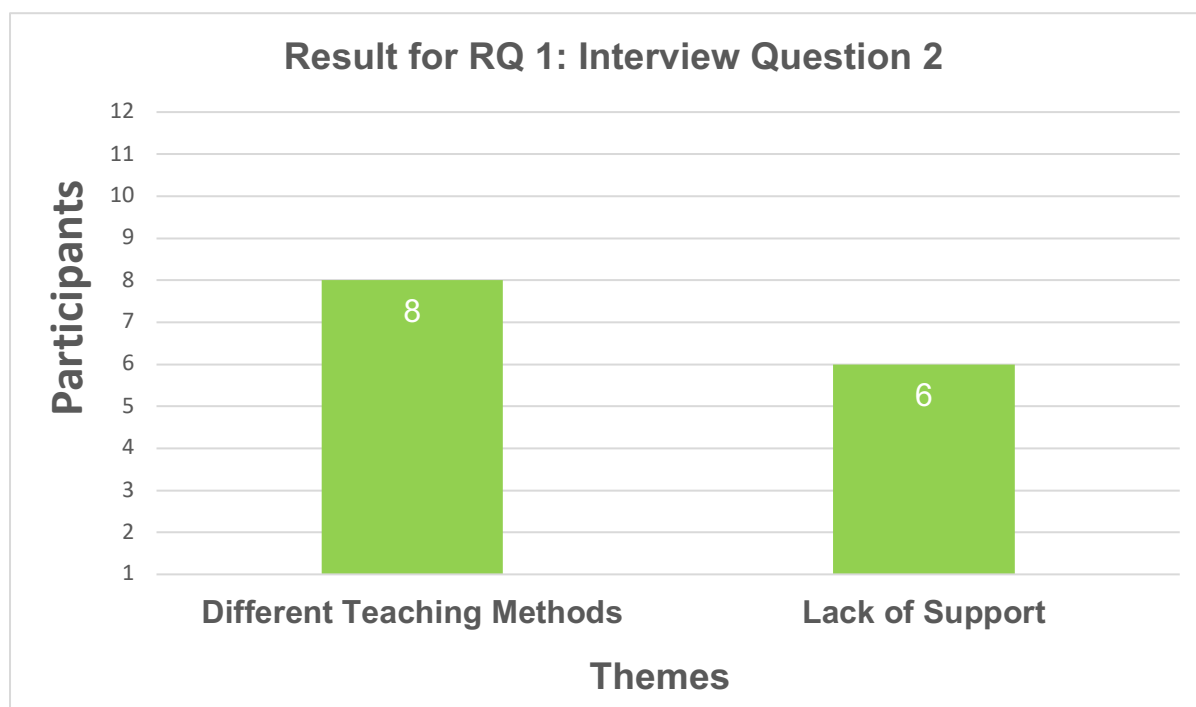
Spanish: Un lugar especial donde le van a enseñar a mi hijo a ser independiente y recibir servicios para ayudarlo.

English: A special place where my son will acquire the knowledge to be independent and receive services to help and guide him.

Interview Question 2. IQ2 asked, how do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers *define* special education? The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers responded to this question as they understood the word *define* meant the same as they explained the term special education. After analyzing the 12 participants' responses, two themes emerged. A few participants found IQ1 to be similar to IQ2. They were unclear about the difference between "understand" and "define." The themes will be discussed in further detail in Figure 2, which displays a bar graph showing the answer counts per theme. The participants used keywords such as different schools, places, education, independent programs, and various forms of teaching.

Figure 6

Results for IQ2: Interview Question 2



Different Teaching Methods. The theme of the different methods of teaching was common, mentioned by 66% of the participants. Eight participants used phrases such as, a place where a boy will be taken care of, more in-depth, your kid will learn better, it's something different, and not any type of care to define the term special education. Participant 2 described her experience as a mother who did not understand anything about special education. She described her experience as follows:

Spanish: Entiendo la palabra especial que se refiere a personas con discapacidades diferentes. Yo no sabía que a los niños con discapacidades les daban una educación aquí en los Estados Unidos. Entonces cuando me dijeron que vaya a la escuela, yo decía porque ir a la escuela yo quiero ir al doctor.

English: I understand the word special refers to people with different disabilities. I was not aware that children with disabilities were given an education here in the United States. So, when they told me to go to school, I said why do I want to go to school? I want to go to the doctor.

Participant 4 responded,

Spanish: La educación especial es una forma diferente. Es como ayudar al niño. En una forma como el niño puede aprender. Por eso se le dice educación especial porque se van hacer ciertas modificaciones para que el estudiante pueda aprender.

English: Special education is a different way. It's like helping the child. In a way the child can learn. That's why it is called special education because certain modifications are going to be made in order to enhance the student's learning.

Lack of Support. When asked to define the term special education, half of the participants expressed words like just us, daycare, no support, lack of structure, nice work, segregation, and not a lot of people working. A participant 3 commented about special education: "My child has not received an appropriate education. I don't want to answer." Furthermore,

Participant 3 responded,

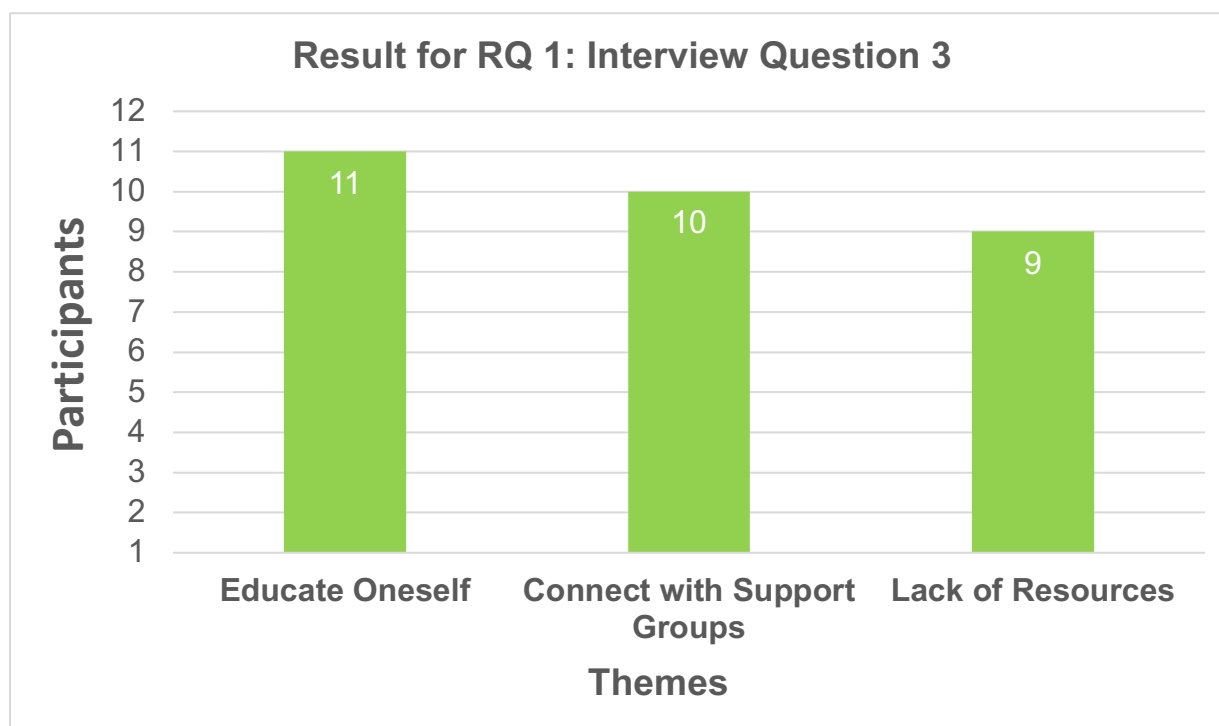
Spanish: No hay un plan para que los niños sean parte de la educación general. No hay oportunidades para ellos. No hay apoyo de los maestros y tampoco les dan metas altas.

English: There is no plan for children to be part of general education. There are no opportunities for them. There is no support from the teachers and they don't give them high goals to pursue.

Interview Question 3. IQ3 asked, has the time spent on special education issues built Spanish-speaking Latina mothers' understanding of special education? After analyzing the 12 participants' responses, the following themes emerged (a) educate yourself, (b) connect with support groups, and (c) lack of resources. Figure 2 displays a visual bar graph demonstrating the frequency of the keyword answers for each theme.

Figure 7

Themes Result for RQ1: Interview Question 3



Educate Oneself. The participants expressed concerns about knowing special education laws and IEP protocols. Ninety-one percent of the participants said they were concerned about not knowing their rights in the beginning. However, after being educated on their rights and their children's rights, they were able to understand the process, ask for related services, or participate more in the IEP meetings. The participants expressed that the district did not help them learn their rights in special education. The participants reported they had to educate themselves by attending workshops and communicating with other parents. For example, Participant 3 expressed:

Spanish: Yo he estado entrenando por 4 años. En un entrenamiento específico, solo para educación especial. Allí he aprendido las leyes. Pero a la misma vez me trajo la realidad de que es exactamente educación especial.

English: I have been training for 4 years. In a specific training for special education only. I have learned the laws there. It helped me and at the same time it brought me the reality of what exactly special education entails.

In addition, Participant 8 learned from special education that,

Spanish: Para tener un buen IEP necesitamos prepararnos, no llegar solas. Por ejemplo, es una buena ayuda que el esposo las acompañe. A veces nos ven solas y quieren hacer con uno lo que ellos quieren. Lo importante es mi hija, que tiene todos sus derechos. Es importante darle seguimiento a un IEP después de la reunión.

English: To have a good IEP we need to prepare, not arrive alone. For example, it is a good support if the husband accompanies us. Sometimes they see us alone and they want to do as they like with us. The important thing is my daughter, who has all her rights. It is important to follow up on an IEP after the meeting.

Furthermore: Participant 5 said she learned from special education,

Spanish: Prácticamente yo me he tenido que educar. He tenido que aprender a conocer mis derechos. Y he aprendido cómo pedir apoyo de grupos de padres que están más involucrados. Padres en el sistema que conocen y saben las leyes. Ellos me han enseñado la verdad de mi hijo que tiene autismo. La escuela ha cometido muchos errores con mi niño que tiene muchos comportamientos.

English: I practically had to educate myself. I have had to learn my rights. And I've learned how to ask for support from groups of parents who were more involved. Parents in the system who know and know the laws. They have taught me the reality about my son who has autism. The school has made many mistakes with my child who has many behaviors.

Likewise, Participant 7 shared,

Spanish: Yo he investigado. Cuando apenas me lo diagnosticaron yo estaba en blanco no sabía nada. Yo creía que le iban a dar todo lo que necesitaban cuando lo evaluaran.

English: I have investigated. When he was diagnosed I was [clueless], I didn't know anything. I thought they were going to give him everything he needed when he was evaluated.

Connect With Support Groups. Connecting with support groups emerged as one of the themes; 10 of the 12 participants expressed that they joined support groups to understand more about special education. Participant 2 said, “speak to parents, went to other districts, investigated and attended workshops.” The participants said they looked for and joined support

groups to learn more about and understand special education. The participants expressed that they were able to obtain resources and support from organizations outside of the school. They discussed how the organizations or support groups that were not related to school or the regional centers were able to provide them with detailed guidance on how to participate in an IEP. They received recommendations on the process and the legal rights of parents. Participant 1 said:

Spanish: Tuve que buscar a padres para poder obtener más información de los programas.

English: I had to look for parents to get more information on the programs.

Similarly, Participant 4 stated,

Spanish: Yo tuve que ir a otros distritos y buscar sola la información.

English: I had to go to other districts and search for information on my own.

Furthermore Participant 12 expressed,

Spanish: Yo iba a workshop para aprender más. Yo iba a eventos y me involucraba más.

English: I attended workshops to learn more. I went to events and became more involved.

Lack of Resources. Regarding the participants expressing their understanding gained over the years their children spent in special education programs, nine of 12 participants reported having experienced a lack of support and structure during meetings and limited information provided by the district. Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers reported receiving lack of knowledge, guidance, and resources from the school and administration. For example,

Participant 4 stated,

Spanish: La escuela no está enseñando que es educación especial. También está comunicando muy poquita información.

English: The school is not teaching what special education is. It is also communicating very little information to us.

In addition, Participant 5 said,

Spanish: En realidad no aprendí nada. En educación especial, los maestros que están allí deben de tener empatía, y de verdad querer trabajar. No pensar únicamente, oh voy hacer la lucha con este niño.

English: I really didn't learn anything. The teachers who are in special education must have empathy and really want to work. They should not just think, oh, I'm going to do the minimum effort with this kid.

Summary of RQ1

The purpose of RQ1 was to describe the experiences Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have had with special education. After analyzing the responses to the supporting interview questions, the researcher identified eight themes. Reactions to the interview questions generated keywords identifying the themes in which the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed how they understood and defined the term *special education*. The participants also expressed and described their experience of how their children's time spent in special education programs increased their knowledge and understanding of special education. The following themes emerged from IQ1, IQ2, and IQ3 to answer RQ1. The eight themes identified were:

- independent educational programs,
- support for students with disabilities,
- professionals,
- different methods of teaching,
- lack of support,
- educate oneself,
- connect with support groups, and
- lack of resources.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked, how do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education? The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were asked three interview questions related to RQ2:

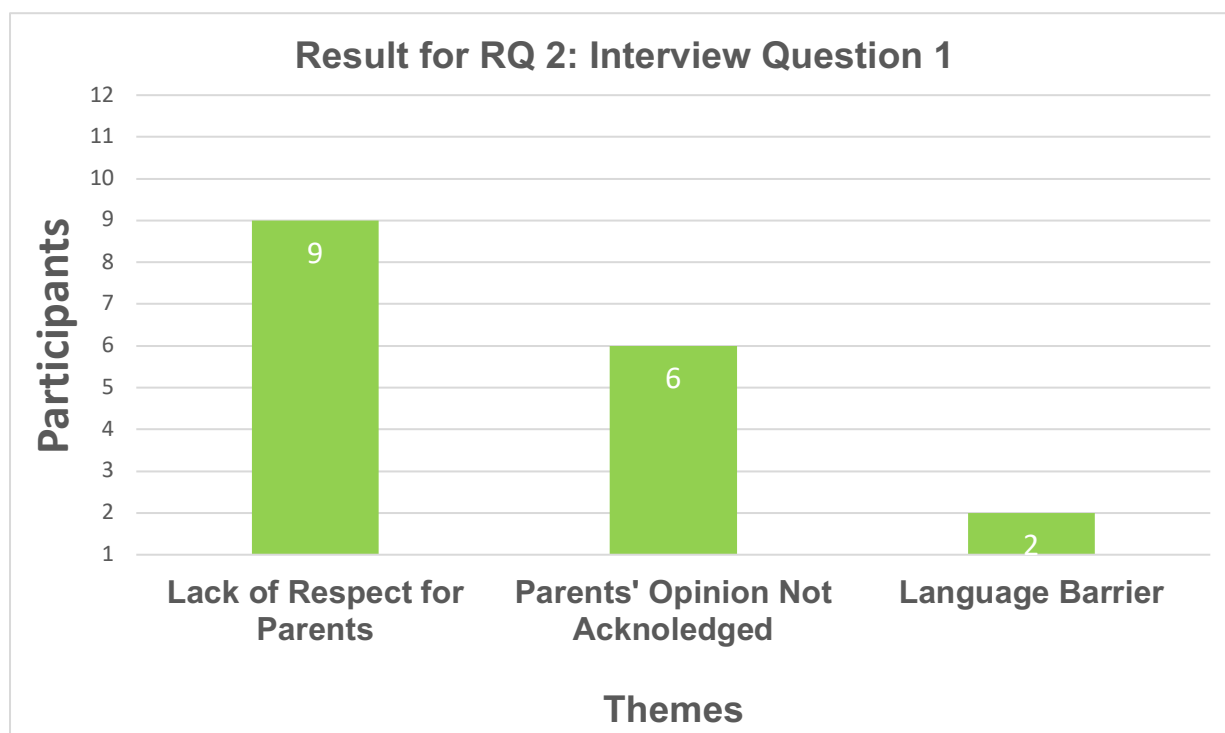
- IQ1: Do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers feel a welcoming approach when working with special education personnel?
- IQ2: If participation has occurred, has it been with school personnel and has it made a difference in their experiences with special education?
- IQ3: Are Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers able to address concerns with school personnel?

The participants' responses were analyzed. Similar responses and keywords were grouped together and themes were identified to address the participants' perceptions regarding their participation in the IEP process. The answers were coded to determine the overall responses for RQ2 and themes were established.

Interview Question 1. IQ1 asked, Do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers feel a welcoming approach when working with special education personnel? Based on participants' responses, a total of three themes emerged regarding how they felt when working with special education personnel (a) lack of respect for parents, (b) parents' opinion not acknowledge and (c) language barrier. Figure 8 presents a bar graph with the themes and number of participants for this interview question.

Figure 8

Themes Result for RQ2: Interview Question 1



Lack of Respect for Parents. The first theme for IQ1 was the school administrators' lack of respect for parents. The nine participants' responses had phrases and keywords such as manipulated, not considered in a child's education, arguments, discriminated, intimidation, and altered IEPs. These phrases expressed by the participants indicate that they felt disrespected and had difficulty expressing themselves in the IEP meetings. For example, Participant 10 described her experience when entering the IEP meeting:

Spanish: A veces la directora de educación especial no pone mucho empeño en las reuniones de IEP. Yo tuve un IEP y ella no se presentó. Entonces yo dije cómo vamos a trabajar bien, si no se entera de las cosas que están pasando con mi hija. La maestra de habla, por ejemplo entró a la IEP y dijo todo lo que Andrea había alcanzado all her goals. Yo sé que ella ha alcanzado muchas más metas.

English: Sometimes the special education director doesn't make a lot of effort into IEP meetings. I had an IEP and she did not show up. So, I said how are we going to work well, if she doesn't find out about the things which are happening with my child. The

speech teacher, for example, entered the IEP and said my child had achieved all her goals. I know she has reached many more goals.

Parents' Opinions Are Not Acknowledged. The second theme that emerged from the participants' responses to IQ 4 was that parents' opinions were not acknowledged. The responses of six participants resulted in this theme. The participants experienced not being heard, feeling that their questions, ideas, and views of their child's needs and related services were not acknowledged when discussed in the IEP meeting. The participants described their experiences as not being included, not being supported, feeling frustrated, feeling unwelcome, and making decisions without their input. Participant 11 stated:

Spanish: Ellos tratan de decirte las cosas en diferentes formas que no sean negativas. Ellos dan mucha información. Cuando uno se despierta y conoce las leyes ellos combinan. Son diplomáticos. A ellos no les gusta que uno pida sus derechos.

English: They try to tell you things in different ways that are not negative. They give a lot of information. When one wakes up and knows the laws they change. They are diplomatic. They don't like it when you ask for your rights.

Language Barrier. The third theme that emerged in response to IQ4 was the language barrier. In this case, two participants expressed that their interactions with school personnel have been positive, describing having a translator in the IEP meeting. One of the participants expressed that the English language translation needed to be more explicit, accurate, and precise. One participant was satisfied with how the school personnel had translated the information to her during the IEP meeting. Meanwhile, the second participant agreed with the IEP process but expressed that the translation was not done word by word. Although the rest of the participants speak Spanish and have a limited understanding of English, they shared their struggles with the lack of resources, support, and training to educate them. For example, Participant 7 said:

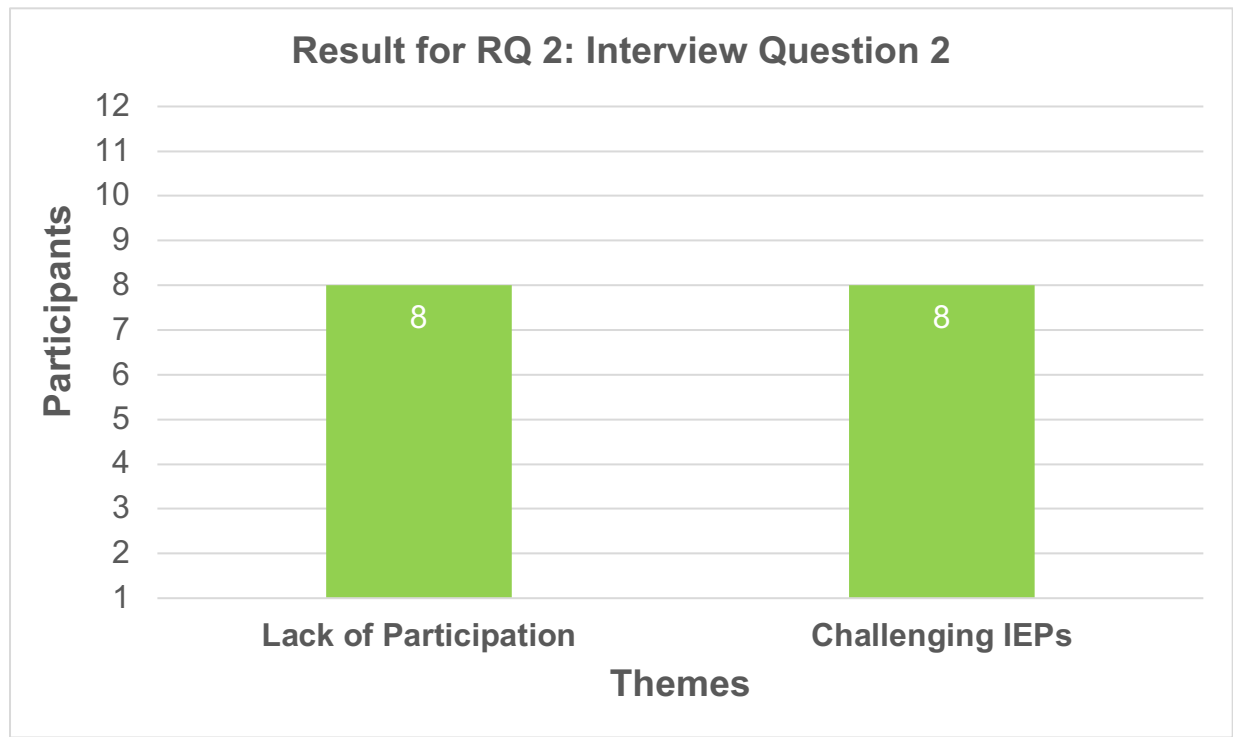
Spanish: Si me siento bienvenida. Ellos pusieron a alguien que me tradujera y explicara lo que la niña necesita.

English: I do feel welcomed. They had someone to translate and explain to me what the girl needed.

Interview Question 2. IQ2 asked, if participation had occurred, has it been with school personnel and if it had made a difference in their experiences with special education? In response to IQ2, participants described their experiences of participating with school administrators and other staff. Based on the data collected and analyzed from the participants' responses and keywords, two themes emerged regarding their participation with school personnel and if it has made a difference in their experience with special education. After the data was analyzed, the themes found were: (a) lack of participation and (b) challenging IEPs. Figure 9 is a bar graph describing the themes and the number of answers from the participants for each theme.

Figure 9

Themes Result for RQ2: Interview Question 2



Lack of Participation. One of the themes for IQ2 was a lack of participation. The participants described their experiences participating with school personnel and the differences it

has made with special education. Per IDEA, federal law mandates parental participation in the decision-making regarding their children's special education services. Eight of 12 participants expressed a need for more participation from school administrators and staff in the IEP meetings. Four participants reported having good communication with the teachers and administration; for instance, they can participate in the meetings and share any concerns. For example, the participants who expressed a lack of participation shared phrases such as, "I read the law and that made a difference," "They are cold," "They put up a wall," and "We need to know when to approach them or not approach them." For example, Participant 6 stated about participation:

Spanish: Ellos no me dicen de los servicios que el niño necesita. Ellos me ponen importancia cuando yo les digo que quiero una reunión.

English: They don't tell me about the services my boy needs. They pay attention to me when I tell them I want a meeting with them

Furthermore Participant 8 stated about participating,

Spanish: Hay más relación de mi así con ellos. De ellos, es muy poca la información que me dan. No recibo muchos mensajes de ellos. Soy yo más que ellos haciendo preguntas.

English: There is more of a relationship from me toward them. From them is very little information I receive. I don't receive a lot of messages from them. I am the one who asks more questions.

Challenging IEP: The second theme for IQ2 was challenging IEPs. Sixty-six percent of the participants reported difficulty talking to school personnel during IEP meetings. The participants used keywords such as, sometimes they help, other times they do not, they could not convince me, and felt not included. The participants felt they were discriminated against and had no support during the IEP meetings. One participant expressed that the school personnel treated her differently because she was an immigrant. For example, Participant 1 stated:

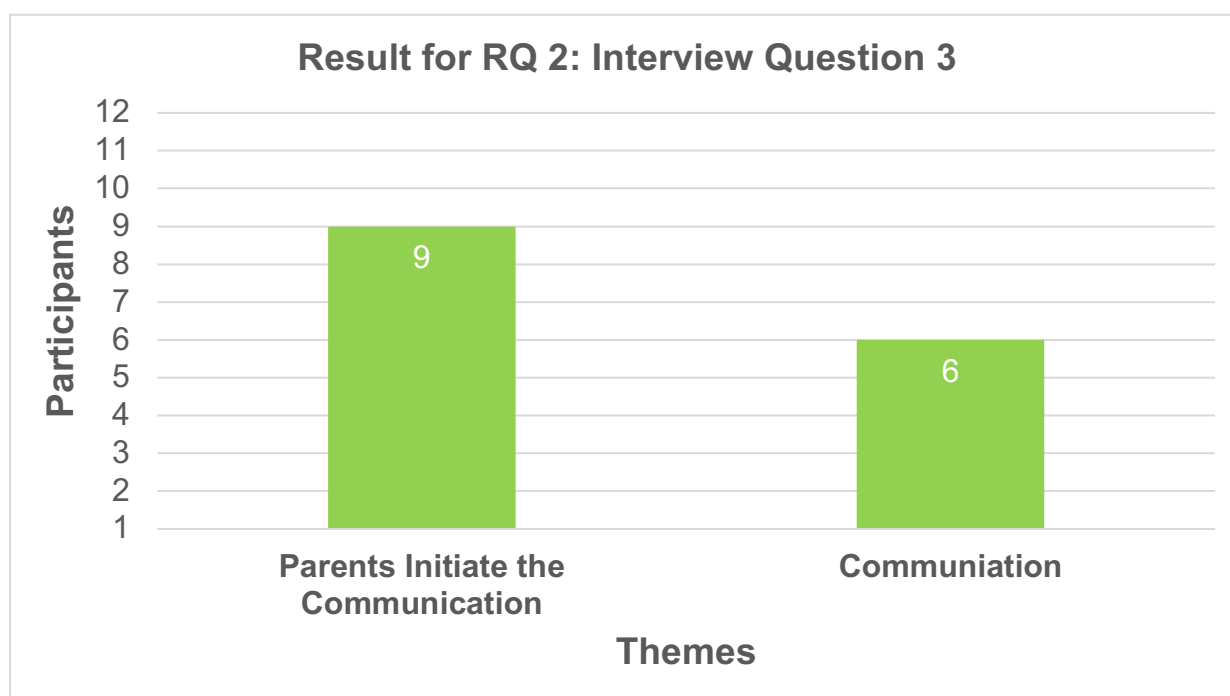
Spanish: Me sentí que no era bienvenida después que ellos supieron que sabía las leyes y mis derechos.

English: I felt unwelcome after they found out I knew the laws and my rights.

Interview Question 3. The first interview question for RQ3 asked, are Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers able to address concerns with school personnel? Based on the responses, the researcher analyzed and identified phrases and keywords, which resulted in two themes: (a) parents initiate conversation and (b) communication. Figure 10 displays a summary of the themes and number of participants expressing these concerns.

Figure 10

Themes Result for RQ2: Interview Question 3



Parents Initiate the Communication. The participants shared essential details regarding addressing concerns with school personnel. Nine participants responded by stating that they were the ones who would approach the teachers or administrators if a meeting was needed. The participants expressed concern about the teacher revealing how their children were doing in class. They stated that the teachers did not approach them about or provide them with their children's progress. Additionally, the participants shared that they asked questions such as, is my

child meeting his goal? How was his day? The participants provided suggestions on methods the teachers could use to communicate with them. For example, Participant 1 said:

Spanish: Los maestros pueden tener contacto con los padres haciendo juntas semanales para dar un reporte. También pueden mandar un mensaje por texto. Puede hacer algo simple. Pueden mandar una nota diaria y escribir en un libro que va en su backpack.

English: The teacher can have contact with the parents by making weekly meetings and providing a report. They can also send a text message. They can do something simple. They can write a daily note and write in a notebook and send it [home]in the backpack.

The participants expressed concern about how the school administrator and teacher do not give daily, weekly, or monthly updates on their child's progress. Because their children have a disability, they expressed a need for more support and care. The participants want to receive regularly updated information on the progress of their children with disabilities. The participants expressed that their children are not able to express verbally on how their day had transpired. Therefore, a note or a simple group or individual text will help build a relationship with the teacher. Participant 7 said:

Spanish: En la casa yo se como esta ella, pero cuando ella está en la escuela no se que esta pasando. La maestra de educación especial necesita tener mucha paciencia.

English: At home, I know how she is doing, but when she's at school I do not know what is happening. The special education teacher needs to have a lot of patience.

Communication. The second theme for IQ1 was communication. Fifty-eight percent of the participants used the word communication. Participants 9, 11, and 12 reported having good communication with the teachers and in the IEP meetings. Participant 12 said she has mutual communication with the teacher. She reported communicating with the teacher and developed plans to support her child in school. She stated that she would tell the teacher.

Spanish: Maestra mi hija no entiende la tarea. ¿Me la puede explicar? Yo le decía mis inquietudes. Yo le preguntaba a la maestra como le puedo ayudarle yo en la casa. Y cuando no podía hacer algo, la maestra me explicaba. Teníamos una conversación mutua.

English: Teacher, my daughter does not understand the homework. Can you explain it to me? I will tell her my concerns. I will ask the teacher how I could help my daughter at home. And when she could not do something, the teacher would explain it to me. We had a mutual conversation.

Participant 3 stated that she did have communication with the administration, but it required a lot of communication and knowledge about laws, specialists, and documentation. She shared:

Spanish: Si he podido hablar con ellos, pero si me escuchan eso es diferente. Tomar acciones es un proceso muy largo. Si hay mucha comunicación ida y vuelta y requiere de saber las leyes, documentos, especialistas y leer evaluaciones.

English: I have been able to communicate with them. But if they listen it is something different. To take action it's a long process. There is a lot of communication both ways but it is required to know about the laws, documents, specialists and read evaluations.

Summary of RQ2

The purpose of RQ2 was to identify how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education. A total of seven themes emerged from analyzing the participants' phrases, keywords, and overall responses to all three interview questions. The responses to these interview questions provided keywords that identified the themes related to how the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceived their participation in the IEP process and special education. The themes for RQ2 were as follows:

- lack of respect for parents,
- parents' opinions not acknowledged,
- language barrier,
- challenging iep,
- lack of participation,
- parents initiate communication, and
- communication.

For RQ2, the participants expressed that they felt disrespected (lack of respect for parents) and that their opinions were not considered (parents' opinions not acknowledged). The participants also reported experiencing language barriers that prevented them from clearly understanding the translation of an IEP meeting. The participants described their difficulties and challenges in IEP meetings when they did not understand or ask for related services or evaluations. According to the participants' comments, school personnel often did not respond with a supportive approach (challenging IEPs). The participants reported on the need for more participation from school administrators and service providers. Most of the participants reported that they are the ones who take the initiative to talk to the teachers and ask for meetings to review their children's progress. The participants expressed that they want their children to be independent adults, which is why they advocate for students' rights. The participants expressed concerns about teaching their children now that they are young, in order for their children to become independent adults.

Research Question 3

RQ3 asked, what motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process? The participants were asked two interview questions to answer RQ3. The interview questions were:

- IQ1: How did the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers become motivated to participate in special education?
- IQ2: What can be done differently to support their children and families?

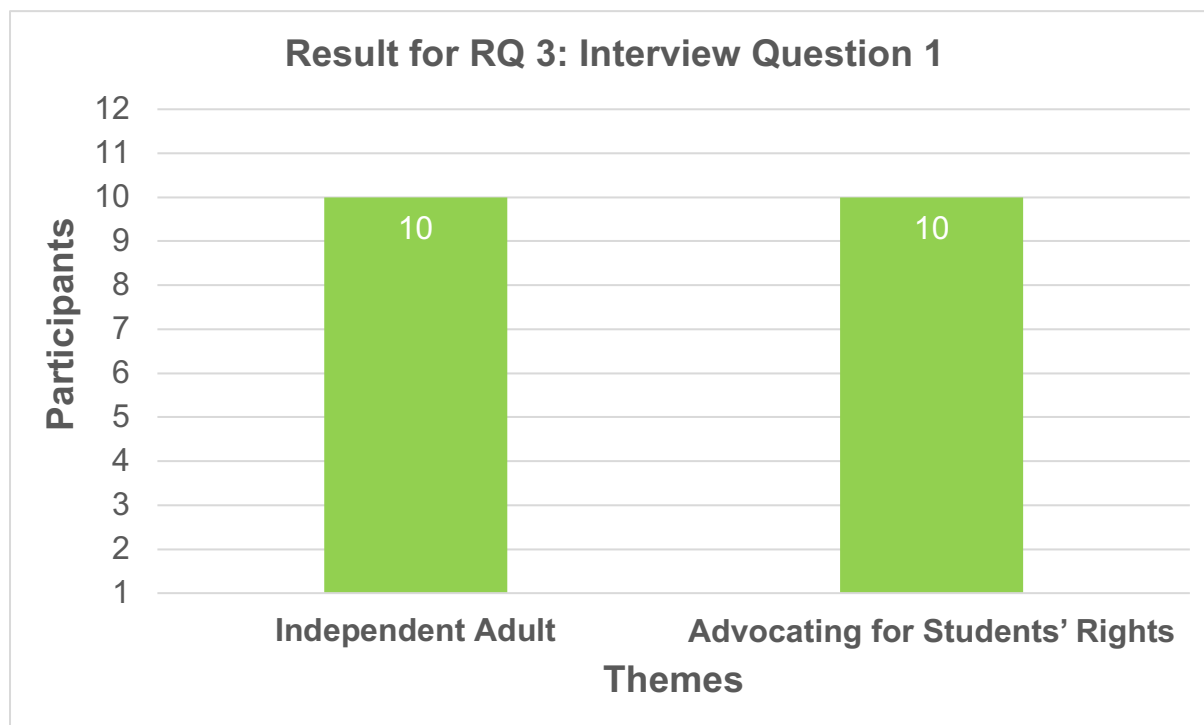
The responses given by the participants were analyzed to identify similar responses and keywords, which were then coded and grouped into themes describing factors that have motivated Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEPs and decision-

making processes for their children with disabilities. The participants also expressed what can be done differently to support children and families.

Interview Question 1. IQ1 asked, how did the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers become motivated to participate in special education? The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers responded by sharing how they became motivated to participate in special education programs. The responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify similar phrases and keywords. After analyzing keywords, two themes emerged, identifying what motivated the mothers to participate in special education: (a) independent adults and (b) advocating for students' rights. Figure 11 depicts the themes and the number of participants identifying with each theme.

Figure 11

Themes Result for RQ3: Interview Question 1



Independent Adult. Nine participants express concerns about their children becoming independent adults. The participants expressed their motivation for their children, stating that they want them to learn everything they can according to their abilities and potential. Seventy-five percent of the participants said they want their children to succeed. For example, participants used phrases such as, “I want my child to be successful,” and “I want my child to be a good, independent man.” Participant 5 shared her concern about her child being independent. She said:

Spanish: Mi trabajo es hacerlo un hombre independiente. Que él pueda verse por sí mismo. Que él pueda estudiar. Ellos son niños muy inteligentes. Son niños que tienen muchas capacidades. Mi motivación es que algún día se pueda valer por sí mismo.

English: My job is to make him an independent man. So that he can see for himself. So that he can study. They are very smart children. They are children with many capacities. My motivation is for one day he will be able to support himself.

Advocating for Students’ Rights. The second theme related to IQ3 is to advocate for their children’s rights. Seventy-five percent of the participants voiced concern about their children’s rights to education. The participants worried about how their children are treated or the limited related services they receive. Therefore, they stated phrases such as, “I became my child’s lawyer,” and “I became motivated to advocate for my daughter’s rights, not to discriminate against my child because of his disability.” Participant 5 expressed her emotions about being her daughter’s advocate, stating:

Spanish: Nosotros pagamos taxes. Mi hija tiene derecho a una educación. Yo tengo derechos de abogar por ella. Como padre, yo soy ciudadana y pagó taxes. Yo soy la voz de mi hija.

English: We pay taxes. My child has the right to an education. I have the right to advocate for my child. As a parent, I’m a citizen and pay taxes. I’m my daughter’s voice.

Participant 9 described her motivation as follows,

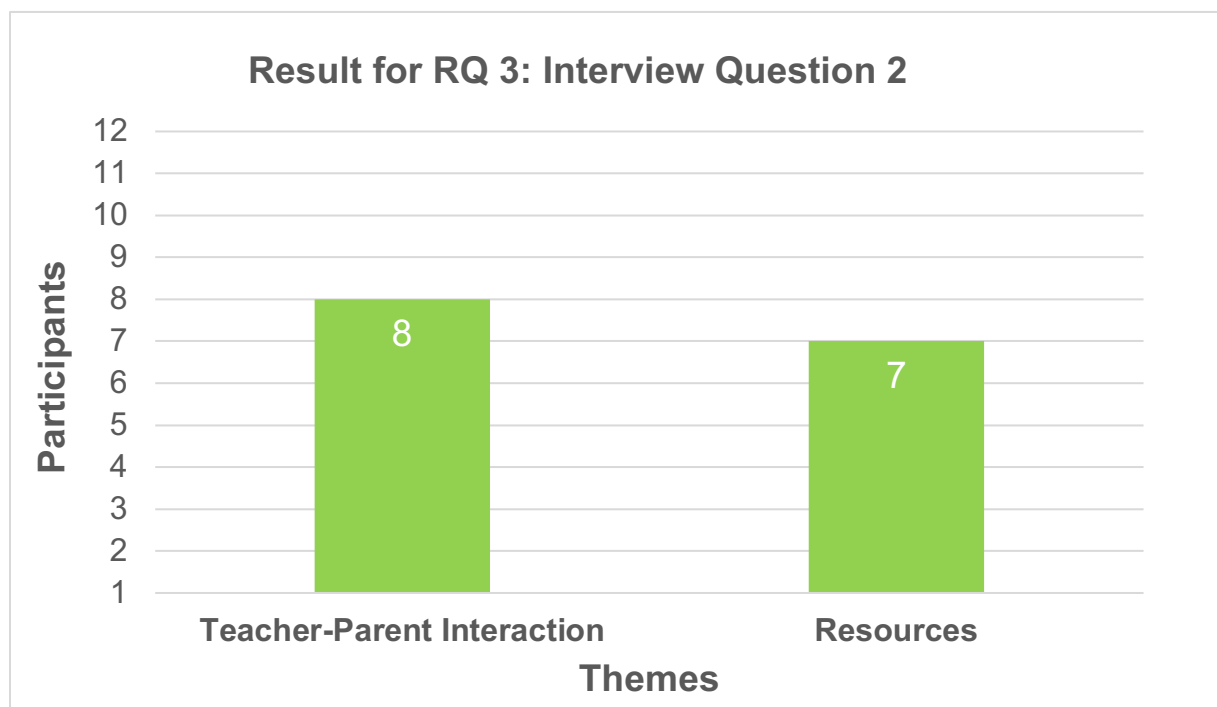
Spanish: Yo la apoyo en cada necesidad que ella tiene en la escuela. Yo hablo por ella. En una reunión les dije que ella necesita mucho de mi apoyo. Yo no la voy a dejar sola. Mi motivación es que traten bien a mi hija y que aprenda.

English: I support her in every need she has at school. I speak for her. In a meeting I told them, she needs a lot of my support. I'm not going to leave her alone. My motivation is that they treat my daughter well and that she learns.

Interview Question 2. The second interview question for RQ3 asked, what can school districts do to better support children and families in special education? The responses from the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were analyzed and phrases and keywords were identified, which yielded two themes: (a) teacher-parent interaction and (b) resources.

Figure 12

Themes Result for RQ3: Interview Question 2



Teacher-Parent Interaction. According to the participants' responses, one of the emerging themes was the interaction between teachers and parents. The participants described the district's interaction and communication with the parents as a way to better support their

children in special education. The participants expressed that interaction with the teacher will benefit the progress of their children with disabilities. Eight participants voiced that the teacher should ask the parents about any concerns. The participants have experienced minimal interaction with the teachers. The participants said phrases such as, having contact with the parents, asking parents for concerns first, including the parents and listening to the parent's concerns. For example, Participant 10 said:

Spanish: Se necesita comunicación porque a veces no dicen todo lo que sucede. Un día cuando hablé con la maestra, ella me dijo que mi hijo no estaba recibiendo los servicios.

English: Communication is essential, because sometimes they don't say everything that has happened. One day when I talked to the teacher, she told me, my son was not receiving all his services.

Some Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed concern about not being listened to even if they told the teachers their worries and areas of interest for their children's education. A few participants also said the teachers are limited in what they can do, noting that the administration pretends to hear their concerns, but in the end, they do not. Four of the participants did report having good interactions with the teachers. They have learned how to address their concerns appropriately—having good communication with the school administration and teachers has helped them build a positive relationship with school personnel.

Resources. The last theme for RQ3 is resources. Seven participants expressed concern about lack of support for the teachers, not investing in the student's education, and the teacher having minimal support to work with all the students. The participants reported that their children have more individual needs and need special care and the teacher cannot do it alone. For example, Participant 9 said:

Spanish: Algo importante que yo he visto, es que se necesitan más personas que trabajen en la escuela. He visto muy poco personal en la escuela trabajando con los niños que están en clases especiales.

English: Something important I have seen is, more people are needed to work in the school. I have seen very little personnel in the school working with the students who are in special education classes.

Participant 7 offered a similar response,

Spanish: Necesitan más ayuda. Deberían de poner más asistentes para que le ayuden a la maestra.

English: They need more help. They should put more assistants to help the teacher.

The participants also asked for resources in providing bilingual translators and training where they can learn more. They also requested that the school invest more in resources to help the students instead of investing money in legal issues.

Summary of RQ3

The purpose of RQ3 was to explore what motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process and recommendations to support students with disabilities. A total of four themes emerged from analyzing the participants' responses to two interview questions. The responses to these interview questions yielded keywords that pointed to themes that described the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' motivation to participate in the decision-making process. The themes for RQ3 were as follows:

- independent adult,
- advocating for students' rights,
- teacher-parent interaction, and
- resources.

Chapter 4 Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to describe the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children in special education programs. Also, the

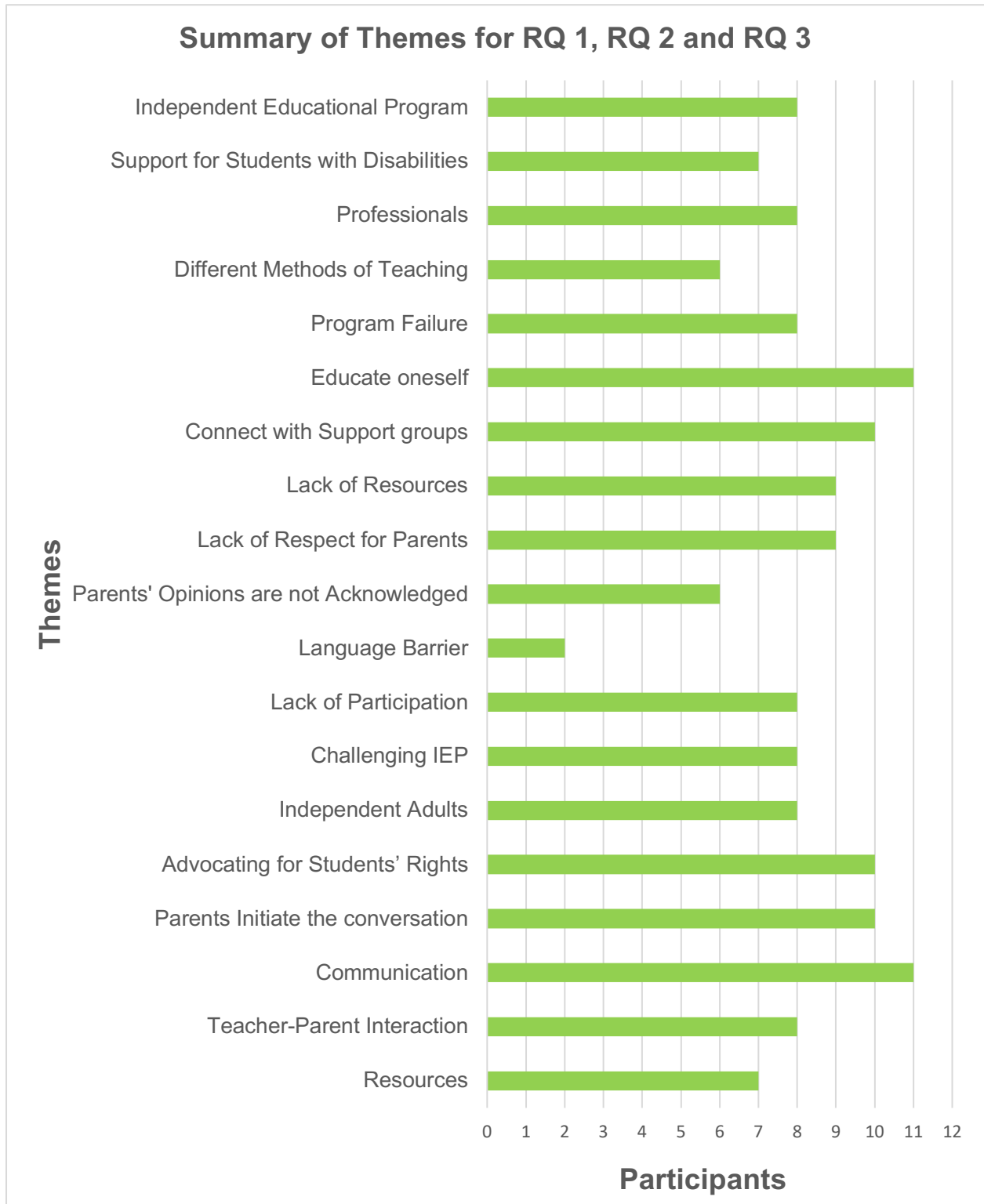
study investigated how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process and what has motivated them to participate in the IEPs and decision-making process to support their children with a disability. In this phenomenological study, the researcher interviewed 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who had experience participating in special education programs and IEPs. The participants answered eight interview questions virtually via Zoom videoconferencing. The open-ended interview questions were generated to address the following three research questions.

- RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?
- RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education?
- RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process?

The researcher collected data for this study by interviewing 12 participants who volunteered their time to participate in sharing their experiences with special education by answering the interview questions. The data was collected, analyzed, and coded to identify themes resulting from the most common keywords in the participants' responses. The data analysis resulted in 19 themes. Figure 13 summarizes the themes that resulted from the twelve participants' experiences as they responded to the research interview questions.

Figure 13

Summary of Themes



Chapter 5: Study Implications, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes this phenomenological study of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities attending public school in the state of California. This chapter includes the purpose statement, an overview of the problem, the methodology used, and a review of the research questions. It continues with a discussion section, which presents an analysis of the findings. It ends with recommendations for future research and a conclusion.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers attending IEP meetings and their participation and motivation when interacting with special education personnel. This study explored the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children attending special education programs in their home school districts. This research provided information regarding the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' awareness of, knowledge of, barriers against, and motivation to understand special education laws, procedures, and involvement in the IEP process. Additionally, the study sought to understand how Spanish-speaking Latina mothers were self-determined and motivated to continue supporting their children with disabilities.

Research Question

Three research questions guided this phenomenological research study:

- RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?

- RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the process of special education?
- RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to be proactive in the IEP decision-making process?

This qualitative phenomenological study endeavored to investigate Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences with special education programs and their experiences attending IEP meetings. The findings of this study analyzed the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' responses to the interview questions through semi-structured interviews, generating themes describing their experiences with special education. This phenomenological study sought to add to the literature on the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers with the special education system in California. California special education department follows Federal laws that require states districts and educational agencies to provide students with disabilities a FAPE with IEPs in order to continue receiving federal funds from the federal government (Trainor, 2010). The Federal law for special education is outlined in IDEA. With the results of this phenomenological study, special education lawmakers, administrators, teachers, teachers' assistants, school personnel, parents, and community leaders will be exposed to the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers describing their participation in IEP meetings. In addition to their experiences in learning about special education, procedures, resources, and laws, from the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences, the school community and district can develop strategies to improve collaboration with parents and caregivers for the well-being of students with disabilities.

Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) reported that most Spanish-speaking Latina mothers are not familiar with special education, nor are they familiar with special education law, special

education programs, or the process of special education. The information shared in IEP meetings is guided and directed by the teacher or administrator, and parents are most likely to take a passive role in these settings (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). Based on the participants' responses in this phenomenological study, all of the participants reported not being familiar with special education, its laws, programs, and processes, just as Blackwell and Rossetti found in their study. In addition, the participants also shared that they were unfamiliar with special education because it involved terminology that was new to them. For example, Participant 2 did not understand that schools provide classrooms and programs for students with disabilities; she thought she had to take her child to a doctor for assistance, not the school.

Research Design, Methodology, and Methods

This research study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology to understand better the experiences and perspectives of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have been and are currently involved in the special education process of their children with disabilities. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers regarding their experiences in the IEP process and with special education services. According to Teherani et al. (2015), the objective of phenomenology is to recount the meaning of the experience in two forms: what was experienced and how it was experienced. The participants participated in this phenomenological study by recounting their experiences and how they experienced the phenomenon.

The participants in this study shared their personal experiences, describing how they felt during the IEP meetings and their motivation when making educational decisions for their children with disabilities. Each participant answered the interview questions based on her understanding and comprehension of the interview questions. Once she understood the interview

questions, she was able to talk about her experiences, personal growth, and emotions she has experienced while making decisions regarding her child's education in special education. The interview probe questions addressed the central research questions by allowing each participant to describe her experience as a Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother engaging in the educational decision-making process.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Linguistic Diverse (CLD) families experience difficulty forming relationships with professionals, making it challenging to share their ideas, concerns, resources, and make decisions that will benefit their children with disabilities (Mortier & Arias, 2020). This phenomenological study was grounded in the work of Guadalupe Valdes's (1996), *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools* to understand CLD families. This framework requires one to understand deeply participants' culture. Valdes's (1996) studies on CLD families demonstrate how cultural views provide an opportunity to understand what CLD families value.

A study conducted by the Child Trends Hispanic Institute (Moodie & Ramos, 2014) identified critical findings regarding how Latina mothers supported their children's education and reflected their cultural values and beliefs, such as sacrificios (sacrifices), consejos (advice), and apoyo (moral support). The theoretical frameworks of this study can help educators understand how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers culture view public education and how self-determination influences their motivation to advocate for their children's rights in special education regardless of their educational level and experiences. This study revealed how CLD mothers, who are also Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, described their participation in their children's education in various ways.

In this phenomenological study, nine of the participants reported experiences such as discrimination, school personnel not listening to their concerns, and administrators not telling them the truth. These nine participants also expressed concern that the schools their children attended did not listen to them because they are Latinas and are perceived as individuals who do not know their rights. Furthermore, Participant 9 expressed that the English language is a barrier because, most of the time, the interpreter does not translate correctly, making it hard to understand the IEP process. The interpreter instead provides a summary of what has been said in the IEP meetings or uses a different vocabulary, not strictly translating what administrators say. As Valdes (1996) described, Latina mothers could not communicate with school personnel because their views were different and the school did not understand their culture. Six of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in this study reported feeling uncomfortable and that their opinions were not heard when advocating for children's educational rights.

Additionally, the study utilized the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, best known for developing self-determination theory (Pink, 2009). Self-determination theory helps describe how humans are motivated intrinsically to grow and take on challenges for their psychological and personal growth. Ten of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers described their motivation to advocate for their children's rights because they want their children to learn and be successful. The 10 participants expressed that they understand that their children have a right to an education. Nine of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers explained that they are their children's voices and will advocate for them to receive related services and an education that will enable them to be independent individuals and reach their full potential.

According to Pink (2009), the first psychological need of intrinsic motivation is autonomy (having control over one's choices). Ten of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant

mothers described the intrinsic motivation of autonomy in their goal of supporting their children with disabilities with the appropriate education by searching for support groups. Eleven of the participants shared that they learned to educate themselves because they wanted to advocate for the appropriate special education related services that were able to support their children's education, regardless of their disability.

The second psychological need is competence (feeling comfortable with what one wants; Pink, 2009). Ten of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers described that they felt competent in expressing their children's needs when they began to understand special education laws and the IEP process. At that point, they started to be more comfortable advocating for their children's needs. Additionally, when they were in the support groups, they received guidance on advocating for their children's education and what kind of questions to ask in the IEP meeting. Ten of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers recommended that Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers not be afraid to ask critical questions.

The third psychological need is relatedness (the need to relate; Pink, 2009). Ten Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers connected with support groups of mothers and families with similar backgrounds. In these support groups, they felt they belonged and could relate to each other's needs. The 10 participants expressed that being part of a supportive group helped them not feel lonely. The support groups gave them the ability to relate to each other and motivate each other to advocate for their children's special education, related services, and programs. Participant 3 expressed that she was able to learn more about special education when she was involved in a nonprofit organization. She expressed that she participated in many school meetings and regional center trainings, but was not informed as much as she was by the nonprofit organization in which she participated.

Eleven Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers recommended that new mothers join support groups and special education organizations to receive information that will educate them about special education laws and the process of an IEP. Their motivation was to see their children succeed. Their autonomy of having control over choices and decisions motivated them to speak about topics that felt challenging in the beginning. Once their autonomy was cultivated, they were able to express their concerns and participate in the IEP in decision-making regarding their children's education without fear.

The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers felt competent advocating for their children with disabilities to receive an education that would support them to become independent adults. The psychological need of competence (feeling comfortable with what one wants), was a motivator to advocate for their children's education and related services were expressed by 11 participants. The 11 participants educated themselves by researching for information that would guide them in understanding the process of on IEP and special education.

The last psychological need is relatedness (the need to relate; Pink, 2009), which motivated 10 of this study's Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to voice their decisions and ask questions of special education personnel in IEP meetings for clarity. The need for relatedness was fulfilled when they joined the support groups that encouraged them to participate actively in their children's education.

Discussion of Key Findings

This phenomenological study investigated Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences participating in IEPs for their children with disabilities. The study's primary purpose was to analyze the participants' responses by identifying themes that described their experiences in understanding and participating in special education. The researcher's key goal for the

findings is to provide school districts with research-based information from Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' personal perspectives from their experiences in special education programs. Doing so can result in recommending that educators and school district establish best practices on how they are directing IEPs when it comes to serving and supporting Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, as well as making Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to feel part of the educational team, as emphasized by IDEA.

From the results of this research, it is hoped that school districts that have special education programs will train their staff to acknowledge Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' views, requests, concerns, and opinions in the decision-making regarding their children with disabilities during IEP meetings. In addition, school districts can establish regular support groups and classes to guide and teach Latinx immigrant parents to understand special education and provide strategies and methods on how they can support their children with disabilities. It is also hoped that the findings will guide administrators and Latinx immigrant parents to work as a team to collaborate in decision-making to support students with disabilities to become independent adults. The following key themes emerged from the participants' responses to the interview questions in this study (see Table 6).

Table 6*Summary of Themes*

RQ1: What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?	RQ2: How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the IEP process in special education?	RQ3: What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to participate in the IEP decision-making process?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Educational Programs • Support for students with disabilities • Professionals • Different teaching methods • Lack of Support • Educate oneself • Connect with Support groups • Lack of Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Respect for Parents. • Parents' Opinions not Acknowledged • Language Barrier • Challenging IEP • Lack of participation • Parents Initiate communication • Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Adult • Advocating for Students' rights • Teacher-Parent Interaction • Resources

Study Conclusions

This phenomenological qualitative study yielded three conclusions based on the participants' responses to the semi-structured interview questions supporting the three research questions. The following three conclusions briefly summarize the themes into one statement for each research question, explaining the experiences Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education. Additionally, the conclusions discuss the role of parents, parent involvement, participation and collaboration, and the barriers parents faced regarding their children's education. These conclusions were affirmed by the literature review in Chapter 2.

Conclusion for RQ1: School Districts to Establish Programs to Educate CLD Families

California's districts provide special education classes, related services, and programs to 12% of all Latino students. In 2018-2019, according to the CDE (2022), 95,047 children from birth through 22 years of age received special education and related services. Mueller et al.'s (2009) study identified some of the challenges Latinx parents experience within the school system, including their difficulty understanding the information presented to them due to language barriers and not understanding the process of the educational system. Research has demonstrated different barriers that CLD families experience in special education. These barriers may include perceptions or beliefs of disability or special education, jargon and specialized vocabulary, formal and informal communication styles, and legal system barriers (Gomez Mandic et al., 2012; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Pearson & Meadan, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2014; Shapiro et al., 2004).

This phenomenological study revealed the experiences shared by Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers of children with disabilities. The 12 participants expressed that when their child was first diagnosed with a disability, they did not understand the term special education. As their children continued in special education programs, they began to understand what special education meant. Two of the participants express that when their second child was diagnosed with a disability, they had already gained some experience with special education and were able to advocate for their children at an earlier age. Ten of the participants described how they joined support groups and educated themselves to learn more about special education.

According to Brownell et al. (2006), in an IEP meeting, the participants (school administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, students, and other related services) are meant to collaborate and communicate effectively and agree on appropriate goals to

support the student's educational needs. Eleven of the participants said that their participation in the IEP meetings was limited when they first learned about their children's disabilities. However, once they began to understand their children's disabilities, they felt the need to educate themselves in order to participate and collaborate in decision-making in the IEP meetings. In this study, nine participants reported receiving a lack of support and resources from the districts to support them in understanding special education. Ten participants described how they had to go outside their districts to learn about special education and acquire resources to support and educate their children with disabilities. The ten participants expressed that they joined organizations or support groups that provided them with information about special education and the process of requesting evaluations to assess their children's needs.

Additionally, eight of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed that if they had known what they know now about special education, their children would have received the services they needed when they were first diagnosed with a disability (early intervention). Eight participants expressed that when they first learned that their children had a disability, they understood special education as an independent program that helped students with disabilities learn.

However, over the years, 11 of the study's Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have taken the initiative to join support groups and educate themselves by learning about special education laws, parents' rights, protocols, and how to obtain related services to support their children's special education. Seven of the participants in this study recommended that school districts develop more training to educate new parents. The training can include support groups with resources on topics such as behavior management, methods to teach children with

disabilities, strategies for modifying and accommodating academic work, daily living skills, and transition skills.

It was also found that two Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed the need to be able to participate and communicate with special education personnel and in IEP meetings. They explained how school personnel were friendly in the IEP meetings and provided them with a review of their children's goals. These two Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers also expressed that the teachers were able to communicate with them when they asked how their children were doing in class and were able to review their goals and progress. These two participants also agreed with the administrators' information in the IEP meetings.

In conclusion for research question one, 11 of the participants in this study reported that school districts could provide CLD families with more information by collaborating with families on how to support their children's special education and related services and having them participate in the decision-making during IEP meetings. These 11 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers shared that the districts and school personnel should provide more training and resources to guide parents as a road map to the IEP process. The training may include but is not limited to how to request an evaluation, related services, and teach learning strategies to improve students' learning in special education classrooms.

Conclusion for RQ2: Develop a Bridge Between Teachers and Parents to Improve Communication and IEP Meetings Process

Per the literature review, Epstein (2001) asserted that parents must participate actively in their children's education to ensure school accountability. She recommended six types of parent involvement, one of which includes the need for parenting classes to support the family. Type 1 of Epstein's parental skills and knowledge relates to instructing families to understand their

children's developmental and life milestones. It also supports the school's understanding of families' cultures, goals in life, and backgrounds. Interaction between the teachers and parents creates two-way communication and involves families in school programs and student success.

This phenomenological study found that 11 of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' in the IEP process experienced a barrier of communication among teachers, service providers, and administrators. From 11 of the participants' experiences, it can be concluded that the lack of communication and inability to express their needs or suggestions resulted in their feeling disrespected, ignored, and not acknowledged about their opinions and personal input, therefore not allowing them to be involved. According to Tamzarian et al. (2012), cultural awareness limits the communication between parents and professionals during IEP meetings, and professionals might mistakenly assume that parents understand the information being presented to them. Eight of the participants reported having teacher-parent interaction, but only if they were the ones asking questions, requesting a meeting, or wanting to know about their children's progress.

According to Olivos et al. (2010), one of the barriers to collaboration between the school and CLD families is that school personnel view academic success as supporting students with disabilities. In contrast, the parents are motivated by their personal experiences. This barrier prevents parents from collaborating with teachers and service providers because they view their children's progress differently. Understanding CLD families' culture, language, race, and SES is essential to collaboration because parents' cultural backgrounds have an impact on the decisions they make. However, the 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experienced this at first when they did not understand their children's diagnosis, nor did they know that special education

existed. Therefore, understanding CLD families' culture is crucial in building parental involvement.

Eight of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experienced a barrier with IEPs, describing them as challenging. A challenging IEP, according to the eight Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, meant that during the meetings, when they had a question or opinion to express, they felt that the special education personnel did not hear their comments and did not acknowledge what they said. Eight of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceived the participation from the administrators, teachers, and related service providers to be minimal. Eight of the participants expressed that unless they were the ones initiating a conversation or requesting meetings to review their children's progress toward meeting their annual goals, there was no communication from special education personnel. They continued by saying that the only meetings that administrators scheduled were the annual IEP meetings. These annual IEP meetings are mandated to be held per IDEA (n.d.).

According to Valdes (1996), barriers such as language and communication differences make it difficult for parents and school staff to communicate with each other effectively. Due to different cultural beliefs regarding and acceptance of children with disabilities, CLD parents struggle with collaboration and involvement in their children's education. In this study, 10 participants did not mention language as a barrier, but did report having challenges with participation. The participants expressed and described the following barriers they experienced as Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers: nine participants described a lack of respect for their opinions, eight participants discussed a lack of participation from the professionals, and 11 participants reported on a lack of communication from school personnel. Learning to educate

themselves about special education was a barrier they had to overcome with the support of mothers in similar situations.

When asked if they felt welcome when working with school personnel, two participants in this study described the English language as a barrier, but continued by saying that they had a translator in the IEP meeting. One of the two participants expressed that the English translation needed to be more explicit, accurate, and precise. The other participant expressed that she was satisfied with how the school personnel had translated the information to her during the IEP meeting.

In the IEP process, nine Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in this study expressed that they felt disrespected and ignored, and that their opinions were not taken into consideration. Mothers play an important role in their children's life. Gulman et al. (2007) described Latina mothers in the U.S. as passive. They are also described as racial and linguistic minority women who do not have a profession and depend on others to guide them (Monzó, 2013a). However, Monzó (2013a) study was conducted to support the role Latina women have as mothers, in challenging Latina mothers to demonstrate to school districts that they are interested in their children's education. Monzó continued by explaining that if school staff would take the time to listen to the concerns, they will have a different understanding of how Latinxs' engage in education. In this study, 11 of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers began to educate themselves by researching and asking questions with other parents and support groups to understand special education so they could better support their children with disabilities.

In conclusion for RQ2, although nine participants reported experiencing a lack of respect for parents in the IEP meetings and six participants reported that they felt that their opinion did not count, in their role they have of parents as Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers, they

are self-determined to find programs where they can learn more about special education and be advocates of their children. The 12 participants in this study are engaged in their children's education in one form or another. Eleven participants expressed their engagement in special education by finding programs to educate themselves and also by finding ways to communicate with their children's teachers.

Conclusion for RQ3: Include Spanish-Speaking Latina Immigrant Mothers in Supporting Students to Become Independent Adults

The primary motivation of the 12 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in this study primary to know more about special education was because they want to support their children with disabilities. Eight participants expressed that they advocate for their children to receive the appropriate related services because they want to see their children be successful in school and be independent adults. Participant 9 expressed sentiments such as, "they have rights; they pay taxes," and "they deserve an education like any other student."

Three of the participants expressed concern about their children's early years in education. They shared that if certain strategies and methods of teachings had been taught earlier, they would know more now. The participants shared that their children lost so much time when they were younger. Being Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers of children with a disability, they did not understand the terms, processes, and meaning of special education. They described how in the early years of their children's education, they did not know the process or protocol for requesting related services or evaluations that could have provided their children with early intervention. Two of the participants have a second child in special education programs and shared how they are now more aware of special education protocol. As a result,

they are now more knowledgeable about the process and feel more confident and motivated to participate in decision-making during the IEPs.

In conclusion for RQ3, the main motivation for Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers is their children's success; their motivation of self-determination to have autonomy, competence, and relatedness to advocate for their children's special education makes a difference in their children's development. Their children have motivated them to attend trainings, meet other parents, join support groups, and educate themselves by learning about special education rights. The participants expressed that they are their children's number one advocates, which motivates them to keep learning and advocating for their children's rights as individuals with disabilities.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is that only one researcher completed it. The researcher began searching for places in California where Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers with children with special educational needs gather or meet. The researcher became aware of a nonprofit community-based organization that held weekly meetings via Zoom that gives Latinx parents of children with disabilities in different counties within the State of California information and resources. The researcher contacted the director and arranged an appointment to explain the study. The researcher asked the director for permission; they subsequently approved the request. The researcher developed a flyer describing the phenomenological study and provided a brief presentation virtually to the group present on a weekly night.

This study was limited to 12 participants who came to the United States from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Two participants had more than one child in special

education programs. This study is limited to the experiences the participants have had within their home school districts.

This phenomenological study adds to the limited field of research on how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers describe their experiences during IEP meetings. This study included special education research on how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experience a lack of participation in the IEP meetings, challenging IEPs, the need to advocate for their children's rights, and minimal teacher-parent communication, to name a few of their experiences. Although there was general literature parents' experiences (mothers' experiences) in special education and IEP meetings, minimal literature was found on Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers. Of the 19 themes identified in the data analysis, five main recommendations were identified for current and future to help Latina mothers of children in special education programs. The five themes are as follows:

- educate oneself,
- connect with support groups,
- advocating for students' rights,
- parents initiate the conversation, and
- communication.

Implications for Practice

The researcher experienced a deeper understanding of the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers with children in special education programs. The researcher experienced an urge to advocate for the Latinx community and provide them with guidance, resources, and training to support them in the process of teaching their children. Training can give them information on the process of how an IEP is run and help them feel confident in

providing feedback recommendations and sharing their opinion on how their children with disabilities can learn in school. The researcher sees the need for Latinx parents/families to be given guidelines and resources to understand the IEP protocol, procedures, and special education laws. Many miscommunications can be avoided if only Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers know the protocol and procedures of an IEP (parental procedural safeguards).

Significantly, this phenomenological qualitative study's findings influenced the researcher to prepare helpful information on IEP protocols for CLD families, as well as to provide educational training in special education laws and related services. The researcher now has a clearer understanding of how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers experience the IEP process during these meetings. In the process, when the participants were describing their experiences, it was clear that their objective of sharing was to provide Spanish-speaking Latinx immigrant families with resources, guidelines, and motivation to become knowledgeable in special education and speak up for their children's education. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers shared how they have learned about their children's disabilities and continue educating themselves to better support their children's learning and progress in school.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, as a follow up to this phenomenological study, the researcher would like to interview Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers both in focus groups and in person. To add to the qualitative study, conducting the interviews in a focus group is recommended. Focus groups can provide an atmosphere where ideas and strategies can be developed to share best practices on how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers and families can have better IEP meetings in terms of communicating, participating, engaging, and interacting with special education personnel.

One of the recommendations from 10 of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers was to search for and join support groups that support families with children with a disability or special educational needs and that have similar questions and concerns. Support groups can provide strategies to guide parents in their special education journey and help them be better prepared to understand professionals' recommendations. School districts can also offer the parents a support group to help them have a better experience with school personnel, which can result in less challenging IEP meetings.

A second recommendation for future research would be to find effective methods to educate parents when they first learn about their children's disabilities. The recommendations from 11 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers suggested for parents to educate themselves in understanding special education overall, as well as to learn about their children's diagnosis and to learn how they can support their children with their learning. In addition, they advised that parents should not be afraid to provide their input, concerns, ideas, and suggestions, and ask questions to clarify what is best for their children. The 11 Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers communicated the importance of being educated in special education topics, procedures, laws, parental procedures, and students' educational rights according to FAPE as described in IDEA (n.d.).

A third recommendation to bridge CLD families and school personnel in improving involvement, participation, and engagement in the IEP process, is for California school districts to develop community centers where they can offer training directed specifically to CLD families that have children with disabilities. CLD families can receive classes and programs in these community centers, along with information and resources regarding special education. CLD families can also learn to understand all the benefits and resources attached to special

education. In these community centers, CLD families can be educated about the expectations and process of an IEP meeting. Once the CLD families are familiar with special education laws and processes, they will feel less intimidated and more respected by school personnel.

Community training centers can educate and provide CLD families with special education resources. Additionally, CLD parents can help other Latina immigrant mothers as well as mothers and caregivers from different cultures who are new to the field of special education. CLD mothers can provide resources and guidance as well as teach strategies and techniques on how to develop consistent communication with special education personnel. Moreover, they can obtain support in knowing how to advocate for their children with disabilities with the goal of receiving the appropriate related services and academic resources. The districts' community training centers can have programs that guide CLD parents on advocating for their children's education in a manner that supports everyone working toward the same goal, always keeping in mind the children's right to a FAPE.

A fourth recommendation from this study of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers was the importance of teacher-parent interaction. Eight participants expressed the importance of maintaining communication because some children cannot speak for themselves or share how their day was. Therefore, the recommendation for future study is to study CLD families with children with disabilities and their interaction with teachers and administrators. In addition to this future study, CLD mothers and fathers can be studied separately to explore different responses from mothers and fathers concerning communication, participation, involvement, and interactions within IEP meetings.

A fifth recommendation can be to collect data on Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers with more than one child receiving special education services. The study can research

how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences of special education differs from the first child to the second child. The study can explore how their communication and motivation to be involved in special education changed from one child to the next. Furthermore, the study can investigate how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers understanding their first child's diagnosis has helped them identify their second child's diagnosis and be able to ask for appropriate related services and special education programs.

Closing Comments

Educators in special education have the ability to educate and teach families about their children's disabilities. Educators can also provide referrals on how parents can receive support and learn about their children's disabilities and special educational rights. Working in education, educators have strategies that can be applied in teaching CLD families how educational resources work. The CLD families can then use these educational strategies to support their children with disabilities obtain the appropriate special education. Providing CLD families with these strategies can motivate in supporting their children's education. Educators have the advantage and knowledge of having received higher education courses over their careers that can support CLD parents in communicating openly and navigating the special education system.

Findings of this study indicated that all 12 of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers were unaware of or did not understand that their child had a disability and that their child would be attending classes referred to as special education. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers needed to clearly understand what type of special education programs or related services were being offered. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers did not understand special education programs, procedures, laws, parents' rights, and IEP protocols as described in IDEA Part B, under procedural safeguards.

Furthermore, the researcher is an instructional specialist who has taught students with multiple disabilities from kindergarten through 12th grade. The researcher is driven to provide best practices to assist and support CLD families with children with disabilities. Specifically, the researcher would like to support and teach parents and families who are limited in their understanding of the U.S. education process.

Additionally, writing this dissertation has made the researcher more aware of how Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have struggled and continue to struggle when navigating special education programs. Ten of the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers shared their motivation to promote their children's progress by their self-determination to advocate for their children to receive an appropriate education. As Valdes (1996) described, CLD families struggle to form relationships with educational professionals. Ten of the participants described the struggle they had to maintain a communication relationship with the professionals during IEP meetings. Nine of the participants reported that special education personnel had a lack of respect for them, making it difficult to form relationships.

Apart from this finding, the researcher hopes to see school districts establish community training centers to build relationships with CLD parents, where they will have the opportunity to be able to participate, become involved and engaged, and learn to collaborate as a team. Such centers will benefit both parties because both sides are active participants in developing a program that will benefit children's education.

In conclusion, the researcher would like to give special thanks to the director of the nonprofit community-based organization located in Southern California for the support she provided, as well as to the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers and the rest of the audience who politely and respectfully listened to the researcher discuss potential study. Last but

not least, special thanks are offered to the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who participated in this phenomenological qualitative study. The researcher appreciates all the time they spent sharing their experiences and motivation to continue learning about special education to support their children becoming independent adults.

Moreover, the researcher is grateful for the time the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers set aside for this study. They made the time for the interviews, even when they had to drive their children to therapy sessions, in addition to the time they spent were waiting to attend a meeting. Furthermore, they also paused what they were doing with their children to support this study. They shared their experiences with the knowledge that they had the opportunity to help other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers navigate the special education system with less stress and greater empowerment.

Finally, the researcher admires the participants for their wiliness to share their personal experiences in raising their children with disabilities. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers shared their experiences and recommended that other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrants educate themselves and not be afraid to support their children with disabilities. They encouraged other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to ask questions and make suggestions to support their children's education. The Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expressed a fighting spirit to ensure that their children received an educational experience that will help them thrive as independent adults in society.

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APPENDIX A

CITI HSR Certificate



Completion Date 18-Jan-2022

Expiration Date 17-Jan-2027

Record ID 46617524

This is to certify that:

Veronica Ferruffino

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification
through CME.**GSEP Education Division**

(Curriculum Group)

GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University**CITI**
Collaborative Institutional Training InitiativeVerify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w2ad4eccf-e94c-47e9-9001-326c10abed43-46617524

APPENDIX B
IRB Approval Notice

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 08, 2022

Protocol Investigator Name: Veronica Ferrufino

Protocol #: 22-01-1740

Project Title: WHAT SPANISH-SPEAKING LATINA IMMIGRANT MOTHERS' EXPERIENCE WHEN PARTICIPATING IN THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN FOR THEIR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Veronica Ferrufino:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Marketing Flyer and Script (English and Spanish)

Figure C1

Recruitment Marketing Flyer in English



Seeking Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with a disability and have participated in IEP meetings. To participate in interviews describing their experiences in IEP meetings for a study conducted by Veronica Ferrufino, School of Education and Psychology department, Student.

Time Required- Approximately 60 minutes interviews

**Contact Information:**

For more information please contact: Veronica Ferrufino

Principal Investigator: Veronica Ferrufino

Figure C2

Recruitment Marketing Flyer in Spanish



Se busca inmigrantes madres Latina de que hablen español y que tengan hijos con una discapacidad y haya participado en reuniones de IEP. Para participar en entrevistas que describen sus experiencias en reuniones de IEP para un estudio realizado por Veronica Ferrufino, estudiante del departamento de Psicología y Escuela de Educación.

El tiempo requerido: aproximadamente 60 minutos de entrevistas



Información del contacto:

Para obtener más información, póngase en contacto:

Contact Information: Veronica Ferrufino

Investigadora principal Veronica Ferrufino

Recruitment Script (English and Spanish)



Dear Participant,

My name is Veronica Ferrufino and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with disabilities and have participated in IEP meetings. As a Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mother, you are invited to participate in this study.

If you agree, you are invited to participate in an interview with the researcher, scheduled for approximately 60 minutes. Interviews can be conducted virtually or in-person with appropriate COVID guidelines for safety reasons.

The interviews are anticipated to take no more than 60 minutes. The interviews are expected to be completed within one meeting day. The research will record the interviews, which will only be utilized for transcription purposes. The recording will be saved in the researcher's computer and will never leave the researcher's possession. After five years, the Recordings will be destroyed. The researcher will be the only one to have access to the recording and it will only be utilized for transcription purposes.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. All identities are protected by pseudonyms such as Participant 1. In addition, the participants' information will not be identified. Data will be stored in a secure place by the researcher.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via email.

Thank you for your participation,

Veronica Ferrufino
Pepperdine University
School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Student



Estimado participante,

Mi nombre es Veronica Ferrufino y soy estudiante de doctorado en la Escuela de Posgrado en Educación y Psicología de la Universidad de Pepperdine. Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación que examina a madres inmigrantes Latinas que hablan Español y que tienen hijos con discapacidades y han participado en reuniones del IEP. Usted está invitada a participar en el estudio.

Si está de acuerdo, se le invita a participar en una entrevista, que se llevará a cabo en una reunión de 60 minutos. Las entrevistas se programarán aproximadamente 60 minutos una reunión. Las entrevistas se pueden realizar de forma virtual o en persona con las reglas de COVID adecuadas por razones de seguridad.

Se anticipa que las entrevistas no durarán más de 60 minutos y se anticipa que las entrevistas se completarán dentro del período indicado. Las entrevistas solo se utilizarán para fines de transcripción. La grabación se guardará en la computadora del investigador y nunca dejará de estar en posesión del investigador. Las grabaciones se destruirán después de 5 años. El investigador será el único que tendrá acceso a la grabación y solo se utilizará con fines de transcripción.

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su identidad como participante será confidencial durante y después del estudio. Todas las identidades están protegidas por seudónimos como Participante 1. Además, no se identificará la información de los participantes. El investigador almacenará los datos en un lugar seguro.

Si tiene preguntas o le gustaría participar, comuníquese conmigo al email.

Gracias por su participación,
Veronica Ferrufino
Universidad Pepperdine
Facultad de Educación y Psicología
Doctorando

APPENDIX D

Demographic Data

Participants	Mother- Level of Education	Place of birth	Years in the U.S.	Child's grade level
Parent 1	High School	Mexico	33	11th
Parent 2	GED	Mexico	5	1st
Parent 3	Bachelor (Accounting)	Mexico	24	8th
Parent 4	High School	Mexico	22	9th
Parent 5	High School	El Salvador	20	9th
Parent 6	Master (Communication)	Columbia	22	6th
Parent 7	High School	El Salvador	12	Kinder
Parent 8	High School	El Salvador	30	9th
Parent 9	No education	El Salvador	15	4th
Parent 10	Some High School	El Salvador	35	11th
Parent 11	Bachelor (Accounting)	Mexico	14	6th
Parent 12	GED	Mexico	25	5th

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

FORMAL STUDY TITLE

What Spanish-Speaking Latina Immigrant Mothers' Experience When Participating in The Individualized Education Plan for Their Children with Disabilities

AUTHORIZED STUDY PERSONNEL

Principal Investigator: Veronica Ferrufino,
Committee Chair: Reyna Garcia Ramos, PhD.

KEY INFORMATION

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant females between the ages of 19 and up.
- Have participated in IEP meetings and have a child with a disability.
- One 60 minutes virtual or in person interview.
- Risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and psychological distress because the questionnaire involves sensitive questions about your experiences with special education programs that serve your child with a disability.
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT INVITATION

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. Please read the sections below carefully and if you have any question or concern, please ask before deciding to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

WHY ARE YOU BEING ASKED TO BE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

You are receiving this letter of informed consent because you voluntarily responded to the recruitment letter from Veronica Ferrufino, a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. You are being asked to be in this study because you are a Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant. Mother of a child with a disability who attends public education and has participated in an Individualized Education Plan meeting. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenology study is to describe the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers attending IEP meetings as they interact with school personnel. This qualitative phenomenological study will explore the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have a child in special education and their understanding of the process of the IEP meeting regarding their children's education with disabilities.

STUDY PROCEDURES

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in approximately a sixty-minute interview either virtually or by phone call. You will complete the interview questions by meeting with the researcher and your answer will be audio recorded. The interview questions are related to your experience in attending IEP meetings.

USAGE OF DATA

Your data will be used to support future Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in understanding the process of special education, such as the terminology services, suggesting educational goals, placement, and procedures during the IEP meetings. This study can help Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers expand their knowledge and abilities within their community to guide other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with a disability. It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to become proactive in seeking clarification and overcome barriers when discussing their children's education future concerning special education services in schools. Any personal information identifying you will be removed before the [data/samples/images] are shared.

POSSIBLE RISKS OF BEING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

This research presents a risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and psychological distress because the questionnaire involves sensitive questions about your experiences with special education programs that serve your child with a disability. This study presents minimal risk to the participants. The participants' names will remain confidential, and the data will be collected through virtual, phone or in-person interviews and will be recorded for research purposes.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

This study can benefit the participants by knowing that they contribute information in hopes that it will help other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers that are experiencing similar problems. You may not get any benefit from participating in the research study.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO OTHER PEOPLE

This study can benefit Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers in expanding their knowledge and abilities within their community to guide other Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers who have children with a disability. It is hoped that the results of this research will encourage Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to become proactive in seeking clarification and overcome barriers when discussing their children's education future about special education services in schools. Any personal information identifying you will be removed before the [data/samples/images] are shared.

COST TO PARTICIPANT

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

PARTICIPANT COMPENSATED

You will receive a \$10.00 gift card for your participation in this study.

IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY-

WHAT TO DO?

Your welfare is the primary concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have a problem or experience harm as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form. If needed, seek immediate emergency care for this problem. Please note it is the policy of Pepperdine University not to pay for any required care. Agreeing to this does not mean you have given up any of your legal rights.

PROTECTING THE PARTICIPANTS

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. Your data will only be shared with the study committee.

FOR PROJECTS THAT COLLECT PAPER-RECORDS

The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for five years after the analysis is complete. The only persons who will have access to the research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be reported as a group or summarize data, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS- IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB): Phone: 1(310)568-2305. Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

DECIDE NOT TO BE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY OR TO STOP PARTICIPATING ONCE YOU START

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University (list others as applicable). You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

You are voluntarily deciding whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered, and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SURVEY

To meet Pepperdine University's ongoing accreditation efforts and to meet the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) standards, an online feedback survey is included below:

<https://forms.gle/nnRgRwLgajYzBq5t7>

As part of Pepperdine University's ongoing accreditation efforts, the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) standard I-4: The Organization responds to concerns of research participants, encourages the HRPP to conduct evaluation or research participant satisfaction. In order to meet this standard, we have created an online feedback survey. All investigators are now required to include the following statement and survey link in all written informed consent information documents.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol (English and Spanish)

The following interview questions will help understand the experiences Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers have when attending IEP meetings. Thank you for agreeing and being part of this phenomenology study. The questions are about your experiences when you participate in your child's IEP.

The purpose of this phenomenology study is to understand Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers' experiences and their motivation to participate in their children's' IEPs

1. What experiences have Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers had with special education?
 - a. What understanding do Latina mothers have in special education?
 - i. When you hear the words "special education," what do you understand?*
 - b. How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers define special education?
 - i. What does special education mean to you?*
 - ii. How would you define or explain special education?*
 - c. Has the time spent on special education issues built their understanding of special education?
 - i. Has spending time with your child in special education meetings and programs increased your understanding?*
 - ii. Describe your experience in learning about special education.*
2. How do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers perceive their participation in the process of special education?
 - a. Do Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers feel a welcomed approach when working with special education personnel?
 - i. In what ways do you feel welcomed into the school?*
 - ii. In what ways has the school personnel supported you in this?*
 - b. If participation has occurred, has it happened with school personnel, has it made a difference in their experiences with special education?

- i. In what ways do you feel connected to the school community?*
- c. How did the Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers become motivated to participate in special education?
- i. What motivates you to be involved in your child's education?*
3. What motivates Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to be proactive in the IEP decision-making process?
- a. Are Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers able to address concerns with school personnel?
- i. How often do you talk with your child's Special Education Teacher?*
- ii. Do you initiate the conversation, or do they?*
- iii. What is the topic of conversation usually about?*
- iv. What do you think is the role of the teacher in school?*
- b. What can school districts do to better support children and families in Special Education?
- i. How can each support the others?*
- ii. What can you share, suggest and recommend about IEP meetings to Spanish-speaking Latina immigrant mothers to understand the process and be part of the IEP meetings?*

Protocolo De Entrevista

Las siguientes preguntas de la entrevista ayudarán a comprender las experiencias que tienen las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español cuando asisten a las reuniones del IEP. Gracias por aceptar y ser parte de este estudio de fenomenología. Las preguntas son sobre sus experiencias cuando participa en el IEP de su hijo.

El propósito de este estudio fenomenológico es comprender las experiencias de las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español y su motivación para participar en los IEP de sus hijos.

1. ¿Qué experiencias han tenido las madres inmigrantes Latinas que hablan español con la educación especial?
 - a. ¿Qué comprensión tienen las madres inmigrantes Latinas que hablan español en educación especial?
 - i. Cuando escuchas las palabras “educación especial”, ¿qué entiende?
 - b. ¿Cómo definen las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español la educación especial?
 - i. ¿Qué significa la educación especial para ti?
 - ii. ¿Cómo definiría o explicaría la educación especial?
 - c. ¿El tiempo dedicado a temas de educación especial les ayudó a comprender la educación especial?
 - i. ¿Ha aumentado su comprensión el pasar tiempo con su hijo en reuniones y programas de educación especial?
 - ii. Describa su experiencia en el aprendizaje de la educación especial.
2. ¿Cómo perciben las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español su participación en el proceso de educación especial?
 - a. ¿Las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español se sienten bienvenidas cuando trabajan con personal de educación especial?
 - i. ¿De qué manera te sientes bienvenido en la escuela?
 - ii. ¿De qué manera le ha apoyado el personal de la escuela en esto?
 - b. Si la participación ha ocurrido, ¿ha sucedido con el personal de la escuela, ha marcado una diferencia en sus experiencias con la educación especial?
 - i. ¿De qué manera te sientes conectado con la comunidad escolar?
 - c. ¿Cómo se motivaron las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español para participar en la educación especial?
 - i. ¿Qué lo motiva a participar en la educación de su hijo?

3. ¿Qué motiva a las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español a ser proactivas en el proceso de toma de decisiones del IEP?
- a. ¿Pueden las madres inmigrantes latinas de habla hispana abordar sus inquietudes con el personal de la escuela?
 - i. ¿Con qué frecuencia habla con el maestro de educación especial de su hijo?
 - ii. ¿Tú inicias la conversación o ellos?
 - iii. ¿De qué se trata habitualmente el tema de conversación?
 - iv. ¿Cuál crees que es el papel del profesor en la escuela?
 - b. ¿Qué pueden hacer los distritos escolares para apoyar mejor a los niños y las familias en Educación Especial?
 - i. ¿Cómo pueden cada uno apoyar a los demás?
 - ii. *¿Qué puede compartir, sugerir y recomendar acerca de las reuniones del IEP a las madres inmigrantes latinas que hablan español para comprender el proceso y ser parte de las reuniones del IEP?*

APPENDIX G

Permission Email Sample

Figure G1*Email Sample*

Hi Dr. **Hernandez**,

I'm a doctoral student at Pepperdine University and I was reviewing your dissertation. I want to know if it's okay if I borrow a few interview questions. My dissertation is about experiences of Latina mothers have during IEP meetings. It's a phenomenological study and I will be interviewing the participants.

Thanks and I hope this is not too much to ask.

Veronica Ferrufino

Yes, of course. But please give me credit.

If I can be of help to you or you have any questions, please let me know.

This work is critically important and being about to have Latina mothers voices in the field is much needed.

Best of luck to you!

Warmly,
Amalia

Sent from my iPhone
