

**Parents' Perception of Early Childhood Parental Involvement in Low-Socioeconomic
Communities**

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Abstract

Early childhood parent involvement sets the pace for academic achievement in later years of schooling and may help remedy underperformance in low-income communities. The study addressed the problem of early childhood parent involvement among parents from low-income communities, which is lacking. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of early childhood parental involvement among parents residing in low-income communities. Ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Epstein's model of parental involvement were utilized as the theoretical foundation for this study. Twenty-four parents of children in preschool through third grade from low-income neighborhoods in the United States were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling via social media postings. Semi-structured interviews served as the data source. Braun and Clarke's inductive thematic analysis phases revealed three central themes: Parents viewed involvement as extending beyond participation in the school setting, they encountered structural and contextual barriers, which included financial hardship, time constraints, and inconsistent communication from schools, and despite obstacles, parents demonstrated resilience and employed various strategies to stay engaged in their children's education. The findings highlighted the need for schools and community organizations to implement inclusive, culturally responsive, and flexible approaches to parent involvement that acknowledge and reflect the distinct lived realities of low-income parents. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on parent involvement by amplifying the voices of parents who are often underrepresented in research and practice, and provides educators, policymakers, and communities with valuable insights on how to better partner with families in underserved communities.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Definitions of Key Terms	11
Review of the Literature	11
Ethical Assurances	27
Summary	31
Section 2: Methodology and Design.....	35
Design and Method	35
Population and Sample	41
Materials/Instrumentation.....	43
Data Collection and Analysis.....	48
Assumptions.....	51
Delimitations.....	52
Summary	53
Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations.....	54
Findings.....	55
Results.....	60
Evaluation of the Outcomes.....	88
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	91
Recommendations for Future Research	94
Conclusions.....	96
References.....	98
Appendices.....	114
Appendix A Parent Interview Questions	115
Appendix B Informed Consent Form	122
Appendix C Facebook Post	124
Appendix D Recruitment Letter	125
Appendix E Recruitment Flyer	126
Appendix F Demographic Data	127
Appendix G Coding Schema	128
Appendix H Codebook	155

List of Tables

Table 1	Participant Demographics.....	57
Table 2	Sample Codebook.....	63
Table 3	Sample Initial Theme and Aligned Codes	65
Table 4	Sample of Aligned Categories to Themes and Research Questions.....	67
Table 5	Final Themes, Meanings, and Alignment with Research Questions	69

Section 1: Foundation

Theorists acknowledge parent involvement as a key component in children's education for achieving academic success (Kingston, 2021). Since parents are children's first teachers, parental involvement is vital during early childhood years to promote the development of social, emotional, and academic skills (Cosso et al., 2022; Young & McGeeney, 2023). Increased parent involvement in early childhood is essential for setting the pace for academic achievement in later years of schooling. It may provide a remedy for underperformance that exists in disadvantaged communities (Kingston, 2021).

While parent involvement has proven to be effective, it is often perceived as a complex subject due to its multiple definitions, elements, methods, and perspectives (Şengönül, 2022). The traditional interpretation of parental involvement encompasses activities such as parents regularly attending school meetings and parent-teacher conferences, participating in school events, and volunteering for various school activities (Şengönül, 2022; Weyant, 2022). In addition, some consider parental involvement as prioritizing their child's school attendance and engagement in home activities that support and develop children's school readiness and academic preparedness (Hamidun et al., 2019; Sujarwo et al., 2021). Given the various aspects of parent involvement, some families of children in early childhood programs fail to recognize the importance of maintaining ongoing engagement in their child's education and have left academic instruction to educators alone (Wehrhan, 2021). Additionally, involvement among parents from low-socioeconomic-status communities is significantly lower than among parents from affluent households (Vanover et al., 2021). Factors and possible contextual challenges may impact the level of early childhood parent involvement in schools in low-income communities (Shepherd, 2022).

Parental involvement has been a focus of research aimed at establishing its importance and positive effects in early childhood education, as demonstrated by Sujarwo et al. (2021). Sengönül (2022) highlighted correlations between parent involvement and educational outcomes by reexamining 42 previously published studies, which revealed increased academic achievement among students whose parents were involved in learning activities such as reading to children and in additional home and school activities that support learning. The results indicated increased outcomes for young children in areas such as cognitive, intellectual, and emerging literacy skills as well as social and emotional growth. Additional educational outcomes included increased reading levels, assessment scores, and grade averages in literacy, math, and science as children progressed through primary and secondary school.

In their research study, Henry et al. (2020) reported that preschoolers from low-socioeconomic-status homes who received parent support demonstrated superior academic performance in second and third grade compared to students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who did not attend preschool. The authors further noted that early parental engagement contributed to stronger foundational skills, including early literacy and numeracy, which supported sustained academic success beyond the preschool years. In addition, Lara and Saracostti (2019) found that low levels of parental involvement were associated with lower academic achievement among children, reinforcing the importance of family involvement in early learning.

Although a student's academic achievement should not be influenced by their socioeconomic status, research indicates that it does (Islam, 2020). Children from low-income communities in the United States have demonstrated deficits in the areas of language development, vocabulary, and physical and cognitive development in comparison to children

from families with higher socioeconomic status. These data directly reflect the skills acquired during the early childhood academic years. Early childhood programs focus on skills that promote development in areas such as speech and language, motor, social, and cognitive skills using play-based learning and direct interaction (Rand & Morrow, 2021; Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Despite these challenges, some children from low socioeconomic backgrounds achieved high academic performance because their parents were determined to be actively involved in their education. According to Islam, these parents developed a mindset of perseverance despite limited resources, viewing education as a pathway out of poverty. The findings highlighted parental involvement as a key factor in increasing academic achievement regardless of one's social status (Islam, 2020).

This study is needed because students from underserved communities often encounter educational inequalities that hinder academic success (Bushnell, 2021; Coser et al., 2020). Although poverty and its effects are among the contributing factors to educational disparities, the lack of parent involvement in early childhood education is another contributing factor (Lara & Saracosti, 2019; Thomas, 2021). Understanding the role of parental involvement during early childhood is essential for developing effective strategies to support families in increasing involvement and improving academic outcomes.

Recent studies have recognized early childhood parent involvement as a precursor to academic success that will significantly impact student learning outcomes in low-income communities (Bushnell, 2021). Increasing parent involvement in early childhood programs located in communities with low socioeconomic status set the pace for continued involvement in primary and secondary grades and increased academic success (Kingston, 2021). As a result, it is

important to identify successful approaches to early childhood parental involvement in low-income communities and identify areas where parents need support.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is, early childhood parent involvement in low-income communities is lacking (Şengönül, 2022). Early childhood parent involvement sets the pace for children's academic success and has long-term effects on school achievement (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Additionally, parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships are crucial in early childhood programs to ensure children achieve their academic and developmental milestones (Kambouri et al., 2022).

Prior research has revealed that levels of parent involvement in early childhood education may be impacted based on factors such as family sociocultural factors, demographics, psychological barriers, parents' educational level, and socioeconomic status (Reupert et al., 2022), and a lack thereof may contribute to children's low academic performance (Gutiérrez-de-Rozas et al., 2022). Yang et al. (2023) recommended further research on the effectiveness of parent involvement, including among children from disadvantaged backgrounds and from single-parent households, and on identifying the types of parent involvement that are most effective in low-income communities. Addressing these research gaps may inform the development of interventions that strengthen family involvement and support early academic success.

Massucco (2020) investigated multiple perspectives on parent involvement to gain stakeholders' understanding of its effects on student success. Recommendations were made for further research to explore parent and student perspectives, specifically to expand the discussion of home-school parental involvement and to capture participants' viewpoints across varying socioeconomic statuses. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) investigated the beliefs and

experiences of low-income African American mothers of young children regarding early childhood parent involvement. Further research was recommended to examine patterns of parental involvement in families residing in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods and to investigate how schools and early childhood programs in low-income communities promote or hinder parent involvement. The lack of early childhood parent involvement in low-income communities can contribute to the inequities that exist in minority communities, such as low achievement on test scores, grade retention, non-completion of high school, and decreased college attendance (Bushnell, 2021). Increasing early childhood parent involvement may help reduce educational disparities faced by low-income communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of early childhood parental involvement among parents residing in low-income communities. Although parent involvement in early childhood years is recognized as a crucial component of early childhood academic and social development, parents in low-income areas face unique challenges that limit their ability to participate (Şengönül, 2022). The guiding research questions focused on understanding how parents described their experiences with early childhood involvement, the barriers they faced, and the successes they perceived from their involvement. Despite their vital role, the experiences, barriers, and successes of these parents remain insufficiently explored. This study sought to address the gap by examining how parents of children in preschool through third grade residing in low-income communities described their involvement in their child's education.

The target population included parents of early childhood children in preschool through third grade from low-income communities residing within the United States. After receiving IRB

approval, 24 parent participants were recruited using convenience sampling via the Facebook social media platform and snowball sampling, in which eligible participants were asked to refer additional participants who met the research criteria (Stratton, 2021). Recruitment was conducted by disseminating flyers, letters, and consent forms via the Facebook platform. The recruitment letters included participant criteria, the research purpose and objective, and the researcher's contact information. After expressing interest in the research study, participants were contacted by email and invited to participate in individual interviews to share their experiences, barriers, and successes related to parent involvement in their low-income communities.

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Interviews were conducted on Zoom platform. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by Cloud Recording and Audio transcript features on zoom setting. Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase process was implemented to conduct a thematic analysis which included becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, identifying initial themes, reviewing themes, refining and naming themes, and writing the final report. From the lived perspectives of parents, this study aimed to provide insights that could inform educators, policymakers, and community organizations in developing culturally responsive and accessible strategies to foster greater parent involvement in early childhood education in underserved communities.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education?

RQ2

How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education?

RQ3

What do parents from low-income communities describe as their successes with being involved in their child's early childhood education?

Theoretical Framework

The ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977), and Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement were utilized as the theoretical foundation for this study. These theoretical perspectives emphasize the influence of family, school, and other social contexts on childhood development and educational outcomes. Along with current research, these frameworks served as a guide for interpreting findings, providing insight, and offering possible explanations for parental involvement in early childhood education (Varpio et al., 2020).

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory describes the influence that environmental factors have on children. The ecological theory emphasizes a child's developmental reliance on multiple facets of their environment. Bronfenbrenner used the terms microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem to describe the levels of environmental relationships that impact a child's growth and development.

The microsystem is the most direct interaction between a person and their immediate environment, in which they play an active role (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This includes a child's interactions with parents and siblings at home, and with teachers and classmates at school. In the present study, the microsystem illustrates the importance of parent involvement with children

from an early age in the home setting. Parents who engaged in activities such as reading, playing, learning, and other experiences to develop a child's social-emotional, cognitive, and academic skills noticed academic gains (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The mesosystem describes the interaction between a child's microsystem and the school community, providing an explanation for the benefits of parents and schools playing a dual role in ensuring academic involvement with young children (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem comprises the social structure that exerts an indirect influence on a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem portrays the impact of other people's experiences on those residing in their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For example, a child is affected by a parent's job and their surrounding neighborhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Finally, the macrosystem describes cultural elements, such as a child's socioeconomic status, and how these factors impact a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This includes geographic location, neighborhood, race, education, and other conditions a child is born into (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory suggests that low economic status poses challenges to parents' desire to participate in their child's education, compared with parents in more affluent conditions. Islam (2020) presented evidence of the impact of low socioeconomic status on the development of young children, due to limited resources and other concerns. His research found deficiencies in cognitive, language, and physical development among young children from financially underprivileged households compared to those from more affluent homes.

The early childhood education system is linked to the ecological system as it relates to child development and the environmental influences that affect growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The multifaceted relationships of family members, educators, and

socioeconomic status all have an intertwined effect on a child's growth and development. As a result, a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and academic progress depends on parents' involvement in home and school activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory aligns with the research problems, purpose, and research questions because it predicts children's growth and development in early childhood and beyond, based on interactions with multiple facets of their environment. For example, the microsystem determines that whatever a child is intricately connected to in their immediate environment, such as home and school environment, has a great influence on a child's learning experience (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). As a result, a child potentially experiences improved learning and development when parents and teachers develop a close relationship that promotes increased parent involvement at home and at school. In addition, the macrosystem focuses on cultural environments, such as a family's educational level and social and economic status (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The macrosystem refers to the effects that cultural and social factors may have on parents' involvement in their child's education and on a child's growth and development (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018).

Epstein's Model of Parent Involvement

Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement also relates to this research problem. Epstein's framework consists of six types of family involvement. The first type of family involvement is parenting, in which support helps families establish a supportive home-learning environment for students. The second type is communication, which promotes effective communication between home and school concerning learning progress and school events. The third type is volunteering, which invites parents to donate their time in support of school

programs. The fourth type is learning at home, which presents information on how families can help students with homework and other home-based activities.

The fifth type is decision making, which provides opportunities for parents to advocate and be included in the decision-making process (Epstein, 1995). The sixth type is collaboration with the community, which promotes the notion that local businesses can be incorporated as a resource to support school programs. Parent involvement is vital for academic success from preschool through high school (Kingston, 2021). Epstein's (1995) model of parent involvement provides a wide range of behaviors that can serve as a guide to support the development of effective parent involvement among early childhood parents in low-income communities.

Epstein's model of parent involvement aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in demonstrating the influence of a child's family and community on educational development (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights successful parent involvement strategies, while Epstein highlights aspects of a child's environment that influence success or failure. Epstein's theory is beneficial to this study because the six steps to parent involvement offer activities that can help families improve the development and academic success of young children. It is necessary to be aware of both theories, as they highlight the relationships among family, home, school, and community and their influence on a child's growth and development (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework emphasizes the connection between a child's development and the enhancement of development in the home environment. Additionally, it reflects the influence of interactions between the microsystem and the extended environment. Joyce Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement reinforces the ideology and the importance of home-school connection.

Definitions of Key Terms

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Early childhood education is defined as the formal educational approach that includes activities to guide the development of children from birth to 8 years (Essa & Burnham, 2019).

Parental Involvement

Parent involvement refers to purposeful home- and school-based interaction between families and the education program, with the intent to support the learning and development of the child (Wieser, 2020).

Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning is defined as guided play that creates opportunities for authentic connection to learning content (Haile & Ghirmai, 2024).

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Socioeconomic status refers to the financial position as reflected in one's occupation, income, educational achievement, and access to numerous resources (Navarro-Carrilo et al., 2020).

Review of the Literature

Early childhood parent involvement is vital for establishing an academic foundation for a lifetime of learning (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). These early years of learning provide a foundation for preschoolers to develop speech and language, cognitive abilities, social-emotional skills, and other prerequisites for academic concepts in literacy, math, and science (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Given that current research has established parent involvement as an essential component of early childhood education, there is a need to promote equitable involvement for families across diverse types and socioeconomic backgrounds (Şengönül, 2022).

This literature review focused on early childhood parent involvement in low socioeconomic communities. National University Library and Google scholar were the academic databases used to access and source scholarly texts through the use of the phrases such as *historical background and theories of parent involvement, early childhood parent involvement in low-socioeconomic communities, parent involvement, benefits of parent involvement, benefits early childhood parent involvement, parent involvement and academic results, parent involvement in low income communities, academic performance in low income communities, barriers that hinder parent involvement in low income communities, parent perception of parent involvement, parent perception of early childhood parent involvement, parent perception of early childhood parental involvement in low income communities, socioeconomic influence on parental involvement, parent teacher communication, parent involvement and academic achievement, the effect of socioeconomic status on parental involvement, methods of increasing parent involvement in low-income communities and parent involvement strategies.*

The search engines returned 197,545 articles from 2018–2023. Keywords and phrases were used with the advanced search option and Boolean operators to refine the search. Terms and symbols such as "and, or, and the minus sign" combined keywords, including synonyms, and excluded unwanted terms for each search result. Ninety results were included as references. The abstract of each result was read to ensure relevance to the topic.

This research examined the perspectives of early childhood parents from low-income communities on parent involvement, identified parent involvement strategies recommended for low-income preschool parents, and determined which strategies were most effective in promoting academic achievement. Finally, methods to increase early childhood parent

involvement among low-income families were investigated, and recommendations for future research were made.

This literature review compiles research articles published within the last five years to survey parent perceptions of early childhood parent involvement in low-income communities and its effect on kindergarten academic preparedness, while scrutinizing socioeconomic status as a hindrance to this involvement. The topics included in the literature review are Early Childhood Parenting, Six Types of Parent Involvement, Positive Effects of Early Childhood Parent Involvement, Parent Perspective of Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community, Teacher Perspectives of Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community, Barriers to Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community, and Increasing Parent Involvement in Low-Income Communities.

Early Childhood Parenting

Parenting is the process of raising a child while providing protection, care, and necessities for healthy development into adulthood (Kretchmar-Hendricks, 2023). Research has highlighted the crucial role of parenting in a child's development (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). In early childhood, mothers play a pivotal role in children's development and educational progress (Reay, 2023). The same holds true for parent involvement, as mothers bear the primary responsibility for caring for all aspects of a child's growth and well-being (Schmidt et al., 2023). Research indicates that parents are also essential to a child's academic development.

Parenting practices can influence a child's cognitive and academic achievement in early childhood development (Riley et al., 2019). Studies have linked parenting style to young children's early development of social, cognitive, and language skills (Waluyandi et al., 2020). Madigan et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis to examine how early language development

was influenced by parental behaviors. Data collected from 37 studies were examined. The parenting behaviors measured were sensitive responsiveness and warmth (Madigan et al., 2019). Sensitive responsiveness refers to parents' ability to recognize and respond to a child's emotional needs appropriately and in a timely manner, and warmth refers to showing affection through physical contact and interactions (Feldman, 2019). According to the results, both parenting approaches positively affected language development, especially among children from low-income backgrounds (Feldman, 2019). Madigan et al. (2019) also reported that their study found the sensitive, responsive parenting approach had a significantly stronger association with a child's language development than the parental warmth approach.

Parents play the main role as caretakers in the development of young children (Jeong et al., 2021). Parent roles are just as important in academic development (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). When parents support young children's learning, they set the stage for a lifetime of learning and academic achievement (Kingston, 2021).

Six Types of Parent Involvement

Joyce Epstein (1995) established six components to parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. Epstein (1995) aimed to help schools improve their programs, support families, increase parents' skills, and build partnerships among families, schools, and communities.

Epstein presented practical examples of how this partnership can be designed and implemented (Epstein, 1995).

Parenting. According to Epstein's (1995) framework, the parenting model helps parents establish a positive home environment conducive to children's growth, healthy development, and academic success. Sample practices are presented for learning institutions to emulate and use as

a guide to provide training and support for families. Some suggested practices include parental education programs, child-rearing workshops, and programs to support families with nutrition and health.

In the United States, Head Start, and other preschool programs utilize Epstein's approach by offering parental support in multiple ways (Holistic Learning, 2021). This includes home-based parenting support in which early childhood specialists visit homes to assist parents and children with developing strategies to promote learning. Parent training is also provided to support parents in developing parenting skills such as discipline strategies, problem-solving strategies, positive involvement with children, and other knowledge needed to raise and educate young children. Parents are assisted with developing home learning environments that are age-appropriate and that promote health and nutrition (Lee et al., 2023).

When providing parental support, schools often face challenges in ensuring that information is presented to all families in need and in motivating families to share areas of need (Epstein, 1995). With workshops in place to support and improve parenting skills, parents gain confidence in their parenting abilities, teachers gain respect for families, and students gain greater awareness of the importance of school. Teachers also gain a better understanding of each family's cultural background and needs. Parenting young children can be overwhelming, and any support offered by early childhood education programs is welcomed by families. Parent support and involvement are necessary to increase young learners' cognitive development (Holistic Learning, 2021).

Communication. The second type of involvement is communication, in which school administrators and educators use communication methods to promote adequate dialogue and exchange of information between home and school (Epstein, 1995). Practices such as parent-

teacher conferences, distribution of progress reports and report cards, and notices regarding school policies and events are all recommended to promote open communication between parents and teachers. Many early childhood programs in the United States implement Epstein's communication model to build partnerships between teachers and parents (Chen & Rivera-Vernazza, 2023). For example, early childhood programs participate in back-to-school events where teachers meet with parents to share information about school programs and curriculum and answer parent questions. Early childhood programs include participation in parent-teacher conferences, which provide teachers with an opportunity to share information about the child's learning and developmental progress, strengths, and needs. Non-routine phone calls can be made periodically to address a child's behaviors, academic difficulties, and other concerns.

In addition to communication modes that require direct contact, schools also engage in communication methods using printed materials, which include newsletters, announcement fliers, booklets about school policies, and home-school communication folders (Chen & Rivera-Vernazza, 2023). Furthermore, the increased use of technology creates opportunities for digital communication, such as text, email, and other platforms. Educators and administrators often face challenges finding time to create printed materials, review the quality of bulletins and printed publications, ensure clear, readable notices are distributed, and maintain two-way communication between school and home (Epstein, 1995).

When implementing communication methods, students, parents, and teachers can experience positive results. Progress reports and report cards give students and parents awareness of student progress and the necessary actions for grade improvement. Parents better understand school policies and programs through newsletters, memos and notices, conferences, and

parenting networks, allowing teachers to better understand parents' views on programs and other issues (Epstein, 1995).

Volunteering. Volunteering is a third approach to parental involvement, including recruiting parents for school-wide and classroom support (Epstein, 1995). Schools are encouraged to create volunteer programs that allow parents to participate in activities such as establishing parent- and family-centered programs, conducting meetings with families, providing resources for families, supporting teachers in the classroom, and monitoring student safety (Epstein, 1995). There is no recognized definition of volunteerism; as a result, the types of volunteer activities differ across cultures and communities. However, many schools in the United States incorporate Epstein's model as a guide and incorporate many activities mentioned (Brown, 2019).

Brown (2019) examined various activities that parent volunteers participate in, and the number of hours spent based on varying demographics, genders, and ethnicities. The study aimed to investigate whether parent participation in volunteer tasks is considered high-risk or low risk. In this case, risk referred to the level of liability the school accepts if a volunteer gets injured or causes injury while volunteering.

To gain a greater understanding of how diverse types of parents choose to volunteer, the research included demographic characteristics of ethnicity and gender (Brown, 2019). Data on volunteer activities were examined to identify types of volunteer work provided by parents (US Census Bureau, 2006). In the survey, parents mentioned participating in volunteer activities such as serving on parent association committees, distributing resources, fundraising, chaperoning school trips, volunteering in individual classrooms, and providing general office support.

Teachers and administrators often face challenges with organizing volunteers, finding parents willing to participate, and making flexible schedules for volunteers (Epstein, 1995). Creating a flexible schedule to accommodate working parents and organizing and providing training for participants were additional challenges faced by schools that attempted this approach. Students, teachers, and parents experienced positive results from volunteering (Iyengar, 2021). When parents volunteer in the classroom, students learn more through tutoring and personal attention during instruction. Parents become more aware of the teacher's job, feel more comfortable in the school community, and gain skills from volunteer work. With volunteers' help, teachers can provide greater individual attention to students (Epstein, 1995).

Learning at Home. Learning at home is the fourth involvement method, offering families strategies to support student learning (Epstein, 1995). Schools are encouraged to support parents who experience challenges with home-learning strategies by providing information on the skills required for each grade, homework policies and schedules, a daily calendar of activities parents can use at home, and vacation learning packets to reinforce what students are learning at home. Many early childhood education programs utilize Epstein's model as a guide to support learning at home and incorporate similar practices such as presenting information regarding grade-appropriate skill requirements, providing a calendar of daily home literacy activities that can be implemented, and providing parents with resources to support students' academic needs (Krijnen et al., 2020).

To support what children are learning in school, parents are encouraged to engage children in activities that build emergent literacy, motor, oral language, and linguistic skills (Krijnen et al., 2020). Teachers provide an opportunity for parents to engage with children in activities such as name writing practice, identifying letter names and sounds from printed

materials, numbers and shapes recognition, letter and number writing practice, and provide daily reminders about correcting mispronounced words, reading to children, and building vocabulary by reinforcing the meaning of words.

Schools often face challenges in designing and organizing interactive homework that reflects daily learning, linking homework activities across multiple teachers, and involving families in decisions related to the curriculum (Epstein, 1995). Home learning offers students opportunities to reinforce content learned in school. When schools provide parents with home-learning activities, students experience increased skills, abilities, and assessment scores. Parents will gain awareness of what their child is learning, and teachers will recognize increased student comprehension.

Decision-Making. Decision-making is a parent involvement strategy that invites parents to participate in their school's decision-making process (Epstein, 1995). Epstein encouraged schools to promote parent participation by creating parent association committees and holding school elections. Providing information about school and local elections and connecting families with parent representatives also encourage decision making.

In some school communities, parents can participate in school decision-making (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parents participate in school decisions by serving on school government committees and parent-teacher associations, and by taking on other leadership roles that involve circulating information to other parents. Other decision-making roles involve advocating for school improvement and networking with parent representatives. In these capacities, parents can have a voice to bring about school reform. Schools often face challenges with including parents from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in decision-making (Epstein, 1995).

Collaborating With the Community. Collaborating with the community is a type of parent involvement strategy that leverages community resources to improve school programs (Epstein, 1995). Schools are encouraged to locate and utilize resources and services in local communities to build school programs, family practice, and student learning. Some suggested practices that schools can utilize include providing families with information about community health, social and recreational support, and community learning activities and opportunities (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein's framework of family, school, and community partnership has influenced many school districts to emulate their sample practices (Epstein, 1995). Many educators in schools nationwide familiarize themselves with community resources that connect to learning curricula and incorporate them to enhance student learning (Gahwaji, 2019; Hausburg, 2020). For example, field trips that connect units of study to the natural world are often planned. In addition, educators and administrators share knowledge of community resources, including local businesses that offer specialized services, community programs with learning activities, health-related services, and other opportunities. Schools often face challenges in ensuring that all parents are informed about community programs and in providing equal opportunity to participate in them.

Epstein's (1995) framework of parent involvement yields different perceptions of parents' effectiveness and consistency, depending on the structure of each population. Newman et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine whether there was a difference in viewpoints on the effectiveness of parent involvement across demographic groups, based on Epstein's framework of parent involvement. A quantitative study was conducted using perception surveys completed by parents with varying demographics, including gender, ethnicity, education level, income

level, and number of children in the home. These were parents from an urban public elementary school system in the Southeastern United States. Availability sampling was used, with a sample of 670 parents: 440 African Americans, 204 Caucasians, 21 Hispanics, and 5 who identified as other. Results indicated no significant difference in parent perceptions by race. However, significant differences were observed in parental perceptions based on education level, socioeconomic status, and the number of children at home.

Positive Effects of Early Childhood Parent Involvement

Several studies have highlighted the positive effects of early childhood parent involvement, including increased school attendance, positive classroom behavior, increased academic grades, better development of social skills, and adaptation to school (Newman et al., 2019). In their quantitative study, Barger et al. (2019) investigated a link between parent involvement and children's adjustment to school. The quantitative methodology included 448 studies with 480,830 families. The results revealed a positive relationship between parent involvement in children's schooling and academic adjustment that remained stable for an extended period.

Additional studies have linked parent involvement to academic improvements in early childhood education and beyond. For example, Tan et al. (2020) conducted a study on the academic benefits of parental involvement and how these benefits are stratified by parental socioeconomic status, using a meta-analysis of 98 studies to evaluate the presumption that students benefit from parental involvement regardless of economic status. The researchers examined patterns in studies on parent involvement variables and student academic achievement.

The results indicated that positive student achievement was associated with parent involvement in academic expectations, parent participation in school events, parent reading

together, and parent discussions (Tan et al., 2020). Students whose parents were highly educated and involved in home learning, parent-teacher communication, and academic support had a strong connection to student achievement. Language-related achievement was also seen in students whose parents were highly educated. The writers concluded that some of the benefits of parental involvement depend on a family's socioeconomic status.

Federal government agencies have envisioned the impact of early childhood parent involvement on a national scale and have invested in federally funded programs to provide parental support across the maternal, infant, and early childhood stages of development (Bower et al., 2020). Increasing early childhood parental involvement indicates greater national development through improved educational outcomes (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000). Increasing early childhood parental involvement fosters a more literate, productive workforce and a prosperous nation (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000).

Parent Perspective of Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Communities

Early childhood parents in low-income communities rely on schools to provide a safe, nurturing environment that teaches children behavior management and offers activities to enhance academic abilities (Newman et al., 2019). Many low-income parents believe their abilities are insufficient to develop appropriate behaviors in their children and increase academic achievement. Some parents feel their responsibility for their children's education exists at home, while schools are responsible for their education at school (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). As a result, parents from low-income communities are less likely to demonstrate involvement in school-based activities.

Some studies showed varying perspectives on parent involvement in low-income communities (Puccioni et al., 2021). In their study, Huguley et al. (2021) described the

educational involvement experiences of parents from urban schools to explore how home-based and school-based involvement relates to academic socialization. This research was conducted through the voices of African American parents attending an under-resourced urban public school as they described their experiences with the three domains of parent involvement.

The findings indicated that, because involvement strategies linked to the experiences of white, middle-class families were often used, distinct involvement strategies used by African American families were often overlooked (Huguley et al., 2021). Findings revealed that parenting approaches vary by race, and some cultures possess their own approaches to home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization. The study concluded that limited attention was given to contextual variations in parent involvement and recommended further exploration of new typologies.

In addition, Lechuga-Peña et al. (2019) noted in their studies that parent involvement strategies are based on the cultural norms of middle-class European Americans. This gives no regard to the educational involvement experiences of other cultures. Research indicates that parent involvement strategies vary across subgroups, including racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences.

In their study, Gross et al. (2020) explored variations in definitions and characteristics of parent involvement in an urban school district serving low-income minorities. A qualitative descriptive design was utilized to interview parents, teachers, school staff, and local officials to understand how parent involvement is defined and characterized. The research sample comprised 63 parents, teachers, early childhood staff, and community leaders. The results highlighted varying definitions and interpretations of parent involvement. The fact that parents and educators hold differing perceptions of how parental involvement is defined and implemented underscores

the complexity of this term and the lack of agreement among parents, teachers, principals, other school staff, district leaders, and community leaders on how to involve parents in early childhood programs.

The meaning of being an involved parent is complex, as it varies across understandings of what it means to be involved in a child's education (Jeziarski & Wall, 2019). Some early childhood parents in low-income communities view parent involvement as engaging in home-based activities such as supporting children with homework, reading, and conversing with children (Gross et al., 2020). In their study "Changing Understandings and Expectations of Parental Involvement in Education," Jeziarski and Wall (2019) analyzed and compared parents' understanding of what it means to be involved in a child's education using articles from a parenting magazine from two periods. The findings reflected the complexity of parents' involvement in children's education from the parents' perspective, across both school and home. Results also indicated that, over time, parents shifted their role from providing parental assistance to creating an environment encouraging children to take responsibility for themselves.

Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) investigated how parents and educators in low-income schools perceive parent engagement and how the school, work, and family domains shape their understanding. Interviews were conducted with the principal, five teachers, and 17 mothers of children attending a Title 1 elementary school. The research provided an opportunity to observe several ways in which parents from low-income communities struggled to fulfill their parental responsibilities despite their desire to be involved in their child's education. As a result, their findings proposed that parent involvement is a unique experience for each family, shaped by home experiences and levels of resources.

Barriers to Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Communities

Early childhood parent involvement is an integral part of every child's academic development (Kingston, 2021). Parent involvement increases academic outcomes, improves attendance, improves social skills, and increases positive behavior (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Many early parents desire to be involved in their child's early childhood education. Research, however, indicated that several variables hinder low-income families' involvement in their child's education as much as they would like.

In their research study, Lechuga-Peña & Brisson (2018) explored school-based barriers to parental involvement. This study involved nine low-income mothers residing in a housing development with two or more children, who shared their experiences through in-depth interviews. Three mothers were culturally identified as African American, two as African, and four as Latina. Key findings indicated that low-income mothers have the desire to be involved and support their children's education through school activities.

However, these mothers faced barriers such as cultural and language differences (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Some parents felt their responsibility for their children resides at home, while schools are responsible for school-based learning. Parents whose first language was not English found it difficult to assist children with homework and communication at school.

In addition, some mothers did not feel welcomed at school and experienced racist undertones from teachers, staff, and parent leaders who looked down on them for their inability to volunteer and attend meetings (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Many parents also shared that their responsibilities as single mothers and primary providers prevented them from providing adequate attention to their children and being involved in school activities. Beyond school-based barriers, research indicated additional hindrances to early childhood parent involvement for low-

income parents. Many parents experienced a lack of childcare, transportation, and non-traditional work hours, all of which made consistent involvement in school activities a challenge.

Increasing Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Communities

Epstein (1995) identified six components of parental involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. There are numerous involvement methods, such as communicating with the school, providing homework help, reading with children, and participating in school activities (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Although African American and Latino students represent low-income and ethnic minority groups, limited research exists to determine which aspect of parent involvement has the greatest impact on these populations. Research indicates that African American parents desire to be involved in school-related activities, such as volunteering, but that home-based parent support tends to be more effective in increasing academic achievement.

Similarly, research indicates that Latino parents often provide educational support for children through home-based interventions. They support students by monitoring progress, providing homework help, offering educational resources, and providing encouragement (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Parent involvement is necessary for promoting academic achievement and educational success, regardless of children's social class and ethnicity. Research indicates that most parents do their best to be involved in their children's education.

This literature review identified recommendations for future research across several areas related to early childhood parent involvement (Thomas et al., 2020). Researchers suggested the need for additional studies to better understand parents' direct and indirect experiences with school-based parent involvement and how these experiences may promote self-efficacy. Further research is recommended to explore programs that help parents overcome circumstantial factors,

such as time and work schedules, that hinder parent involvement, and to work with families to develop additional involvement practices. Future research is recommended to investigate how parental involvement decisions are affected by socioeconomic status, how learning environments constrain or expand parental involvement, and which practices and policies may increase parental involvement across diverse cultures, races, and socioeconomic contexts.

Ethical Assurances

This research was conducted after receiving approval from the National University IRB. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants followed the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees, as well as the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments (Shresth & Dunn, 2019). Participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study. All participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Decisions were made by the researcher at every stage of the research process, and biases can occur at distinct phases of research (Flake & Fried, 2020). At the planning stage, researchers avoided sampling bias by selecting participants who best reflected the population (Flinton, 2020). A combination of Convenience and snowball sampling was used to select appropriate representatives to ensure objective results (Johnson et al., 2020). While conducting the study, interviewer bias, measurement bias, and confirmation bias were avoided by following standard interaction protocols with each respondent (Ross et al., 2018). Questions were asked in the same manner with the same wording for each participant (Johnson et al., 2020). Bias can also be prevented by including outliers who may have a different outlook from other participants and by utilizing additional researchers to analyze research results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). During the reporting stage of research, outcome reporting bias, publication bias, and spin were avoided

by ensuring that all study outcomes were reported (Ajuwon, 2020). Researchers must ensure a balanced summary of results, including negative findings. Research must also ensure that findings are reported without distorting the interpretation of the results.

To ensure ethical considerations in this study, all participants were informed of the study's purpose and intentions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Participants provided acknowledgment of their informed consent and understanding of the research's purpose, activities, and how the results will be utilized. Honesty and transparency were enforced by communicating all aspects of the research; participants provided consent for participation prior to the study, and the privacy and confidentiality of participants and data were ensured. All efforts were made to ensure that individuals and organizations participating in the study were unidentifiable through substitution codes. Substitution codes ensured participants' anonymity, so data collected cannot be traced back to individuals (<https://www.unr.edu/research-integrity/human-research/human-research-protection-policy-manual/410-maintaining-data-confidentiality>). All findings were presented and reported honestly and truthfully, without bias. Data collected were securely stored away in a locked cabinet for three years in accordance with federal guidelines (Simmons, 2024).

The Belmont Report presents ethical principles for evaluating and approving human actions in research and was created to ensure that research involving human subjects is conducted ethically (Pritchard, 2021). It provides guidelines for researchers to adhere to protect research participants, ensure individuals maintain their autonomy, and protect those whose autonomy has been diminished. Three principles accepted in the context of human research ethics are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Beneficence ensures that participants are treated with fairness and respect by securing participants' well-being, protecting them from harm,

and respecting their decisions. The main goal of the Belmont report is to do no harm, maximize benefits, and minimize possible harm. Justice ensures participants' right to be informed about the research purpose and intent, and to choose to participate or withdraw from participation. As a result, participants were made aware that their participation is voluntary, and they were at liberty to discontinue at any point in the research.

Recruitment letters, consent forms, and recruitment fliers were posted on Facebook. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to select parents of children in preschool through third grade in the United States from low-income communities. Convenience sampling was appropriate for this qualitative research because it allowed for precise targeting of the demographic and interest group needed, and for identifying the specific population that would have been challenging to find otherwise. The participants must meet specific inclusion criteria based on their experience with the phenomenon under investigation and be willing to participate.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit initial participants to share the research and to recruit additional participants who met the criteria (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Parent representatives from preschool through third-grade classrooms in low-income communities were selected, aiming at 25 participants. The research sample was finalized based on the number of parents who agreed to participate.

As the primary instrument of all aspects of the researcher process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), the researcher initiated the data collection phase by developing open ended questions aligned with the research problem, purpose and guiding research questions. The researcher questions and were used to conduct semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection

method. Interviews were conducted virtually through the Zoom video conferencing platform which allowed for both recording and transcription of participant responses.

The semi-structured interviews commenced once recording and transcribing were initiated. At the start of each session, the researcher engaged the participant in a brief greeting to build rapport, gain trust, and foster a comfortable environment conducive to open discussion (Wolff et al., 2019). The study's purpose was clearly explained, and its voluntary nature was emphasized. Each participant provided verbal consent, confirming their willingness to participate and be recorded. As Wolff et al. (2019) noted, consent for participation may be obtained formally or informally, through verbal or written means, depending on the nature of the research and the ethical guidelines in place.

The prepared open-ended questions served as a guide during the interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). After completing all the interviews, the researcher secured verbatim transcriptions for data analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step process was used to analyze the interview transcripts. The process included familiarizing the data, generating codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting results.

As I embark on this research study and engage in self-reflection, I acknowledge my standpoint as an African American early childhood educator serving families in a low-income community. I acknowledged my perspective as a parent of a child in an early childhood classroom. Although I currently educate preschoolers, I educate students in additional early childhood grades and often reflect on the under-performance and lack of preparedness observed as children transition to kindergarten and beyond. I acknowledge that my positionality has influenced this project to some degree. My experience as an educator and parent sparked a desire

to investigate and find answers to the question of why early childhood parent involvement is lacking in low-income communities.

One implicit bias addressed was the assumption that only African American families are uninvolved parents and should represent most research participants. To prevent this bias and to avoid influencing data findings, a researcher must conduct a self-examination to identify and acknowledge personal biases (DiBrito et al., 2019). Researchers must remain mindful when selecting research participants and aim to recruit a diverse group. In addition, providing clear eligibility criteria for study participation minimizes the need for researchers to select participants based on personal filters and perceptions (Wolff et al., 2019). Implementing these measures promotes objectivity, strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's results.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the phenomenon of why early childhood parent involvement among parents from low-income communities is lacking. This research explored how parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with involvement in early childhood education programs, the barriers they face to involvement in their child's early childhood education, and the successes they achieve through involvement in their child's early childhood education. The theoretical framework for this study included Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory, and Joyce Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement. These perspectives, in addition to current research, were used as a guide to provide insight and explanations for this phenomenon (Varpio et al., 2020).

A literature review examined current research articles of existing studies on parent involvement. To support the study, a focus was placed on the following topics: Early Childhood Parent Involvement, Six Types of Parent Involvement, Positive Effects of Early Childhood

Parent Involvement, Parent, Perspective of Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community, Teacher, Perspective of Early Childhood Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community, Barriers to Parent Involvement in Low-Income Community and Increasing Parent Involvement in Low-Income Communities. This literature review provided additional knowledge on this topic of study and provided guidance with approaches toward a successful research study.

Research indicated positive correlation between parent involvement and educational outcomes in early childhood education and beyond (Şengönül, 2022). Research also indicated that socioeconomic status, does have an impact on early childhood parent involvement (Islam, 2020). In addition, parent involvement among parents from low-socioeconomic communities is significantly lower than among parents from wealthy neighborhoods. There is a need for increased early childhood parent involvement in low-income communities to set the pace for future parental involvement, to promote academic increase, and to close the achievement gap that exists in low-income communities (Kingston, 2021).

Yang et al. (2023) recommended that future research identify effective parent involvement in low-income communities. After investigating multiple perspectives on parent involvement to understand its effect on student success, Massucco (2020) recommended that future research expand the discussion and include the viewpoints of participants from various socioeconomic statuses. In their studies on low-income mothers' experiences with early childhood parent involvement, Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) recommended further research to examine patterns of parental involvement in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and to investigate how parent involvement is promoted or hindered by early childhood programs.

Ethical assurances certify that all procedures conducted in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national

research committees and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments, or comparable ethical standards (Shresth & Dunn, 2019). The necessary approvals for conducting this research study were obtained before data collection was conducted. Possible biases were mentioned followed by means of prevention. Ethical considerations were addressed to maintain the code of conduct that must be adhered to when conducting human research. For example, all participants were informed regarding all aspects of the study and participate voluntarily, all aspects of the research were communicated honestly and with transparency, and all efforts were made to ensure that all participants in the study were unidentifiable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The Belmont report presented guidelines for the protection of research participants by ensuring research of human beings is conducted ethically to protect them from harm (Pritchard, 2021).

A reflection on a researcher's role as the main instrument in a qualitative study revealed the full responsibility researchers have for all aspects of the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This included defining the research method and objective, selecting participants, and sharing the study's purpose, requirements, risks, and benefits, as well as providing formal consent forms. A researcher is also responsible for obtaining informed consent from voluntary participants, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all involved, developing guidelines for interviews, and conducting interviews that yield rich, meaningful discussions aligned with the study's objective. The researchers were responsible for transcribing and analyzing data to identify themes and patterns, and for interpreting and reporting the data without bias. In addition, the researcher held responsibility for conducting self-reflections to identify implicit biases that may exist and prevent personal biases from influencing data findings (DiBrito et al., 2019).

The researcher adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines in place that protects the rights of research participants according to The Belmont Report (National Commission for the

Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), which provides a framework for the ethical conduct of research. As a result, participants provided informed consent, participated voluntarily in the study, and retained the right to withdraw from the study at any interval (Pritchard, 2021). Participants were also assured of their privacy, confidentiality, and protection from harm (Pritchard, 2021). With ethical considerations in place, the validity of the research is enhanced, academic integrity is maintained, and the rights of the research participants are protected (Pritchard, 2021).

Section 2: Methodology and Design

Parents are the first teachers in the development of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional skills, and parent involvement is a key component in early childhood education (Kingston, 2021). Increased parent involvement in a child's early years of education sets the pace for academic achievement in subsequent years of schooling. The problem is that early childhood parent involvement among parents from low-income communities is lacking (Şengönül, 2022).

Early childhood parent involvement sets the pace for children's academic success and has long-term effects on school achievement (Lara & Saracosti, 2019). The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how parents from low-income communities described their experiences of involvement in their child's early childhood education program. This section presents the research methodology that was used to organize and guide this study. This includes research questions, a description of the setting, data collection methods, data analysis methods, data interpretation methods, and methods for presenting findings. These methodological choices were clearly defined, along with an explanation of why they were the most appropriate.

Design and Method

A qualitative methodology with a generic design was used for this study. Qualitative research is a process with many facets and is described as a complex fabric composed of minuscule threads, various colors, textures, and blends of materials (Weyant, 2022).

Characteristics of qualitative research include the researcher as the primary data collection instrument, focus on a natural setting, multiple methods of data collection, inductive analysis of data, an emergent design, an interpretive account, and reflexivity (Thomas, 2006; Weyant, 2022).

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument in all aspects of the research process. This reflects the responsibility researchers have for all aspects of the study,

including data collection, documentation, data analysis, and the description of findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In qualitative studies, researchers immerse themselves in participants' lives, both socially and culturally, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The phenomenon explored in this study was parents' experiences with early childhood parent involvement in low socioeconomic communities.

To gain deep insight into participants' perspectives, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The non-numerical approach of qualitative research relies on a range of data collection methods, such as observations, documentation, interviews, and focus groups. Through these interactions, the researcher can gather detailed information regarding parent involvement in their children's early childhood education.

Qualitative research follows an inductive approach to develop a theory from themes and patterns that arise from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The result determines the conclusion of the study, unlike quantitative research, which begins with a hypothesis. An inductive analysis approach was a good fit for this study because it allowed themes to emerge from the data and provided evidence and answers to the research questions, rather than relying on preconceived results to ensure that meaning is derived exclusively from the data (Thomas, 2006).

Qualitative studies follow an emergent approach, which describes research that is continually developing (Weyant, 2022). While conducting qualitative research, researchers may need to modify concepts and findings as the study progresses. Therefore, plans in place can be changed as the research develops. The benefit of this feature is the flexibility for researchers to make necessary adjustments as they work towards gathering thick descriptions of participants'

experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). An emergent approach is necessary for this study because, as the researcher interacts with participants, they cannot predict what will emerge from open and honest interaction (Denzin et al., 2023). As a result, the researcher may need to rephrase questions and ask probing questions to clarify meaning and nudge participants to provide more information about their experience with the phenomenon at hand.

Qualitative research is interpretive (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher interprets what they observe, hear, and understand. Consequently, differences of interpretation can arise between researchers and participants. In qualitative studies, researchers engage in reflexivity, which involves awareness of their role in the research process and how that role may be influenced by their experiences, personal beliefs, and assumptions.

An alternative research methodology is quantitative research. However, the quantitative research approach was not appropriate for this study because it is deductive, beginning with an assumption or hypothesis brought to the study by the researcher. In contrast, a qualitative study seeks to answer questions about why something is or is not observed and uses findings that emerge at the end of the study to draw conclusions (Weyant, 2022).

Quantitative design relies on instruments to collect numeric data, such as surveys, tests, and questionnaires with closed-ended questions (Weyant, 2022). Respondents usually select one-word answers, such as true-false, yes-no, or multiple-choice, which can be easily scored and summarized as numerical results. In addition, quantitative research is used to examine relationships between variables that can be measured and analyzed to test theories and develop mathematical representations, while qualitative methods are used to understand and describe people's perspectives, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors.

In contrast, a qualitative research study is used to gather personal accounts of individuals' experiences and perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This study relied on verbal communication as its primary data collection method to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and personal accounts, rather than using objective measurements and numerical data. Furthermore, the researcher is not interested in testing potential relationships between variables or differences between groups, with statistical tests (Weyant, 2022). Therefore, the qualitative methodology is appropriate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

A generic qualitative design, often labeled basic and interpretive, is a descriptive research model that seeks to understand people's perspectives on a phenomenon (Merriam & Grenie, 2019). Generic studies use multiple methods to construct a research design and often deviate from the traditional single-methodology structure. As a result, generic design is frequently debated for lacking an established set of guidelines (Ellis & Hart, 2023).

Generic qualitative design includes a descriptive qualitative approach that focuses on specific observations without imposing personal judgment, and an interpretive description that relies on individual experiences to interpret and make meaning of the findings in relation to existing theories (Ellis & Hart, 2023). The mission of the generic qualitative study is to answer the research questions through a wide range of experiences and beliefs (Denzin et al., 2023).

A generic qualitative design was a suitable choice for this study, as it relied on verbal data collection through individual interviews and employed a descriptive qualitative approach (Cho et al., 2020). This research utilized a descriptive qualitative approach to understand participants' perspectives regarding the phenomenon. This format provided detailed, descriptive data from participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings, in their own words, yielding rich data that the researcher used to interpret and gain insight into the quest to answer research

questions (Denzin et al., 2023). In addition, the flexibility of generic qualitative design allows the researcher to add probing questions during interviews to encourage participants to reveal more information and deepen the researcher's understanding of participants' perceptions of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Silverman, 2016). A generic design was most appropriate for exploring the research problem and purpose and finding answers to the research questions.

An alternative research design is a case study. A case study focuses on a case of interest through observations and interviews to understand its complexity (Thomas, 2021). The main goal of a case study is to understand the circumstances that give rise to a specific issue, to describe and evaluate the case, and to identify commonalities (Gopi, 2018). Types of case studies in qualitative research include descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, and intrinsic case studies, which can involve either a single case or multiple cases. Data collection methods often include observations, interviews, oral recordings, and documentation.

A case study is not a good fit for this study because the defined boundaries may limit the sample size, which in turn may affect the ability to identify patterns and themes that emerge during data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Thomas, 2021). Some case studies require observing the setting where the issue occurs and often rely on lived experiences (Thomas, 2021). Although interviews are used for data collection, participants focus on a specific case, and only individuals involved in that case can participate (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In addition, case study abides by a bounded system (Thomas, 2021). The bounded system refers to the fact that limitations are determined by the case of interest (Thomas, 2021).

An additional alternative qualitative research design is the narrative inquiry design which is a method of collecting data using in-depth interviews and documentation from participants to pen their stories (Constable & Cowell, 1994). Researchers utilize that information to write a

narrative of the participant's experience (Weyant, 2022). Educators Clandinin and Michael Connelly developed narrative inquiry as a method in education by narrating educators' stories and experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015). Narrative inquiry was not an option for this study because this prospectus was an exploration project of multiple parent perceptions of the phenomenon at hand.

Ethnographic research is an extension of anthropology (Boyd, 2021). The design focuses on collecting data from a group of people, their characteristics, and how their cultural beliefs can influence their thoughts and behavior (Boyd, 2021). Ethnographic research is used to gain information from the perspective of participants (Boyd, 2021). Ethnographic research is not appropriate for this study because ethnography's purpose is to describe cultural groups and to explore their lived experiences as a group (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This includes a group's pattern of behavior, their language, the system of beliefs, and additional qualities (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

My position as an elementary educator strongly influenced my decision to conduct this research study. As a current employee in an early childhood education program serving a low-income community, I am aware of the challenges educators face when students are performing below grade level. I am also cognizant of the lack of parent involvement that exists in these communities. My awareness of this phenomenon piqued my interest in investigating the underlying causes of the lack of parent involvement in schools located in low-income communities. This study intended to listen to parents' experiences, opinions, and perceptions to gain a better understanding of parents' perspectives as we explored answers to the research questions and research objectives. I acknowledged that my positionality influenced this study. As a result, this research study excluded all parents of students with whom I interacted.

Population and Sample

The population sample for this study included early childhood parents of children in preschool through third grade residing in high-need communities in the United States. The participants were 18 years of age or older and had children enrolled in preschool through third grade. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015) was utilized to select parents who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate.

The convenience sampling method enabled the researcher to access readily available participants with characteristics relevant to the research study, yielding rich data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Snowball sampling supplemented the recruitment plan. The researcher asked parents to invite other participants who fit the research criteria (Parker et al., 2019).

After receiving IRB approval, a recruitment plan was implemented to identify potential participants for the research study. The plan included posting recruitment letters and fliers on social media. The recruitment letters stated the participation criteria, purpose, objectives, potential risks, benefits, confidentiality, and the researcher's contact information for parents to contact the researcher.

The most frequent range of sample sizes observed in qualitative studies is between 20-26 (Bekele & Ago, 2022). However, most researchers agree that several factors determine the number of research participants in qualitative research. In their article, Bekele and Ago (2022) mentioned some factors, which include “the focus of the research, the type of research question, available resource and time, institutional committee requirements, the judgments of epistemic community in which a researcher is located, the nature of the selected group, the domain of inquiry, the experience of the researcher with qualitative research, and so on” (p. 42).

For this study, participants were selected based on their willingness to participate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) and their alignment with the inclusion criteria. The sample size was finalized based on the number of eligible participants who consented to participate in the study and the point at which data saturation was achieved (Family Health International, 2005). The data source was semi-structured interviews, and Saldana's level 1 and 2 analysis processes were used to analyze them (Vanover et al., 2021).

Saturation in qualitative research refers to the point in data collection at which novel issues and insights are exhausted, and repetition of themes and codes is recognized (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This signifies that the sample size is adequate for a convenience sample. An appropriate sample size is necessary for achieving saturation. The saturation process involves continuous movement between data collection from various participants and analysis until saturation is reached (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). As a result, sampling sizes are determined by the findings of data analysis and by how much it takes to achieve saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Due to additional factors that determine sample size in qualitative studies, sample sizes are usually much smaller than those in quantitative research (Aguboshim, 2021). Although many researchers avoided providing estimates of adequate sample size, Bertaux (1981) established guidelines stating that 15 is the smallest acceptable sample size for all qualitative research. It is recommended that researchers continue interviews until saturation is met (Austin & Sutton, 2014). However, Green and Thorogood (2009) found in their studies that most qualitative researchers obtained little to no additional information after interviewing approximately 20 participants (Aguboshim, 2021).

Lester et al. (2020) noted that data analysis can become complicated when a qualitative study includes more than fifteen participants. The purpose of this study was to collect data that gives an understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of participants, to understand their experience with the phenomenon at hand, and to gain insight into participants' thoughts, feelings and behaviors as they relate to the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method to obtain comprehensive responses to open-ended questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Experienced researchers generally agree that a sample of at least 20 participants is sufficient to obtain rich data and achieve saturation (Bekele & Ago, 2022). As a result, the goal of this study was to obtain 25 participants to shed light on the phenomenon being discussed in this current study. The researcher is also aware of the fact that participation is voluntary, participants must give their consent, and sample size will be determined by the number of volunteers who agreed to participate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Materials/Instrumentation

The data collection method for this proposed research study was semi-structured interviews, which lasted 30-45 minutes. One-to-one interviews were conducted through a virtual meeting room. Semi-structured interview was a good option for this study because it allowed the researcher to ask questions in any order and change course based on the participant's responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher was also at liberty to change the wording of the questions and ask follow-up questions to gain additional information as opposed to structured interviews with more restrictions, such as asking the questions in the same order for each participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews followed a personal format, beginning with an introductory session designed to create a comfortable environment that encouraged participants to share detailed information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The purpose of the research study was disclosed, and its voluntary nature was emphasized (Busetto et al., 2020). Participants provided verbal consent and confirmed their willingness to participate and be recorded. Informal consents were obtained orally for each data collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

A set of prepared open-ended questions served as a guide during the individual interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The interview questions were developed to explore educational beliefs, parental experiences, practices, and family factors that influence parent involvement. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological system theory guided the development of interview questions. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), low economic status poses challenges for parents of young children and hinders their involvement in their children's education (Islam, 2020).

The interview questions were directly aligned with the research questions, which sought to understand how parents from low-income communities described their experiences with early childhood involvement. The study specifically examined how parents described the barriers and successes they encountered in their children's education. The research questions guided the interviews to capture parents lived experiences, challenges, and achievements related to early childhood parent involvement (See Appendix A).

The interview began with an introduction of the researcher and an overview of the study. Participants provided verbal consent to participate and to be recorded before the researcher proceeded with the prepared questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The virtual interviews were

conducted via Zoom and recorded using the platform's built-in recording function (Archibald et al., 2019).

During each interview, participants were asked open-ended questions in a conversational manner while the researcher actively listened and engaged as needed (Bhandari, 2020). Participants' responses were captured via video and audio recordings and documented verbatim in Zoom's audio transcript. Participants' body language, emotional displays, and other nonverbal cues were also noted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As the interview progressed, the researcher asked follow-up questions when appropriate to gain deeper insight into participants' responses.

The interview questions aligned with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in various ways. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the influence that various environmental systems have on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Questions 1, 2, 3, and 11 aligned with the microsystem environmental relationship with the immediate environment, which includes a child's immediate surroundings and relationships with family, early childhood education program, and interactions with educational staff. These questions explored parents' direct involvement in their child's early education program, activities, and home learning.

Questions 4, 5, and 13 addressed the mesosystem, which involves interactions among the child's microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This includes the relationship between the family and the early childhood education program. These questions examined how parental involvement, or its absence, affects a child's educational experience, development, and outcomes.

Exosystem (external environments):

Questions 6, 7, and 8 relate to the exosystem, which influences a child's development through external environments that indirectly shape it, such as parents' work schedules, transportation, financial constraints, and cultural or language barriers. These questions explored the barriers and challenges that parents from low-income communities face in being involved in their child's early education. Questions 4, 8, and 13 explored the societal and cultural influences of the Macrosystem. The macrosystem indicates the broad cultural and social factors, values, and beliefs that shape a child's growth and development (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). The questions explored existing hindrances and possible resources, support, and advice to help parents overcome barriers to greater involvement in their child's early childhood education.

The chronosystem, which considers the influence of time and transitions on a child's development, could be explored through questions such as 5 and 12, which evaluate changes in parental involvement or barriers over time as the child progresses through various stages of early childhood education. This researcher aimed to understand the varied factors and contexts that affect parental involvement in early childhood education, particularly among parents residing in low-income communities. The approach was achieved by aligning the interview questions with the various systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The interview questions also aligned with Joyce Epstein's six types of parental involvement in the following areas:

1. Parenting:

Questions 4, 5, and 7 aligned with the parenting type of involvement, which focuses on helping families build and establish a supportive home-learning environment for children (Epstein, 1995). The factors that influence parental involvement or the lack of involvement in a

child's educational experience were explored through these questions, as well as how parents can support children's learning at home

2. Communicating:

Questions 3 and 8 aligned with this type of involvement, which promotes effective communication between home, school, and educational programs (Epstein, 1995).

These questions examined communication and relationships between parents and early childhood educators, as well as possible barriers, such as language or culture, which may prevent effective communication (Epstein, 1995).

3. Volunteering:

Questions 1 and 2 relate to this type of involvement, which involves recruiting and organizing parental support for educational programs or activities (Epstein, 1995). These questions explore the level of parental involvement in their child's early childhood education program or activities, as well as the specific events or activities they have participated in (Epstein, 1995).

4. Learning at Home:

Questions 11 and 12 align with learning at home and focus on providing families with information and strategies to support their children's learning at home (Epstein, 1995). These questions examined how parents support their child's learning and development at home and the practical strategies they have used to stay engaged in their child's early education (Spreeuwenberg, 2022).

5. Decision Making:

This type of involvement provided parents with opportunities to advocate and be included in decision-making about their child's education (Epstein, 1995). This involves including parents

in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Asking parents about opportunities to participate in decision-making or advisory roles within the early childhood education program can help explore this type of involvement.

6. Collaboration with the Community:

Question 9 concerns this type of involvement, which promotes the idea that local businesses can be incorporated as resources to support school programs (Epstein, 1995). This type of involvement focuses on coordinating community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. This question explored the resources available to parents that could help them overcome barriers and become more involved in their child's early education, involving community collaboration (Hausburg, 2020).

This research aimed to gather insights into the various aspects of parental involvement in early childhood education, including parenting practices, communication, volunteering, home-based learning support, decision-making opportunities, and community collaboration by aligning the interview questions with Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2018). This framework provided a structured approach to examining different ways parents are involved in their children's learning. The findings are intended to inform educators on strategies to increase family involvement in early childhood settings.

Data Collection and Analysis

To obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher completed an application form and uploaded all supporting documents before certifying the submission (Mongeon, 2023). Then, the application was reviewed by a faculty chair to ensure completion and sent to the IRB for confirmation that all sections are complete and that supporting documents

have been included. The IRB team reviewed the submission and provided feedback. IRB offered approval when it was determined that all conditions were met.

The researcher collected data from 24 participants who volunteered to participate (Aguboshim, 2021). To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher used codes to identify participants as 1-24 (Evergreen, 2019). The researcher collected data through semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix A). Semi-structured individual interviews provide opportunities to engage participants in conversations, ask questions, and collect information necessary to answer research questions through prearranged questions that guide discussions (Mannan & Afni, 2020). A semi-structured interview is an effective tool for this study because guided questions were prepared beforehand to guide discussions. At the same time, allowances were made for probing and follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Pin, 2023; Svensson, 2021).

During the interviews, the researcher utilized the Zoom platform to record and transcribe data (Archibald et al., 2019). The Zoom video conferencing platform is more convenient than manually transcribing the interviews by typing out every word spoken during the discussion. Transcription was necessary for researchers to acquire a visual representation and gain a better understanding and meaning of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

After the researcher downloaded the transcriptions, coding was used to analyze the data for this proposed research study. Coding helped the researcher organize data by noting themes as the data were read (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). A thematic analysis identified patterns in the data (Lester et al., 2020). Thematic data analysis involved taking large amounts of data and downsizing them into themes to make sense of and clarify the abundance of data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The qualitative data analysis software tool NVivo was used to assist with data

management and analysis, which was downloaded and activated on a Windows operating system with a student license. NVivo was used to assist the researcher in labeling data sections and creating categories from the datasets (Dhakal, 2022).

To accomplish thematic coding with NVivo, selections of text from the interview transcript were imported into the NVivo platform through the Windows operating system (Dhakal, 2022). Each section was tagged with a node, NVivo's term for codes. Each section was coded and assigned a color to visually represent gaps and themes arising from the data. As themes appeared, labels were assigned to each category using words, short phrases, and symbols to classify data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Creating file classifications through NVivo helped the researcher develop files with broader categories and organize them into varying data types for further analysis (Dhakal, 2022). The research questions were revisited, and the data were scrutinized to identify answers and recurring themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This process continued, and the coding scheme organized the codes, compared participants' statements across various subject matters, and identified significant information.

An inductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative interviews, employing a thematic content analysis (Lester et al., 2020). NVivo also assisted the researcher with identifying relationships between themes for thematic analysis (Dhakal, 2022). The Zoom video and transcriptions were revisited several times to identify patterns, insights, and significant statements that emerged from participants' experiences (Lester et al., 2020). The findings were then synthesized and categorized into sections, each providing insights into responses to the research questions. When the data were analyzed and interpreted, the researcher presented the results in a report that outlined key findings, explained how the data answered the research questions, and shared recommendations for future research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Assumptions

In qualitative research, the researcher makes assumptions about various aspects of the research methods, including the research design, data collection, data analysis, and the synthesis of results (Shuttler, 2022). Although it is human to make assumptions throughout our natural world, researchers must be mindful of the assumptions they make and question how their personal biases influence them and may affect their research results (Clair et al., 2022). Several assumptions were made throughout the research process for this proposed study. For example, the research assumed that every participant had access to technology and the internet. As a result, the only option presented to participants was virtual interviews (Zoom). This created a limitation by assuming that all residents in low-income communities have access to the internet and the necessary technology. As a result, participants who were inclined to conduct in-person interviews due to a lack of internet access or limited technology experience were excluded.

Another assumption underlying this proposed study is that a sample of 24 participants is sufficient to represent the views of a larger population of early childhood parents in low-income communities. Assumptions can be made that, upon saturation, no new data will emerge, but new themes may emerge with additional interviews (Shuttler, 2022). The researcher also assumed that participants would understand the research topic and interview questions, provide truthful responses, and always tell their true stories.

Assumptions were made that participants are well enough to participate or are in environments conducive to participation for the time allotted. However, participants may find themselves in conditions that impact their ability to function, affecting their performance (Shuttler, 2022). Participants may be unwell and unable to continue an interview or face circumstances that interrupt their ability to participate in the research. To reduce such biases,

researchers avoided making assumptions about participants and followed participants' lead in all stages of the research (Arias et al., 2023; Clair et al., 2022).

Limitations

Limitations refer to possible weaknesses of a study beyond the researcher's control that limit its potential for replication across other research populations, due to the research design and methodology (Shuttler, 2022). There were some possible limitations in this proposed research study. For example, there were some issues with a poor internet connection. During one interview, an emergency activity caused some disruptions.

Other limitations included that some respondents were unfamiliar with the subject matter, and the research questions were not as clear to them as the researcher intended. As a result, some responses were not appropriate to the questions, and during the interview, the researcher found that some questions were too open, leading to the need for follow-up questions, which, in turn, extended the interview time, something respondents did not anticipate (Shuttler, 2022). Consequently, some interviews were shortened by omitting questions, which may have reduced the completeness of the collected data. Furthermore, despite efforts to obtain a diverse sample, the study was constrained by participants' willingness to engage. Limitations of a study are shortcomings that often occur for various reasons. Researchers should demonstrate honesty and transparency by acknowledging possible limitations that may affect the study's outcome (Malakar, 2022).

Delimitations

Delimitations in research refer to aspects of a study that the researcher decides to include or exclude (Malakar, 2022). The researcher intentionally decides what to include and what to leave out based on what is most relevant to the research goal. For example, this study focused on

parents of young children from low-income communities across the United States. Only parents of children in preschool through third grade were included in this research, excluding parents with children in fourth grade or higher and parents with higher incomes. Another delimitation was the requirement that participants use the Zoom platform. This imposed limitations, allowing only parents with access to technology and the internet to participate in the study. Delimitation is necessary to set a boundary that focuses on a distinct aspect of the study. When research is focused, data gathered aligns with the project's objective, unnecessary information is avoided, and the research can be completed within the allotted time and resources (Bhosale, 2023).

Summary

This generic qualitative study was intended to explore how parents in low-income communities describe their experiences with involvement in their child's early childhood education program. The sample was selected from parents of children enrolled in an early childhood program in low-income communities in the United States. With ethical considerations in place, a combination of convenience and snowball sampling was utilized to recruit 24 willing participants for the research study. Data collection was conducted after the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with questions aligned with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Evans, 2020) and Joyce Epstein's six types of parental involvement. Saldana's level 1 and 2 analysis processes were utilized to analyze interviews, and a thematic analysis method identified patterns that emerged from the data (Lester et al., 2020). Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were addressed to strengthen the research study by openly disclosing potential issues and flaws that arose and by declaring the decisions that guided the study in seeking answers to the research problem (Bhosale, 2023).

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

Parental involvement is vital during the early childhood years to promote social, emotional, and academic achievement (Cosso et al., 2022). Research indicates that parent involvement in low-income communities is lacking (Şengönül, 2022). The purpose of this study was to explore how parents from low-socioeconomic communities described their experiences of involvement in their child's early childhood education. The problem was that early childhood parent involvement among parents from low-income communities is lacking. Early childhood parent involvement sets the pace for children's academic success and has long-term effects on school achievement (Lara & Saracosti, 2019). This chapter provides a descriptive summary of the demographic characteristics of the research participants, a discussion of the overall study, a presentation of the results, a report of analysis results, a discussion of how criteria for trustworthiness were met, a summary of the evaluation of the outcome, implications that were drawn from the study findings, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of research results may be limited by several factors. For example, most participants reside in the northeastern United States, specifically the New York area, with additional participants from Florida and Arizona. There are significant differences in what is considered low income from state to state. Since the definition of low income varies, a participant may be considered low-income in one state based on certain criteria but not in another, potentially affecting the generalizability of all low-income communities. The experiences shared by participants may not be reflective of all early childhood parents from low-income communities in the United States.

Since most participants were African American, the data largely reflect the perspective of African American parents. Additional studies are needed to gain diverse experiences from other

racial and ethnic groups in low-income communities. Due to some participants' limited knowledge of specific elements of parent involvement, the research questions were not as clear to some respondents as I had anticipated, and some responses were not directly related to the questions. Some questions were too open, leading to follow-ups that required more time to gather additional information for clarification. Other participants were interested in the topic and shared detailed experiences, which led to further exploration of related topics. As a result, the interview time exceeded the scheduled time, which respondents did not anticipate (Shuttler, 2022). Some questions were omitted to make up for the added time, which may have affected the results.

Findings

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to recruit 24 parents with children enrolled in early childhood programs, ranging from preschool to third grade, in low-income communities throughout the United States. The participants were mostly single-parent households and a few dual-parent households from racial and ethnic backgrounds that included African American, Hispanic, African, and Caribbean families from low socioeconomic households, as indicated by their public-school attendance, in high-need communities with income-based programs such as Title 1 schools, and their eligibility for free school meals. All parents spoke fluent English. Some parents were employed part-time, some were employed full-time, two worked from home to combat childcare expenses, and one parent was unemployed. Some families had households with multiple children at varying early childhood grade levels, and some had a single child. Three parents mentioned having children with varied disabilities, which include a speech delay, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), and ASD (autism spectrum disorder). The respondents were mothers and one participating father.

Participants ranged in ages from 18-24, 25-34, and 35-50. Table 1 presents participant demographics.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Demographic category	Description	n
Age Range	18–24	7
	25–34	11
	35–50	6
Household Type	Single-Parent Household	19
	Dual-Parent Household	5
Racial/Ethnic Background	African American	23
	Non-African American (unspecified)	1
Language Proficiency	Fluent English	24
	Limited English	0
Employment Status	Part-Time Employment	8
	Full-Time Employment	10
	Work from Home (to combat childcare expenses)	2
	Unemployed	1
Number of Children	Multiple Children in Early Childhood Grades	11
	Single Child in Early Childhood Grades	13
Children with Disabilities	Speech Delay, ADHD, or ASD	3
	No Disabilities	21
Gender of Parent	Mother	23
	Father	1

Note. $N = 24$. ADHD = attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; ASD = autism spectrum disorder.

Trustworthiness of Data

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was demonstrated using four criteria recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1986). These criteria included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which were addressed through rigorous methods such as member checking, detailed descriptions of the study context, and maintaining an audit trail to ensure transparency and consistency. Using this criterion ensured robust data collection and analysis, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Credibility. Credibility is the assurance that the findings accurately reflect participants' lived realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established in this study through a clear and thorough data collection plan, member checking, researcher reflexivity, and the use of thick descriptions through participant quotes. A transparent data collection plan was presented in Section 2 of this dissertation. Member checking included verified transcripts of the responses being shared with each participant to ensure their perspectives were adequately documented and to prevent any omissions or errors. During the member checks, the participants confirmed that their transcripts were reflective of the experiences shared in the study, for example, their descriptions of reading routines or communicating with their teacher in certain contexts, to enhance study credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability. In this study, transferability is the researcher's ability to enable readers to assess if the findings are applicable to other contexts (Mongeon, 2023). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers provide thick, rich descriptions of the participants, their setting, and findings. Transferability was achieved through thick, rich descriptions of the 24 participants (i.e., low-income community parents whose children attend urban public preschool programs), as well as their contexts, including specific socio-economic details such as income,

employment, and family composition (e.g., single parents). Thick, rich descriptions were also provided of the educational context in which the participants were engaged, namely, urban settings with limited resources, which significantly influenced their experiences. For example, descriptions of parents' activities, such as dabbling in educational apps or attending their child's parent-teacher conference, were delivered for the theme titled School-Based Engagement. In this way, these descriptions allow researchers or educators to consider whether the findings transfer in any fashion to similar low-income communities or early childhood education contexts. This refers to transferability, not the universal generalizability of findings, which is part of the principles of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated that qualitative results be dependable by ensuring the study's processes were consistent and replicable. Dependability was established through detailed, transparent documentation of the research methodology, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The study employed semi-structured Zoom interviews with 24 parents, guided by an interview protocol with open-ended questions tailored to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, as documented in the codebook. The data collection process included individual interviews averaging 45 minutes, with both video and audio recordings transcribed. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic analysis, with steps including initial coding of transcript segments, grouping codes into themes like *Logistical and Resource Barriers*, and iterative refinement to ensure coherence. An audit trail, comprising raw transcripts, coded data, field notes, and researcher memos, was maintained to allow an external reviewer to trace the research process from data collection to final themes, ensuring that another researcher could replicate the study in a similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability. The researcher addressed confirmability, which allows the findings to remain rooted in the data instead of being influenced by researcher or participant bias, through a series of measures to ensure objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher practiced reflexivity by maintaining a reflective journal to document personal assumptions (e.g., the author's educational background could affect biases); this demonstrated transparency. A systematic process was used to code the transcripts to minimize researcher bias, and code categories were generated from participants' actual responses, such as the theme of Child Academic and Behavioral Improvements, ensuring the findings were grounded in the data. During the data analysis, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with two other researchers specializing in qualitative research. The other researchers reviewed the coding schema (see Appendix F) and themes that emerged and confirmed that they were grounded in the data as identified previously.

An external auditor independently examined transcripts to address the possibility of the researcher's bias (Arias et al., 2023). The auditor reviewed a predetermined subset of the transcripts and codes to confirm that the content, exemplified in the theme of *Child Emotional and Social Growth*, was reflected in actual participant statements. All these processes provided assurance that findings were not influenced by researcher bias, thereby enhancing the study's confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Participants were recruited after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research through convenience and snowball sampling. Recruitment letters and fliers were posted on Facebook. Snowball sampling was then used, with existing participants

recommending other parents to participate in the study. Twenty-four parents participated in individual interviews.

During the initial interviews, participants expressed concerns about the confidentiality of their responses, particularly since they were discussing their involvement, or lack thereof, in their child's education and their socio-economic circumstances. As a result, the interviewer adopted a personal approach, beginning with an introductory session to foster participants' comfort and encourage them to provide detailed information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The purpose of the research study was disclosed, and its voluntary nature was emphasized (Busetto et al., 2020).

The researcher utilized the Zoom platform to record and transcribe data (Archibald et al., 2019). The researcher hoped to engage more deeply with the data by listening to each interview multiple times, while noting nonverbal cues to capture tone, emotional responses, and context. Once transcribed, every participant was given the opportunity to review their interview transcript, and 22 of the 24 parents returned their transcripts, specifying that they were accurate. Of the two remaining parents, no one replied. Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis process was used to inductively analyze interview data.

Familiarization with the Data

To become familiar with the data, the transcripts were read and reread alongside each audio recording. A reflexive journal was kept to document initial observations, emotions, and emerging patterns of concepts related to parental involvement, barriers to involvement, and success in parental involvement. The researcher also read the notes from each interview, which

provided additional context and included nonverbal expressions and cues from interview participants in response to the interview questions.

Initial Coding

The initial coding process was conducted in two phases. First, over 1,200 passages from the interview transcripts were identified as relevant to the research questions. The passages were assigned to a descriptive code based on their content. Initially, many labels were overly specific (e.g., “reading bedtime stories,” “using ClassDojo app”), which resulted in many codes.

During the second review, the interviews and initial codes were revisited, consolidated into 127 final codes that captured concepts (e.g., “home-based learning activities,” “school communication methods”). These codes were compiled into a codebook containing each code, its definition, and an illustrative quote (see Appendix H). A sample of the codebook is shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Sample Codebook*

Code	Code meaning	Quotes
Home-Based Learning Activities	Parents engage in activities at home, such as reading, educational games, or structured routines, to support their child's learning.	<i>"I'll find ways to kinda still incorporate the theme at home in some way, like do little experiments with them during the weekend, or just things like that."</i> (Parent 1)
School Communication Methods	Parents use various methods, such as emails, apps like Class Dojo, or face-to-face meetings, to communicate with educators.	<i>"It's really good. I talk to the teachers regularly through emails, meetings, or apps like Class Dojo. They keep me updated on my child's progress, and I feel comfortable asking questions."</i> (Parent 2)
Work-Related Barriers	Parents cite demanding work schedules and exhaustion as barriers to involvement in their child's education.	<i>"My job keeps me so busy, I can't always make it to school events, and money is tight for supplies."</i> (Parent 3)
Financial Constraints	Parents describe limited financial resources as a barrier to providing educational materials or attending school events.	<i>"Work hours are long, and I can't afford extra things like books or activities for school."</i> (Parent 4)
Child Academic Improvement	Parents observe improvements in their child's academic skills, such as reading or math, due to their involvement.	<i>"My involvement has helped my child improve in math and stay more focused in class."</i> (Parent 5)
Child Emotional Growth	Parents note increased confidence and enthusiasm for learning as outcomes of their involvement.	<i>"My child is happier and more confident because I'm involved in their education."</i> (Parent 6)

Note. Quotes are verbatim excerpts from parent interviews and are identified by participant number.

Generating Initial Themes

The next stage was to assess the 127 codes to determine the connections and patterns, resulting in 24 initial categories based on shared concepts, such as types of involvement (i.e., home-based, school-based), types of barriers (i.e., logistical, communication), and types of successes (i.e., academic, emotional). For example, the researcher categorized the codes “reading bedtime stories,” “using educational apps,” and “structured homework routines” under the category “Home-Based Involvement Activities.” In this way, the researcher grouped “work schedule conflicts” and “financial barriers” within “Logistical Barriers.” As a result, a table was generated to clarify how these categories were formed (See Appendix H) Table 3 shows sample initial themes and aligned codes.

Table 3*Sample Initial Theme and Aligned Codes*

Initial themes	Aligned codes
Parent Involvement Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-Based Learning Activities • School Communication Methods • Educational Games • Structured Routines • Parent-Teacher Meetings
Barriers to Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-Related Barriers • Financial Constraints • Time Limitations • Poor School Communication • Exhaustion
Child Outcomes from Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Academic Improvement • Child Behavioral Improvement • Child Emotional Growth • Child Social Skills

Note. Initial themes represent higher-order categories derived from qualitative analysis, with aligned codes reflecting related subthemes.

Developing and Reviewing Themes

The 24 initial categories were further analyzed to identify connections and develop final themes aligned with the research questions. Seven final themes were identified: three for RQ1, two for RQ2, and two for RQ3. These themes were reviewed against the coded data and transcripts to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences. For example, the category "Home-Based Involvement Activities" was combined with related codes to form the theme *Home-Based Engagement*, while "Poor School Communication" and "Lack of Resource

Awareness” were merged into *School Communication Barriers*. The relationship between categories, themes, and research questions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Sample of Aligned Categories to Themes and Research Questions*

Research question	Theme	Aligned categories
RQ1: How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education?	Parents perceive involvement in their child's early childhood education as a critical responsibility that includes both home and school activities to support learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Definitions of Involvement 2. Parent Role in Education 3. Collaboration with Teachers
RQ2: How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education?	<p>Parents face logistical and resource constraints that hinder their ability to engage in their child's education.</p> <p>Parents encounter barriers in communicating with school staff which limit their involvement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Work-Related Barriers 5. Financial Constraints 6. Time Limitations 7. Exhaustion 8. Single-Parent Challenges 9. Poor School Communication 10. Lack of Resource Awareness 11. Inadequate Event Information
RQ3: What do parents from low-income communities describe as their successes with being involved in their child's early childhood education?	<p>Parents report that their involvement leads to improved academic performance and behavioral outcomes for their children.</p> <p>Parents observe that their involvement enhances their child's emotional well-being and social skills through strengthened family bonds and encouragement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Child Academic Improvement 13. Child Behavioral Improvement 14. Community Resource Utilization 15. Parental Confidence and Advocacy 16. Child Emotional Growth 17. Child Social Skills 18. Parent-Child Bond

Note. RQ = Research Question.

Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes

Upon completing the initial themes, I reviewed the categories and coded data to assess their alignment with the intended theme names, focusing on clarity, accuracy, and relevance to the research questions. I realized that some initial themes were not fully developed and lacked sufficient context to represent the nuanced experiences, barriers, and successes described by parents in low-income communities. For instance, the theme "Parents perceive involvement in their child's early childhood education as a critical responsibility" was too broad and did not specify the nature of the responsibility or its connection to specific activities, while "Child Outcomes from Involvement" was overly general and failed to differentiate between academic/behavioral and emotional/social outcomes.

To address this, I refined the themes to be more descriptive and grounded in the data, ensuring they conveyed complete thoughts. For example, "Home-Based Involvement Activities" was revised to "Parents Actively Foster Child Development Through Home-Based Educational Engagement" to emphasize proactive parental strategies, and "Child Outcomes from Involvement" was split into "Parental Involvement Enhances Children's Academic Performance and Behavioral Outcomes" and "Parental Involvement Promotes Children's Emotional Well-Being and Social Development" to clearly distinguish outcome types. The final seven themes, presented in, were carefully labeled to encapsulate the primary findings, firmly anchored in the coded data, and directly aligned with the research questions, providing a comprehensive and contextualized representation of parents' perceptions, barriers, and successes in early childhood education involvement. Table 5 presents the final themes, meanings, and alignment with research questions.

Table 5
Final Themes, Meanings, and Alignment With Research Questions

Research Question	Final Theme	Theme Meaning
RQ1: How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education?	Parental involvement is multidimensional, encompassing school participation, communication with educators, and support for learning at home	Parents defined involvement as active engagement in school activities, communication with educators, and supporting learning at home to foster their child's academic and developmental success.
RQ1	Parents reinforced school learning at home through reading, educational games, and structured routines, adapting their strategies within the limits of low-income contexts.	Parents employed home-based strategies, such as reading, educational games, and structured routines, to reinforce school learning, adapting to resource constraints in low-income contexts.
RQ1	Parents supported their child's education by maintaining consistent communication with educators and engaging in school events.	Parents maintained regular communication with educators through emails, apps like Class Dojo, and face-to-face meetings, and participated in school events like parent-teacher conferences to support their child's education.
RQ2: How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education?	Parents' involvement in their child's education was constrained by work demands, financial pressures, limited time, and single-parent responsibilities.	Demanding work schedules, financial constraints, time limitations, exhaustion, and single-parent responsibilities significantly hindered parents' ability to engage in their child's education.
RQ2	Parents' engagement was hindered by inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, and resources.	Inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, or resources limited parents' ability to participate fully in their child's education.
RQ3: What do parents from low-income communities describe as their successes with being involved in their child's early childhood education?	Parents linked their involvement to improvements in children's academic skills and behavioral outcomes.	Parents observed improvements in their children's academic skills, such as reading and math, and behavioral outcomes, such as focus and responsibility, as a result of their involvement.
RQ3	Parental involvement fostered children's confidence, enthusiasm for learning, stronger family bonds, and improved social skills.	Parental involvement promoted increased confidence, enthusiasm for learning, stronger parent-child bonds, and improved social skills in children.

Note. Themes were derived from participants' qualitative responses and are aligned with the study's research questions.

Writing up the Report

The final step in analyzing the data was to synthesize the information into a cohesive report that accurately depicts the experiences, barriers, and successes shared by the 24 parents from low-income communities regarding their involvement in their child's early childhood education. This narrative account is the result of the process previously described: conducting semi-structured interviews with parents, recording and transcribing data, familiarization with the data through repeated review, generating initial codes, reviewing and consolidating codes, identifying categories, and refining themes. Seven themes were identified through this process.

The first theme revealed that parental involvement is multidimensional, encompassing school participation, communication with educators, and support for learning at home. The second theme indicated that parents reinforced school learning at home through reading, educational games, and structured routines, adapting their strategies within the limits of low-income contexts. The third theme showed that parents supported their child's education by maintaining consistent communication with educators and engaging in school events.

The fourth theme demonstrated that parents' involvement in their child's education was constrained by work demands, financial pressures, limited time, and single-parent responsibilities. The fifth theme reflected that parents' engagement was hindered by inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, and resources. The sixth theme highlighted that parents linked their involvement to improvements in children's academic skills and behavioral outcomes. Finally, the seventh theme illustrated that parental involvement fostered children's confidence, enthusiasm for learning, stronger family bonds, and improved social skills.

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was: How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education? Data obtained from 24 individual interviews were analyzed, coded, and categorized. Three themes resulted from this analysis: (1) understanding of parent involvement, (2) home-based engagement, and (3) school-based engagement. These themes are further detailed in the following subsections and supported by verbatim quotes from participant responses.

Theme 1: Parental Involvement is Multidimensional, Encompassing School Participation, Communication With Educators, and Support for Learning at Home. Parents defined involvement as active participation in school-related activities, communicating with educators, and supporting student learning from home, ultimately to promote academic and developmental success for their children. Based on parents' descriptions, they perceived involvement as a dynamic, holistic role shaped by their economic circumstances while living in a low-income community. The following issues emerged from the parent accounts regarding their understanding of parent involvement: complete involvement across home and school contexts; advocacy and presence to support the child's success; and partnerships with educators to support student learning.

Many parents described involvement as a comprehensive role that integrates both home-based and school-based activities to support their child's education. Parent 1 articulated this broad perspective:

It means I'm involved in the school in any way, shape, or form. So, in terms of communicating with the teacher daily and getting to know the other students in the classroom and the day-to-day schedule, the routine, just when the kids need anything for

like spirit day, or just in general, for the week, helping them at home, so that they continue working on the lesson plan or potty training, things of that nature.

Similarly, Parent 2 emphasized a holistic approach, saying that “It means being actively engaged in your child’s education, helping with schoolwork, communicating with teachers, and participating in school activities to support their learning.” Parent 5 echoed this, stating, “It’s being involved in everything—school events, homework, and talking to teachers to make sure my child succeeds.” Parents 12, 19, and 21 reinforced this view, noting, “being active in their education, like going to school events and helping with homework” (Parent 12), “being active in their school life and supporting their learning at home” (Parent 19), and “being involved in their education, attending events, and helping with homework” (Parent 21). These parents highlighted the importance of bridging home and school contexts to create a cohesive support system for their children. Parent 24 described a supportive environment: “Providing, like, a supportive home? You know, also a positive environment for my child. Communication with teachers and participating in school events and helping them engage with school activities at home.”

Another group of parents emphasized advocacy and presence as central to their involvement, focusing on ensuring their child’s needs are met both academically and developmentally. Parent 6 defined involvement as “advocating for your child, making sure they get what they need at school and home.” Parent 7 noted, “Being present in their education, attending meetings, and helping with schoolwork.” Parents 3, 13, and 23 similarly described involvement as being present and supportive, with Parent 3 stating, “It’s about being there for your child, knowing what’s happening at school, and helping them learn at home,” Parent 13 saying, “being there, talking to teachers, and making sure my child is supported,” and Parent 23 noting, “being there for my child, helping with schoolwork, and staying connected with the

school.” Parent 11 focused on daily engagement: “being involved in their daily school life and helping at home with reading.” These responses underscore the role of parents as active advocates who prioritize their child’s success through consistent presence.

A third group of parents highlighted collaboration with educators as a key component of involvement, emphasizing the importance of communication and partnership to enhance their child’s learning. Parent 4 described involvement as “supporting my child’s learning by talking to teachers and doing activities at home.” Several parents echoed this sentiment, noting that their engagement involved maintaining regular contact with teachers to stay informed about their child’s progress and supporting learning through home-based activities, such as homework assistance. Parent 9 stated, “Involvement means knowing what my child is learning and helping them with it.” Similarly, Parent 10 emphasized, “It’s working with teachers to ensure my child’s success.” Parents also described creating structured learning environments at home while participating in school events, such as parent-teacher meetings, to foster a strong connection with the educational system. For instance, Parent 15 noted, “helping my child with schoolwork and attending parent meetings.” Parent 17 further highlighted, “being part of their education, helping at home, and talking to teachers.” Other parents expressed that their involvement centered on both engaging with school staff and reinforcing learning at home to support their child’s academic success. Parent 24 summarized this dual role, stating, “It means to do research and participate with teachers in letting your child be more successful in their educational background.”

Theme 1 Summary. Parents understood and perceived involvement as a dynamic, multifaceted responsibility encompassing school participation, teacher communication, and home-based support, tailored to their socio-economic circumstances. They viewed their role as

extending beyond traditional school involvement, such as attending parent-teacher meetings, to include consistent communication with educators to stay informed about their child's progress. Additionally, parents emphasized creating supportive home environments through activities such as reading and homework assistance, while adapting their efforts to overcome the challenges posed by limited resources in their low-income community.

Theme 2: Parents Reinforced School Learning at Home Through Reading, Educational Games, and Structured Routines, Adapting Their Strategies Within the Limits of Low-Income Contexts. Parents reinforced school learning at home through reading, educational games, and structured routines, adapting their strategies within the limits of low-income contexts. The Home-Based Engagement theme focused on specific actions parents took at home to support learning that occurred in school. The parents mentioned activities such as reading, educational games, workbook practice exercises, routine and consistency, and developmental support activities. These parents described these activities as intentional strategies to support what their child was learning in school, often with limited resources due to low income. The responses helped identify the following issues: reading and homework routines; educational games and/or educational apps; and creative or themed learning experiences.

Many parents emphasized structured reading and homework routines as a core component of their home-based engagement, focusing on consistent daily or nightly practices to support academic progress. Parent 3 stated, "I read books with my child every night to help with their reading skills and make it a routine." Several parents described establishing regular schedules for reading and assisting with assignments to ensure their children stay on track with schoolwork, often prioritizing these activities despite limited time and resources. Parent 10 said,

“I make sure we do homework and read every day to support their learning.” Similarly, Parent 15 noted, “I read with my child every evening and help with their assignments.”

Another group of parents focused on using educational games and apps to make learning engaging and accessible, adapting to limited resources by leveraging technology and interactive activities. Parent 5 described, “I use workbooks and apps to help my child with math and reading skills.” Parents reported using educational apps, workbooks, and games to practice skills such as reading and math, making learning more interactive and feasible within their economic constraints. Parent 24 detailed a structured approach: We pick books together. We do reading at night. The teacher will give us calendars that we do in a month of schoolwork, and we do extra lessons with her, so that she is able to be on target.

A third group of parents described incorporating creative or thematic activities to align home-based efforts with classroom learning, often making learning enjoyable and relevant. Parent 1 noted, “I’ll find ways to kinda still incorporate the theme at home in some way, like do little experiments with them during the weekend, or just things like that.” Parents mentioned engaging in activities like school-aligned projects or themed games to reinforce classroom content, tailoring these efforts to their child’s interests and available resources. Parent 2 provided a comprehensive example: “I read with them, help with homework, and try to make learning fun with games or activities. I also talk to them about their day to keep them engaged and supported.”

Theme 2 Summary. Parents actively supported their child’s school learning through diverse home-based strategies, including structured reading and homework routines, educational games, and creative activities, tailored to the constraints of low-income environments. They described these efforts as intentional, focusing on daily practices like reading and using

accessible tools, such as apps, to reinforce academic skills. Despite limited resources, parents adapted by incorporating engaging, school-aligned activities to foster their child's development.

Theme 3: Parents Supported Their Child's Education by Maintaining Consistent Communication with Educators and Engaging in School Events. Parents supported their child's education by maintaining consistent communication with educators and engaging in school events. The theme about engagement in school emphasized parents' communication with educators and participation in school events. Common events included parent-teacher meetings, school plays, and workshops, which occurred through various communication methods, such as face-to-face meetings, email, and other apps. Parents characterized these efforts as critical to being aware of their child's development and working with educators. There can be problems in these efforts for parents, especially in low-income communities where access to opportunities and resources become barriers to participation. Three concerns emerged from their response: communications with educators to find regular opportunities for input from parents, how the parents could play a role in school activities, and using technology and other digital devices to assist with engagement.

Nine parents emphasized regular communication with educators through direct conversations, emails, or phone calls as a cornerstone of their school-based engagement. Parent 1 described daily interactions as important when she shared that "I tell them hello and good morning. We have conversations. When I pick my kids up from the teachers, I get a little update of how their day is going." Several parents highlighted maintaining ongoing dialogue with teachers through meetings or emails to stay informed about their child's academic needs and progress, often prioritizing these interactions despite time constraints. Parent 5 stated, "I talk to teachers regularly and make sure to go to all parent meetings." Similarly, Parent 15 noted, "I go

to conferences and talk to teachers about my child's progress." Parent 24 elaborate: I try to stay in regular contact with them, whether it's through meetings or quick check-ins. I make sure to ask about my child's progress and any areas they might need help with. Ongoing dialogue with educators is important to stay informed and support my child's education.

Another group of parents focused on active participation in school events, such as parent-teacher conferences, school plays, and workshops, to strengthen their involvement and connection with the school community. Parent 9 described, "I go to school events and keep in touch with teachers about my child." Parents reported attending events such as parent nights and school performances to show support for their child's education, often balancing these commitments with limited resources in their low-income community. Parent 11 added depth, explaining: "I talk to teachers about my child's needs and go to school events. It's important to show up for things like school plays or parent nights because it shows my child I care about their school life."

A third group of parents reported using digital tools, such as Class Dojo apps or text messaging, to facilitate communication and engagement with educators. Parent 6 noted, "I communicate with teachers through apps and attend conferences to stay involved." Many parents value digital platforms for their accessibility, using tools like apps or text messages to stay connected with teachers and receive updates, which helped overcome barriers like transportation or scheduling conflicts. Parent 16 stated, "I use apps to stay in touch with teachers and attend school events."

Theme 3 Summary. Parents actively supported their child's education through consistent communication with educators via face-to-face meetings, emails, and digital apps, as well as participation in school events such as parent-teacher conferences and plays. They

prioritized these efforts to stay informed about their child's progress and to strengthen their connection to the school community, despite challenges posed by limited resources in low-income settings. By leveraging accessible communication methods and attending school activities, parents maintained an active role in their child's educational environment.

Research Question 2

The second research question in this study was: How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education? Data from 24 individual interviews were analyzed, coded, and categorized to identify relevant themes that address this second research question. Findings from thematic analysis identified two themes which included (4) logistical and resource barriers, and (5) school communication barriers.

Theme 4: Parents' Involvement in Their Child's Education Was Constrained by Work Demands, Financial Pressures, Limited Time, and Single-Parent Responsibilities.

Parents frequently cited demanding work schedules as a primary barrier to involvement, emphasizing how long hours and inflexible timings conflicted with school-related activities. Participant 1, who worked at their children's school, described the challenge of balancing an 8-to-5 schedule with parenting responsibilities: "So, my schedule, because, like I said, I work in the same school as them, I work 8 to 5. So then, like I said, I try to spend time with them sometimes during my lunch break. I'll take turns, either one or the other, and by the time we get home, it's like a 20–30-minute commute home, and then I try to have them down by like 7. So, it really only gives me about an hour and a half, really, to juggle dinner and spending time with them."

This response highlights how a full-time work schedule, even in a school setting, severely limits the time available for meaningful engagement with their children's education. Participant 2 similarly noted the impact of work demands: "Work and money are the biggest challenges. I'm often tired after work, and it's hard to make it to all the school events. Affording extra supplies or activities can be tough too." The exhaustion from long work hours compounded the difficulty of attending events like parent-teacher conferences or school performances, which often occurred outside regular working hours.

Participant 24 explicitly linked their work schedule to limited involvement, stating, "Work schedule definitely affects it. I work full-time, so I can't always make it to every event or meeting. Transportation hasn't been a big issue, but financial constraints can limit what extra activities or materials I can provide for her." This account underscores the pervasive impact of full-time employment, which restricted participation in school activities and access to resources. Participant 23 echoed this sentiment, emphasizing scheduling conflicts: "Work is a big factor. Sometimes my schedule doesn't allow me to attend everything I'd like to. Also, finding out about all the events can be tough if the school doesn't communicate them well." The mention of school communication highlights an additional layer of difficulty, where lack of timely or clear information about events further hindered attendance for parents with constrained schedules.

Financial constraints emerged as a major barrier, with parents reporting that limited resources prevented them from providing educational materials or participating in extracurricular activities. Participant 2's statement, "Work and money are the biggest challenges ... Affording extra supplies or activities can be tough too," illustrates how financial constraints prevented parents from purchasing items such as books, art supplies, or uniforms required for school events. Participant 21 reinforced this, noting that "financial constraints can limit what extra

activities or materials I can provide for her.” These constraints were particularly acute for parents in low-income communities, where disposable income for non-essential educational expenses was scarce. Participant 1 indirectly referenced financial strain in the context of single-parent responsibilities, which often exacerbated resource limitations: Main challenges, “I feel like sometimes I feel burnt out just from work in general, or being a single parent. I just feel a little tired by the time I get home to kind of be involved with them a lot.”

The reference to being a single parent suggests additional financial pressures, as managing household expenses alone left fewer resources for educational involvement. Participant 1 further elaborated on the need for external support to alleviate financial burdens: “I guess if I had someone else to help financially or just to find the time to interact with the kids more. I don't know how that could happen. Maybe a babysitter in some way that would help with dinner, maybe, and so I could spend time with the children.” The quotes reveal financial constraints extended beyond direct educational costs to include the inability to afford support services like childcare, which could free up time for involvement.

Time limitations were a recurring barrier, closely tied to work schedules and parenting demands. Participant 23 explicitly identified time as a critical obstacle: “Time is a big factor. Sometimes work schedules can be demanding, and it’s hard to balance everything. Also, not knowing about all the resources available can make it challenging to get involved as much as I’d like.” The mention of balancing multiple responsibilities highlights the challenge of allocating time for school involvement amidst work and household duties. Participant 1’s description of their daily routine further illustrates this constraint, as the limited window between work and bedtime restricted opportunities for educational engagement. Participant 24 noted similar challenges, stating, “Sometimes my schedule doesn’t allow me to attend everything I’d like to,”

underscoring how time scarcity prevents participation in school events such as parent meetings and volunteering opportunities.

Physical and emotional exhaustion emerged as another potential barrier, particularly for parents balancing multiple roles. Participant 1's account of feeling "burnt out just from work in general, or being a single parent" captures the emotional toll of managing work and parenting responsibilities, which left little energy for additional involvement. This exhaustion was not merely physical but also mental, as parents described feeling overwhelmed by the demands of low-income life. Participant 2's statement, "I'm often tired after work, and it's hard to make it to all the school events," reflects how fatigue reduced their capacity to engage in activities like attending school plays or helping with homework. The emotional burden was particularly pronounced for single parents, as Participant 1 noted, "I just feel a little tired by the time I get home to kind of be involved with them a lot." This sentiment underscores how exhaustion limited the quality and quantity of involvement, even when parents were motivated to participate.

A lack of awareness of available resources or school opportunities was another critical barrier, as parents often felt uninformed about programs or events that could facilitate involvement. Participant 22 highlighted this issue: "Also, not knowing about all the resources available can make it challenging to get involved as much as I'd like." This lack of information prevented parents from accessing free or low-cost programs, such as tutoring or after-school activities, which could support their child's education. Participant 24 similarly noted, "Finding out about all the events can be tough if the school doesn't communicate them well," suggesting that inadequate communication from schools exacerbated this barrier. Parents expressed a desire for better information dissemination, such as through newsletters or digital platforms, to stay

informed about opportunities for involvement. Participant 22 further elaborated: “Definitely be more aware of programs that are out there. There are a lot of programs that we are not aware of, and it's not teachable through teachers or principals.”

Additional participant responses provide further insight into the interconnected nature of these barriers. Participant 2 suggested potential solutions that indirectly highlighted their challenges: “More flexible work hours would help a lot. Also, if the school could share more about free programs or resources, like tutoring or after-school activities, which would be great. Online meetings or text updates would make it easier too.” This response reflects the combined impact of work schedules, lack of resource awareness, and the need for more accessible communication channels. Participant 24 similarly proposed, “More flexible work hours would help a lot. Also, if the school could provide more information about free or low-cost resources, like after-school programs or tutoring, that would make a big difference.” These suggestions highlight how barriers such as time constraints and limited access to information can be mitigated through structural changes, underscoring their significance.

Theme 5: Parents’ Engagement Was Hindered by Inadequate or Unclear Communication from Schools About Events, Programs, and Resources. Parents’ engagement was hindered by inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, and resources. The School Communication Barriers theme highlighted challenges stemming from insufficient or unclear information from schools, which limited parents’ ability to stay informed and participate in their child’s early childhood education. Parents described missing opportunities to engage due to a lack of clear notifications about school events or available resources, which compounded other barriers, such as time and financial constraints, noted in Theme 4. Participant 1 suggested a need for better support systems: “If I had someone to

help financially or find time, like a babysitter to help with dinner, I could be more involved.”

Similarly, Participant 2 noted, “If the school could share more about free programs or resources, like tutoring or after-school activities, that would help.” These challenges restricted parents’ ability to participate in activities such as parent-teacher meetings and school plays, as highlighted in Theme 3, where consistent communication and attendance at events were key to school-based engagement.

Several parents reported that unclear communication about school events, such as workshops or parent nights, prevented them from participating fully in their child’s education. Participant 3 said, “I don’t always know about school events because the communication isn’t clear.” Participant 5 noted, “I miss some events because I don’t hear about them in time.” Participant 7 described, “Sometimes I don’t get information about school activities, so I can’t participate.” Parents often learned about events too late or not at all, limiting their involvement in the school-based activities emphasized in Theme 3. Participant 9 said, “I don’t always find out about events or programs, which limits my involvement.” Participant 11 noted, “I don’t hear about all the school events or resources available.”

Another group of parents highlighted a lack of information about available programs, such as tutoring or after-school activities, which restricted their ability to support their child’s learning. Participant 6 said, “I don’t know about all the programs available because the school doesn’t share enough.” Participant 8 noted, “The school could do better at letting us know about free resources.” A lack of awareness of resources, such as free programs that could alleviate financial barriers noted in Theme 4, left parents feeling disconnected from opportunities to engage. Participant 14 noted, “I don’t get enough information about school activities.” Participant 16 described, “I miss events because the school doesn’t share information clearly.”

Parents also mentioned that poor school communication exacerbated existing logistical challenges, such as work schedules and financial limitations, making it harder to stay involved. Participant 15 said, “School communication could be better to help me stay involved.” Participant 20 noted, “School communication isn’t great, so I miss out on some opportunities.” Many parents expressed that clearer or more frequent communication from schools, such as through emails, apps, or fliers, would enable them to participate more actively, aligning with Theme 3’s emphasis on digital tools and regular teacher communication. Participant 22 described, “The school could share more about resources to help me get involved.” Participant 24 stated, “Finding out about all the events can be tough if the school doesn’t communicate them well.”

Theme 5 Summary. Parents reported that inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, and resources significantly hindered their ability to engage in their child’s early childhood education. This lack of information, such as untimely or unclear notifications about parent-teacher conferences or free tutoring programs, limited their participation in school activities and access to resources. These communication barriers compounded logistical challenges, such as time and financial constraints, further restricting parents’ involvement in low-income communities.

Theme 6: Parents Linked Their Involvement to Improvements In Children’s Academic Skills and Behavioral Outcomes. The theme encompassed parents’ observations of enhancements in their children’s academic performance, such as reading, writing, and math skills, as well as positive changes in behavior, including better classroom conduct and independence. Parents described their efforts, such as helping with homework or collaborating with teachers (as noted in Theme 3), as contributing to these gains, despite challenges like

inadequate school communication highlighted in Theme 5. Participant 1 noted, “I’ve noticed a lot of improvement in their behavior and their speech. They’re doing better in school activities.” Participant 2 described, “Helping with homework has improved their reading and math skills, and they behave better in class.” Many parents reported that regular home-based support, such as assisting with assignments, led to noticeable improvements in their children’s reading and writing skills. Participant 4 noted, “I see my child doing better in schoolwork, especially writing, because I help with assignments.”

Several parents observed that their involvement, including attending parent-teacher meetings and using community resources (connected to Theme 3’s school engagement), led to better grades and increased focus in class. Participant 5 described, “My involvement has helped my child improve in math and stay more focused in class.” Participant 7 noted, “I’ve seen my child improve in reading and become more responsible in class.” Participant 9 said, “Helping at home has made my child better at reading and more engaged in school.” Parents also mentioned that their consistent engagement fostered behavioral improvements, such as greater discipline and responsibility, which they linked to their efforts to remain involved despite barriers described in Theme 5 (e.g., poor school communication). Participant 12 said, “My child’s grades are better, and they’re more disciplined in class.” Participant 15 noted, “I’ve seen my child improve in writing and become more responsible.”

Another group of parents highlighted specific academic gains, such as improved math and reading skills, alongside behavioral changes, such as better classroom conduct, often attributing these to their active role in their child’s education. Participant 16 noted, “My child’s reading skills and behavior have gotten better with my help.” Participant 18 said, “My child’s reading and math have improved, and they’re better behaved.” Parents described working closely

with teachers or using available resources to support these outcomes, aligning to Theme 3's emphasis on collaboration with educators. Participant 20 described, "My child's academic skills, like reading, have improved, and they're more focused." Participant 22 noted, "My involvement has helped my child improve in math and classroom behavior." These responses highlight specific academic and behavioral gains linked to parental involvement.

Theme 6 Summary. Parents reported that their involvement, through activities like homework assistance and teacher collaboration, led to significant improvements in their children's academic skills, such as reading, writing, and math, and behavioral outcomes, including better classroom conduct and independence. These gains were observed despite challenges such as limited resources and poor school communication, which parents navigated to remain engaged in their child's education, as seen in Themes 3 and 5. By maintaining consistent involvement, parents noted enhanced grades, focus, and responsibility in their children, particularly in low-income community settings.

Theme 7: Parental Involvement Fostered Children's Confidence, Enthusiasm For Learning, Stronger Family Bonds, and Improved Social Skills. Parents emphasized the emotional and social benefits of their engagement, noting how it fostered a sense of support and motivation in their children, often through activities like attending school events (Theme 3) or supporting academic progress (Theme 6). Participant 1 described, "They're super happy going to school. They love waking up and knowing that they're going to school, which is amazing." Participant 2 noted: Seeing my child get excited about learning is the best. When I help with homework or go to school events, they're happy, and it feels good to see them improve, especially in confidence.

Many parents reported that their involvement, such as helping with homework or participating in school activities, led to greater confidence and enthusiasm for learning in their children. Participant 3 said, “My child is more confident in class and loves learning now.” Participant 5 noted, “My child is happier and more confident because I’m involved in their education.” These emotional gains were often linked to parents’ presence at school events, as described in Theme 3, which reinforced children’s sense of support. Participant 7 described, “My child’s confidence has grown, and they enjoy school more.” Participant 9 said, “Helping at home makes my child excited about learning and more outgoing.”

Parents also observed stronger parent-child bonds and improved social skills, attributing these to their active engagement in their child’s education. Participant 11 noted, “My child’s enthusiasm for school has grown, and they’re more social.” Participant 14 described, “My child enjoys learning more and is more confident in class.” Many parents mentioned that activities such as reading together or attending school plays, as in Theme 3, strengthened their relationships with their child and encouraged social interactions with peers. Participant 16 described, “My child is more excited about learning and gets along better with others.” Participant 18 said, “My child’s confidence and enthusiasm for school have grown.”

Several parents highlighted that their involvement fostered a love for learning and improved classroom interactions, connecting to Theme 6’s focus on behavioral improvements like responsibility and engagement. Participant 20 noted, “My child is more confident and loves school because I’m involved.” Participant 22 described, “My involvement has helped my child love learning and feel more confident.” Participant 24 stated, “When I go to events or help out, they get so excited, and it makes me feel like I’m making a difference.” These accounts underscore the emotional and social benefits parents observed from their involvement.

Theme 7 Summary. Parents reported that their involvement, through activities such as homework support and school event participation, fostered increased confidence and enthusiasm for learning in their children, along with stronger parent-child bonds and improved social skills. These emotional and social gains were evident in children's excitement for school and better interactions with peers, often supported by parents' engagement despite challenges in low-income communities. The outcomes, linked to consistent home and school-based efforts, complemented the academic and behavioral improvements noted in Theme 6, highlighting the multifaceted impact of parental involvement.

Evaluation of the Outcomes

This section reviews the study's findings, based on the three research questions, to demonstrate how they contribute to the study's problem and purpose. The study examined parents' perceptions of early childhood parental engagement among low-income communities through a thematic analysis of interview and focus group data collected from 24 parents, mostly African American. The findings for RQ1 were grouped into three themes and exhibited the main findings relevant to the study's purpose of examining first-hand experiences of parental engagement in low-income communities.

The first theme captured the parents' perception of parental involvement as a complex role, including both home-based and school-based engagement. These findings aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which posits that parental involvement is shaped by interactions within the microsystem (home and school), highlighting how parents navigate these contexts to support their children's education. In Elaboration, this aligns with the problem assertion that low parental involvement impacts academic success. The second and third themes reflected home-based activities, such as reading and homework support, and school-

based activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings and school events, demonstrating learned engagement despite socioeconomic barriers.

These results play an important role in contributing to existing literature on the topic. Huguley et al. (2021) explained that African American parents within low-income conditions engage in unique involvement strategies like home-based learning which closely mirrors the second theme. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) further supported the findings, noting that African American parents in low-income neighborhoods use home-based strategies, such as reading, to promote school readiness. Iruka et al. (2021) documented that low-income parents engage in school first when it is available (supporting the third theme).

The focus on parents' perception of involvement as a responsibility aligns with Johnson et al.'s (2021) article on parental motivation in underserved communities. An unexpected finding in the study was the presence of cultural practices (e.g., storytelling) within home-based engagement, which was not the focus of the literature. It seems that the observance of this cultural practice is influenced by the fact that most of the sample consisted of African American participants. Huguley et al. (2021) noted, cultural identity is a major component of how involvement is shaped. Further research is needed on the cultural significance of parental involvement among low-income families.

RQ2 examined how parents from low-income contexts are descriptive of their barriers to participating in their child's early childhood education. Thematic analysis identified two themes that were identified to consider logistical and resource constraints (e.g., limited time, limited money) and barriers to communication from school (e.g., language barriers, lack of knowledge). The theme may be understood in the light of Epstein's (1995) model where lack of communication is substantial challenge that hinders parental involvement.

These themes were intended to inform purpose by identifying barriers to participation and offering educators ways to advance engagement. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory frames these barriers as interactions between the exosystem (e.g., work demands) and the mesosystem (e.g., parent-school communication), which limit parents' capacity for engagement. Huguley et al. (2021) noted that the socioeconomic barriers of time and money for African American parents support the first theme. Similarly, Iruka et al. (2021) noted communication barriers, including a lack of clear information provided by schools, which aligns with our second theme, particularly for parents with limited English proficiency.

The results align with Huguley et al. (2021), who observed that work demands and limited resources constrain involvement in low-income communities. Reynolds et al. (2018) further corroborate the findings showing that financial constraints were barriers to parental involvement in low-income settings. However, in this case the prominence of single-parent difficulties (as documented in the participant demographics, 18-20 were single parent households) as a barrier was greater. This difference in emphasis may be due to the single-parent make-up of the study sample emphasizing that single-parent households might have greater logistical hurdles (e.g., due to childcare) necessitating appropriate interventions.

RQ3 evaluated what parents of low-income communities describe as their success of being engaged in their child's early childhood education. The parents expressed improved academic and behavioral outcomes, along with improved emotional and social skills. The results of the study demonstrated that parents being involved have a real benefit that is pertinent to the study's problem of connecting parents' involvement to academic success and achievement in the long-term. These successes align with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, as parental involvement in the microsystem (home and school) fosters child development across

academic, behavioral, and emotional domains. Regarding this study's findings, the results also show that parents succeed despite their barriers to involvement, demonstrating the resilience of low-income parents. These findings aligned with those of Johnson et al. (2021), who found that parental involvement, particularly in low-income settings, improves academic outcomes, as seen in the first theme. Iruka et al. (2021) found that parental involvement improves behavioral outcomes, which aligned with the second theme in this study, particularly for the three participants whose child had a disability (speech delay, ADHD, ASD) and therefore had a greater need for engagement and involvement.

The findings align with Huguley et al. (2021), who found that African American parents' involvement has positive implications for academic and behavioral outcomes. However, the extreme emphasis on emotional and social growth as a success differs from literature which focused more on academic outcomes (e.g., Johnson et al., 2021). The difference may be due to the sample being predominantly African American, particularly given that emotional support and family bonding carries cultural significance (Huguley et al., 2021) and with a focus on children with disabilities it elevated outcomes around emotional and social growth. Loeza and Thompson (2023) also highlight that emotional and social growth is a significant outcome in African American families, suggesting that cultural values amplify these successes. This finding, supported by Saran et al. (2023), underscores the need for interventions that prioritize emotional and social support for children with disabilities in low-income communities.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study provide important inferences about parental involvement in early childhood education. The three themes of parents' perception of involvement as a critical responsibility, engagement in home-based activities, and participation in school-based activities

suggest that low-income parents are highly motivated to support their children's education despite socioeconomic challenges. This implies that, within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the microsystem interactions (home and school) are pivotal in shaping parental involvement, highlighting parents' resilience in navigating these contexts.

The themes of logistical and resource constraints (e.g., time scarcity, financial limitations) and school communication barriers (e.g., language difficulties, inadequate information) indicate that systemic barriers in the exosystem (e.g., work demands) and mesosystem (e.g., parent-school communication) significantly hinder engagement. These findings suggest that schools must address structural and communication challenges to enhance involvement (Harwood et al., 2019). Lastly, the themes related to improved academic and behavioral outcomes and enhanced emotional and social skills imply that parental involvement creates measurable benefits across multiple developmental domains, particularly for children with disabilities like speech delay, ADHD, or ASD. These findings underscore the potential of targeted involvement strategies to improve child outcomes in low-income settings, without overgeneralizing to all populations.

The research findings provide important recommendations for educational practice in low-income communities, acknowledging that applicability is limited to similar contexts. First, schools need to take steps to develop culturally responsive engagement programs. Schools might develop a program that incorporates cultural practices, such as storytelling, to support parental engagement at home. The recommendation is based on the finding that parents in the sample engage in home-based activities (Theme 2) that resemble storytelling, likely because 80% of the parents are African American. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) describe how African American parents use culturally relevant strategies to promote school readiness; therefore,

schools can consider these strategies and practices to strengthen engagement in their learning environments.

Second, there is a need to implement flexible scheduling for school events. Such a recommendation is important to address logistical constraints. Schools should offer flexible scheduling for parent-teacher meetings and school events, such as evening or weekend options. The recommendation is supported by the finding that logistical and resource constraints, including time scarcity, hinder involvement (Theme 4), particularly for single-parent households (18–20 participants). Reynolds et al. (2018) note that time constraints are a significant barrier and recommend flexible access to school activities to accommodate working parents.

Third, there is a need to enhance school communication strategies. That is, schools should improve communication by providing clear, accessible information in multiple languages and formats (e.g., emails, apps, translated materials). Enhanced communication is important to address barriers, such as language difficulties, that limit parental involvement (Theme 5). Iruka et al. (2021) advocate for clear, equitable communication to foster family engagement in urban schools.

Fourth, there is a need to provide targeted support for children with disabilities. Based on the findings, schools should offer workshops and resources to support parents of children with disabilities in fostering emotional and social growth. The recommendation is supported by the finding that parental involvement enhances emotional and social skills (Theme 7), particularly for children with disabilities. Johnson et al. (2021) highlight that parent-child interactions improve outcomes for at-risk children, suggesting tailored support can amplify these benefits.

Lastly, there is a need to promote community partnerships. That is, schools should partner with community organizations to provide resources (e.g., tutoring, after-school programs)

that support parental involvement. The need for community partnerships aligns with the finding that parents perceive involvement as a critical responsibility (Theme 1) and engage despite barriers. Huguley et al. (2021) recommend community-based strategies to enhance culturally responsive parental engagement in low-income settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, several important recommendations for future research emerged. These recommendations address the study's limitations and propose the next logical steps in this line of research. First, future research should examine how cultural practices, such as storytelling (Theme 2), shape parental involvement in diverse low-income communities beyond African American families. This study found that cultural practices were prominent in home-based engagement, likely due to the predominantly African American sample, but the reported diverse sample (African Americans, Hispanics, Africans, Caribbeans) suggests broader applicability. Huguley et al. (2021) emphasize cultural identity in African American parental engagement, but further studies could include Hispanic or Caribbean parents to compare cultural influences and address the limitation of a skewed sample. This would clarify the generalizability of cultural practices within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem.

Second, researchers should examine constraints for single-parent households, e.g., time and childcare (Theme 4), and design targeted interventions. The prominence of the issues facing single parents was critical to establishing the impact of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, in which work pressures affect families more than others. Reynolds et al. (2018) noted logistical constraints but did not specify single parents as a group. Given the limitations noted, it may be worthwhile to conduct a study analyzing single- and dual-parent households using a larger stratified sample, thereby addressing the small sample size.

Third, future studies should test interventions to improve parent-school communication (Theme 5), such as multilingual resources or school apps, to reduce barriers, such as language difficulties. Iruka et al. (2021) advocate for equitable communication, but this study focused on a single community, limiting generalizability. A multi-site study could address this limitation by testing communication strategies across diverse low-income schools and exploring mesosystem interactions within Bronfenbrenner's framework.

Fourth, the researchers should use longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impact of parental involvement on academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes (Themes 6 and 7), particularly for children with disabilities. Johnson et al. (2021) link involvement to immediate outcomes, but this study's cross-sectional design limits causal claims. A longitudinal study would address this limitation, tracking outcomes within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem over time.

Lastly, future researchers should evaluate community partnerships (e.g., libraries, after-school programs) to support parental involvement (Theme 1). Huguley et al. (2021) suggested community-based strategies, but this study's single-community focus limits broader application. A mixed-methods study across multiple low-income communities could test intervention efficacy, addressing the limitation of geographic scope.

Based on these recommendations, the next logical step is to conduct a mixed-methods study in diverse low-income communities. Such an approach will help explore cultural and single-parent dynamics (Recommendations 1 and 2) and test interventions for communication and community support (Recommendations 3 and 5). Undertaking such an approach would build on the current study's findings by addressing its limitations (a small, skewed sample;

overrepresentation of a cultural group) and by extending the ecological systems framework to diverse populations.

Conclusion

This study explored parental perceptions of early childhood parental involvement in low-income communities in the United States, addressing the practice-based concern that limited parental involvement can hinder academic and long-term success. Using thematic analysis of interviews and transcript data collected from 24 parents, seven key themes emerged: parents view involvement as an important obligation, parents engage in both school-based and home-based practices, parents encounter logistical barriers to involvement and communication, and observe improvements in children's academic, behavioral, emotional, and social outcomes. These findings were interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, which highlighted the significance of the microsystem (home and school) and the exosystem (work and community) in shaping parental involvement. The study also identified structural barriers that create challenges for parents.

The result of the study suggests that low-income parents, despite facing significant obstacles, demonstrate motivation and resilience by engaging in educational practice in ways that produce meaningful developmental outcomes for their children, particularly children with disabilities (e.g., children with speech delays, children who have ADHD, children who have ASD). The implications for practice include the need for culturally responsive programs that utilize storytelling practices (Huguley et al., 2021), allow for flexible scheduling to support single-parent homes (Reynolds et al., 2018), allow for better communication practices (Iruka et al., 2021), provide explicit support for children with disabilities (Johnson et al., 2021), and develop partnerships with community organizations to provide support (Huguley et al., 2021).

These implications relate to the significance of this study for educational practice, as they provide practical actions that can foster engagement in low-income communities.

The principal implication of this study is the importance of providing low-income families with culturally and contextually relevant support to promote parent involvement and enhance children's developmental and academic outcomes. The findings indicate that effective strategies include implementing culturally responsive programs, offering flexible scheduling to accommodate families' diverse needs, developing clear and consistent communication approaches, establishing support mechanisms for children with disabilities, and fostering collaborative partnerships with community organizations. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to implement initiatives to strengthen parent involvement and to support the social-emotional development and academic achievement of children from low-income communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parent Interview Questions

Research Question 1 How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education?		
Interview Questions	Aligned Questions	Content used
1. In what ways are you involved in your child's early childhood education program or activities?	The interview questions are in alignment with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in various ways. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the influence that various environmental systems have on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).	Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. <i>American psychologist</i> , 32(7), 513.
2. What type of activities or events have you participated in related to your child's early education?		Epstein, J. L. (1995). <i>School/family/community partnerships</i> . <i>Phi delta Kappan</i> , 76(9), 701.
3. Describe your relationship and communication with your child's educators.	Microsystem (immediate environment): Questions 1, 2, 3, and 11 align with the microsystem environmental relationship, which includes a child's immediate surroundings and relationships with family, early childhood education program, and interactions with educational staff (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The direct involvement of parents in the lives of their child's early education program, activities, and home learning is explored by these questions.	Epstein, J. L. (2018). <i>School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools</i> . Routledge.
4. What are some personal, economic, or social factors or circumstances that have influenced your ability to be involved in your child's early education?		Erdener, M. A., & Knoeppel, R.C. (2018). Parents' perceptions of their involvement in schooling. <i>International Journal of Research in Education and Science</i> , 4(1), 1-13.
5. What impact, if any, has your involvement had on your child's education and development?	Mesosystem (connections between microsystems): Questions 4, 5, and 13 address the mesosystem, which involves the connections and interactions between the different microsystems in the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This includes the relationship between the family and the early childhood education program (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These questions examine how parental involvement or lack of involvement impacts the child's educational experience, development, and outcomes.	
	Exosystem (external environments):	

	<p>Questions 6, 7, and 8 relate to the exosystem, which reflects how a child's development is impacted by external environments that indirectly influence it, such as the parents' work schedules, transportation, financial constraints, and cultural or language barriers. These questions explore the barriers and challenges that parents from low-income communities face in being involved in their child's early education.</p> <p>Macrosystem (societal and cultural influences): The macrosystem indicates the broad cultural and social factors, values and beliefs that shape a child's growth and development (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). The questions explore the hindrance that exists and possible resources, support and advice that could help parents overcome barriers that prevent them from being more involved in their child's early childhood education.</p> <p>Chronosystem (changes over time): The chronosystem, which considers the influence of time and transitions on a child's development, could be explored with questions about changes experienced with parental involvement or barriers over time, as their child progressed through various stages in their early childhood education.</p> <p>This research aims to understand the varied factors and contexts that affect parental involvement in early childhood education, specifically for parents who reside in low-income communities. It will do so by aligning the interview questions with the various systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).</p>	
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Research Question 2		
How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education?		
Interview Questions	Aligned Questions	Content used
6. What challenges have you faced in trying to be involved in your child's early education?	<p>The interview questions align with Joyce Epstein's six types of parental involvement in the following areas:</p> <p>1. Parenting Questions 4,5 and 7 align with the parenting type of involvement in which the focus is on helping families build and establish a supportive home-learning environment for children (Epstein, 1995). The factors that influence parental involvement or the lack of involvement in a child's educational experience are explored through these questions, as well as how parents can support children's learning at home</p> <p>2. Communicating: Questions 3 and 8 align with this type of involvement, which promotes effective communication between home, school, and educational programs (Epstein, 1995). These questions examine communication and relationships between parents and early childhood educators, as well as possible barriers, such as language or culture, which may prevent effective communication (Epstein, 1995).</p> <p>3. Volunteering:</p>	

	<p>Questions 1 and 2 relate to this type of involvement, which involves recruiting and organizing parental help and support for educational programs or activities (Epstein, 1995). These questions explore the level of parental involvement in their child's early childhood education program or activities and the specific events or activities they have participated in (Epstein, 1995).</p> <p>4. Learning at Home:</p> <p>Questions 11 and 12 align with learning at home and focus on providing information and strategies to families that will support their children's learning at home (Epstein, 1995). These questions examine how parents support their child's learning and development at home and the practical strategies or approaches they have found for staying engaged in their child's early education.</p> <p>5. Decision Making:</p> <p>This type of involvement provides opportunities for parents to advocate and be included in the decision-making process of their child's education process (Epstein, 1995). This involves including parents in school decisions and developing</p>	
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	<p>parent leaders and representatives. Asking questions about opportunities for parents to participate in decision-making processes or advisory roles within the early childhood education program provides an opportunity to explore this type of involvement.</p> <p>6. Collaboration with the Community:</p> <p>Question 9 relates to this type of involvement, which promotes the concept that local businesses can be incorporated as resources to support school programs (Epstein, 1995). This type of involvement focuses on coordinating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. This question explores the resources available to parents that could help them overcome barriers and become more involved in their child's early education, involving community collaboration.</p> <p>This research aims to gather insights into the various aspects of parental engagement in early childhood education, including parenting practices, communication, volunteering, home-based learning support, decision-making</p>	
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	opportunities, and community collaboration, through aligning the interview questions with Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995).	
7. Have any factors such as work schedules, or transportation affected your ability to be involved in your child's education? If so, how?		
8. Describe any cultural or language differences that made it challenging for you to communicate with your child's early education program or staff.		
9. What kind of support or resources would make it easier for you to participate more in your child's early education?		

Research Question 3		
RQ3: What do parents from low-income communities describe as their successes with being involved in their child's early childhood education?		
Interview Questions	Aligned Questions	Content used
10. What are some positive experiences or successes you've had in being involved in your child's early education?		
11. In what ways do you support your child's learning and development at home or outside of school?		
12. What strategies have you found effective to stay involved in your child's education?		
13. What advice would you give to other parents in similar situations to help them be more involved in their child's early education?		

14. What other thoughts or experiences would you like to share regarding your involvement in your child's early childhood education?		
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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

My name is Karese Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU).

I am conducting a study to better understand how parents are involved in their children's education communities with fewer resources. Your insights can support students and improve outcomes in early education.

I'm asking you to take part in a research study about how parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education. The name of this research study is "Parents' Perception of Early Childhood Parental Involvement in Low-Socioeconomic Communities."

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

You are age 18 or older.

You are a parent of a child attending pre-school through 3rd grade in the United States in a community with fewer resources.

I hope to include 20-25 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

What you will be asked to do:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

Participate in an online interview via Zoom for 30-45 minutes
Review interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

Ways you are involved in your child's early childhood education

Types of parent involvement activities or events you have participated in

Factors that have influenced your ability to be involved in your child's early education

Challenges faced in trying to be involved in your child's early education

Positive experience with being involved in your child's early education

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participating at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this study.

Recording: I would like to audio and video record the interview responses with Zoom during the interview. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Confidentiality: I will keep records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. I will securely store your data for 3 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at K.Haynes0232@o365.ncu.edu or at (845)659-3487

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

Appendix C

Facebook Post

Date: May 9, 2025

Parents Needed for a Research Study

Do you have a child in preschool through 3rd grade? Do you live in the United States?

I am conducting a study to better understand how parents are involved in their children's education in communities with fewer resources. Your insights can support students and improve outcomes in early education.

If you are 18 or older, I invite you to take part in a 30–45-minute Zoom interview where you can share your thoughts and experiences.

Those who are interested in participating, please contact me at Karese Haynes at K.Haynes0232@o365.ncu.edu. My phone number is (845) 659-3487. Your participation is voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your support in creating a stronger educational community!

#parentInvolvement #study #earlychildhoodParents #earlychildhood #earlychildhoodeducation
#NYCParents #parenthood #usaParents #parentinvolvementBarriers #Familyinvolvement
#ParentInvolvementForLowIncome #SchoolCommunity

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

My name is Karese Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study on Parents' Perception of Early Childhood Parental Involvement in Low-Socioeconomic Communities. I am recruiting individuals who meet all these criteria:

You are 18 years of age or older.

You are a parent of a child attending pre-school through 3rd grade in the United States in a community with fewer resources.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in an interview over Zoom for 30-45 minutes
2. Review interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Ways you are involved in your child's early childhood education
- Types of parent involvement activities or events you have participated in
- Factors that have influenced your ability to be involved in your child's early education
- Challenges faced in trying to be involved in your child's early education
- Positive experiences with being involved in your child's early education?

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at

K.Haynes0232@o365.ncu.edu.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer



Share your Thoughts on Parent Involvement

Study Purpose: To Inquire About Parents' Perception of Early Childhood Parental Involvement in Low-Socioeconomic Communities.

You are eligible for this study if you meet all of the following criteria:

1. You are 18 years or older
2. You are a parent of a child attending pre-school through 3rd grade in the United States in a community with fewer resources

In this study, participants will:

1. Participate in an interview over Zoom for 30-45 minutes

Participants will be asked questions about:

Factors that influence your ability to be involved in your child's early education

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Contact Karese Haynes
Doctoral Student at National University

**K.Haynes0232@o365.
ncu.edu**

Appendix F
Demographic Data

Demographic Category	Description	Number of Participants
Age Range	18–24	7
	25–34	12
	35–50	6
Household Type	Single-Parent Household	19
	Dual-Parent Household	6
Racial/Ethnic Background	African American	24
	Non-African American (unspecified)	1
Language Proficiency	Fluent English	24
	Limited English	0
Employment Status	Part-Time Employment	8
	Full-Time Employment	10
	Work from Home (to combat childcare expenses)	2
	Unemployed	1
Number of Children	Multiple Children in Early Childhood Grades	12
	Single Child in Early Childhood Grades	13
Children with Disabilities	Speech Delay, ADHD, or ASD	3
	No Disabilities	22
Gender of Parent	Mother	24
	Father	1

Appendix G
Coding Schema

Code/Theme	Description	Examples (Quotes)
RQ1: How do parents from low-income communities describe their experiences with being involved in their child's early childhood education?		
Understanding of Parent Involvement	Parents defined involvement as active engagement in school activities, communication with educators, and supporting learning at home to foster academic and developmental success.	<p>- <i>"It means I'm involved in the school in any way, shape or form. So, in terms of communicating with the teacher daily and getting to know the other students in the classroom and the day-to-day schedule, the routine, just when the kids need anything for like spirit day, or just in general, for the week, helping them at home, so that they continue working on the lesson plan or potty training, things of that nature."</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p>- <i>"It means being actively engaged in</i></p>

		<p><i>your child's education, helping with schoolwork, communicating with teachers, and participating in school activities to support their learning.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 2)</p> <p>- <i>“It's about being there for your child, knowing what's happening at school, and helping them learn at home.”</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p>- <i>“It means supporting my child's learning by talking to teachers and doing activities at home.”</i> (Participant 4)</p> <p>- <i>“It's being involved in everything— school events, homework, and talking to teachers to make sure my child succeeds.”</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p>- <i>“It's advocating for your child, making sure they get what they need at school and home.”</i> (Participant 6)</p> <p>- <i>“Being present in their education, attending meetings, and helping with schoolwork.”</i> (Participant 7)</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>“It’s about staying connected with the school and supporting my child’s learning at home.”</i> (Participant 8)- <i>“Involvement means knowing what my child is learning and helping them with it.”</i> (Participant 9)- <i>“It’s working with teachers to ensure my child’s success.”</i> (Participant 10)- <i>“It’s being involved in their daily school life and helping at home with reading.”</i> (Participant 11)- <i>“It’s about being active in their education, like going to school events and helping with homework.”</i> (Participant 12)- <i>“It means being there, talking to teachers, and making sure my child is supported.”</i> (Participant 13)- <i>“It’s creating a learning environment at home and staying in touch with the school.”</i> (Participant 14)- <i>“Being involved is helping my child</i>
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		<p><i>with schoolwork and attending parent meetings.” (Participant 15)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s knowing what’s going on at school and supporting my child at home.” (Participant 16)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s being part of their education, helping at home, and talking to teachers.” (Participant 17)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s engaging with the school and helping my child learn.” (Participant 18)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s being active in their school life and supporting their learning at home.” (Participant 19)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s about helping my child succeed by working with teachers and doing activities at home.” (Participant 20)</i></p> <p><i>- “It means being involved in their education, attending events, and helping with homework.” (Participant 21)</i></p> <p><i>- “It’s communicating with teachers and supporting my child’s learning.” (Participant 22)</i></p>
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		<p>- <i>“It’s being there for my child, helping with schoolwork, and staying connected with the school.”</i> (Participant 23)</p> <p>- <i>“Providing, like, a supportive home? You know, also a positive environment for my child. Communication with teachers and participating in school events and helping them engage with school activities at home.”</i> (Participant 24)</p> <p>- <i>“It means to do research and participate with teachers in letting your child be more successful in their educational background.”</i> (Participant 25)</p>
Home-Based Engagement	Parents engaged in home activities such as reading, educational games, workbook exercises, and structured routines to reinforce school learning and promote development.	<p>- <i>“I’ll find ways to kinda still incorporate the theme at home in some way, like do little experiments with them during the weekend, or just things like that.”</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p>- <i>“I read with them, help with homework, and try to make learning fun with games</i></p>

		<p><i>or activities. I also talk to them about their day to keep them engaged and supported.” (Participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>- “I read books with my child every night to help with their reading skills.”</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p><i>- “We do homework together and play educational games to make learning fun.” (Participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>- “I use workbooks and apps to help my child with math and reading.”</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p><i>- “I set up a routine for reading and doing schoolwork at home.” (Participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>- “We do reading and math activities at home to support what they learn at school.” (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>- “I help with homework and use apps to practice reading.” (Participant 8)</i></p> <p><i>- “We read together and do activities that match what they’re learning in class.”</i></p>
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		<p>(Participant 9)</p> <p>- <i>“I make sure we do homework and read every day to keep them on track.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 10)</p> <p>- <i>“I use books and games to help my child learn at home.”</i> (Participant 11)</p> <p>- <i>“We do reading and educational activities to support school learning.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 12)</p> <p>- <i>“I help with homework and use apps to practice skills.”</i> (Participant 13)</p> <p>- <i>“We have a nightly routine for reading and doing schoolwork.”</i> (Participant 14)</p> <p>- <i>“I read with my child and help with their assignments.”</i> (Participant 15)</p> <p>- <i>“We do learning activities at home, like reading and games.”</i> (Participant 16)</p> <p>- <i>“I help with homework and do reading to support their learning.”</i> (Participant 17)</p> <p>- <i>“We use workbooks and play games to make learning fun.”</i> (Participant 18)</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>“I read with my child and help with school projects.”</i> (Participant 19)- <i>“We do homework and use apps to practice reading and math.”</i> (Participant 20)- <i>“I set up a routine for reading and homework to help my child.”</i> (Participant 21)- <i>“We do educational games and reading to support schoolwork.”</i> (Participant 22)- <i>“I help with homework and read with my child every night.”</i> (Participant 23)- <i>“We have different apps that they can use for learning, math, and reading skills.”</i> (Participant 24)- <i>“We pick books together. We do reading at night. The teacher will give us calendars that we do in a month of school work, and we do extra lessons with her, so that she is able to be on target.”</i> (Participant 25)
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<p>School-Based Engagement</p>	<p>Parents maintained regular communication with educators through conversations, emails, apps, and participated in school events like parent-teacher conferences and workshops.</p>	<p>- <i>“I tell them hello and good morning. We have conversations. When I pick my kids up from the teachers, I get a little update of how their day is going or anything I need to work on with them.”</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p>- <i>“It’s really good. I talk to the teachers regularly through emails, meetings, or apps like Class Dojo. They keep me updated on my child’s progress, and I feel comfortable asking questions.”</i> (Participant 2)</p> <p>- <i>“I go to parent-teacher meetings and talk to teachers about my child’s progress.”</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p>- <i>“I stay in touch with teachers through emails and attend school events.”</i> (Participant 4)</p> <p>- <i>“I talk to teachers regularly and go to all parent meetings.”</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p>- <i>“I communicate with teachers through apps and attend conferences.”</i></p>
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		<p>(Participant 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>“I check in with teachers and go to school events when I can.”</i> (Participant 7)- <i>“I talk to teachers through Class Dojo and attend meetings.”</i> (Participant 8)- <i>“I go to school events and keep in touch with teachers.”</i> (Participant 9)- <i>“I communicate with teachers regularly and attend parent nights.”</i> (Participant 10)- <i>“I talk to teachers about my child’s needs and go to events.”</i> (Participant 11)- <i>“I stay connected with teachers and attend school activities.”</i> (Participant 12)- <i>“I talk to teachers through emails and go to parent meetings.”</i> (Participant 13)- <i>“I communicate with teachers and attend school events to stay involved.”</i> (Participant 14) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>“I go to conferences and talk to teachers about my child.”</i> (Participant
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		<p>15)</p> <p>- <i>“I use apps to stay in touch with teachers and attend events.”</i> (Participant 16)</p> <p>16)</p> <p>- <i>“I talk to teachers regularly and go to school meetings.”</i> (Participant 17)</p> <p>- <i>“I communicate with teachers and attend parent-teacher conferences.”</i> (Participant 18)</p> <p>17)</p> <p>- <i>“I go to school events and talk to teachers about progress.”</i> (Participant 19)</p> <p>18)</p> <p>- <i>“I stay in touch with teachers and attend school activities.”</i> (Participant 20)</p> <p>- <i>“I talk to teachers through apps and go to meetings.”</i> (Participant 21)</p> <p>- <i>“I communicate with teachers and attend school events.”</i> (Participant 22)</p> <p>- <i>“I go to parent meetings and talk to teachers about my child.”</i> (Participant 23)</p> <p>19)</p> <p>- <i>“I try to stay in regular contact with</i></p>
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		<p><i>them, whether it's through meetings or quick check-ins. I make sure to ask about my child's progress and any areas they might need help with.</i>” (Participant 24)</p> <p>- <i>“I am a parent, so I keep in touch as regularly as possible. I even do texts in the morning to make sure that she's not missing anything that I need to drop off for her at school.”</i> (Participant 25)</p>
RQ2: How do parents from low-income communities describe their barriers to being involved in their child's early childhood education?		
Logistical and Resource Barriers	<p>Parents cited demanding work schedules, financial constraints, time limitations, exhaustion, and single-parent</p>	<p>- <i>“Main challenges, I feel like sometimes I feel burnt out just from work in general, or being a single parent. I just feel a little tired by the time I get home to kind of be involved with them a lot.”</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p>- <i>“Work and money are the biggest</i></p>

	<p>responsibilities as barriers to involvement.</p>	<p><i>challenges. I'm often tired after work, and it's hard to make it to all the school events. Affording extra supplies or activities can be tough too.</i>" (Participant 2)</p> <p>- <i>"My job keeps me so busy, I can't always make it to school events, and money is tight for supplies."</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p>- <i>"Work hours are long, and I can't afford extra things like books or activities for school."</i> (Participant 4)</p> <p>- <i>"I work full-time, and it's hard to find time for school events. Money is also a big issue."</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p>- <i>"Financial constraints make it tough to buy supplies, and my job takes up most of my time."</i> (Participant 6)</p> <p>- <i>"I'm exhausted after work, and my schedule doesn't let me attend everything."</i> (Participant 7)</p> <p>- <i>"Work leaves me tired, and I can't</i></p>
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		<p><i>always afford the extra stuff schools ask for.” (Participant 8)</i></p> <p><i>- “My job takes up so much time, and I struggle to pay for school activities.” (Participant 9)</i></p> <p><i>- “Work schedules and lack of money make it hard to be as involved as I want.” (Participant 10)</i></p> <p><i>- “I’m tired after long work hours, and I can’t afford extra resources for my child.” (Participant 11)</i></p> <p><i>- “Work and financial issues limit how much I can do for school events.” (Participant 12)</i></p> <p><i>- “Being a single parent and working full-time leaves me with little time or money.” (Participant 13)</i></p> <p><i>- “My job takes all my energy, and I can’t afford school supplies or activities.” (Participant 14)</i></p> <p><i>- “Work hours and exhaustion make it hard to participate in school events.”</i></p>
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		<p>(Participant 15)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t have enough time because of work, and money is always tight.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 16)</p> <p>- <i>“Work and being tired all the time make it tough to be involved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 17)</p> <p>- <i>“Money for supplies and time for events are my biggest challenges.”</i> (Participant 18)</p> <p>- <i>“Work keeps me busy, and I can’t always afford what the school needs.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 19)</p> <p>- <i>“My job takes up my time, and I struggle to pay for extra school stuff.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 20)</p> <p>- <i>“I’m exhausted from work and being a single parent, so I miss some events.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 21)</p> <p>- <i>“Work schedules and financial constraints make involvement really hard.”</i> (Participant 22)</p>
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		<p>- <i>“My job and lack of money limit how much I can do for school.” (Participant 23)</i></p> <p>- <i>“Work is a big factor. Sometimes my schedule doesn’t allow me to attend everything I’d like to.” (Participant 24)</i></p> <p>- <i>“Work schedule definitely affects it. I work full-time, so I can’t always make it to every event or meeting. Transportation hasn’t been a big issue, but financial constraints can limit what extra activities or materials I can provide for her.” (Participant 25)</i></p>
<p>School Communication Barriers</p>	<p>Parents reported inadequate or unclear communication from schools about events, programs, or resources as a barrier to involvement.</p>	<p>- <i>“If I had someone to help financially or find time, like a babysitter to help with dinner, I could be more involved.” (Participant 1)</i></p> <p>- <i>“If the school could share more about free programs or resources, like tutoring or after-school activities, that would help.” (Participant 2)</i></p> <p>- <i>“I don’t always know about school</i></p>

		<p><i>events because the communication isn't clear.</i>" (Participant 3)</p> <p>- <i>"The school doesn't always tell us about events or resources, which makes it hard."</i> (Participant 4)</p> <p>- <i>"I miss some events because I don't hear about them in time."</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p>- <i>"I don't know about all the programs available because the school doesn't share enough."</i> (Participant 6)</p> <p>- <i>"Sometimes I don't get information about school activities, so I can't participate."</i> (Participant 7)</p> <p>- <i>"The school could do better at letting us know about free resources."</i> (Participant 8)</p> <p>- <i>"I don't always find out about events or programs, which limits my involvement."</i> (Participant 9)</p> <p>- <i>"School communication isn't always clear, so I miss out on opportunities."</i> (Participant 10)</p>
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		<p>- <i>“I don’t hear about all the school events or resources available.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 11)</p> <p>- <i>“Not knowing about school programs makes it hard to get involved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 12)</p> <p>- <i>“The school doesn’t always communicate events or resources well.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 13)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t get enough information about school activities or programs.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 14)</p> <p>- <i>“School communication could be better to help me stay involved.”</i> (Participant 15)</p> <p>- <i>“I miss events because the school doesn’t share information clearly.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 16)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t always know what’s going on because school communication is lacking.”</i> (Participant 17)</p> <p>- <i>“The school doesn’t tell us about free</i></p>
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		<p><i>programs, which would help.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 18)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t hear about all the resources or events, so I can’t participate.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 19)</p> <p>- <i>“School communication isn’t great, so I miss out on some opportunities.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 20)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t always get clear information about school events or programs.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 21)</p> <p>- <i>“The school could share more about resources to help me get involved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 22)</p> <p>- <i>“I don’t know about all the programs because the school doesn’t communicate well.”</i> (Participant 23)</p> <p>- <i>“Finding out about all the events can be tough if the school doesn’t communicate them well.”</i> (Participant 24)</p> <p>- <i>“Definitely be more aware of programs that are out there. There are a lot of</i></p>
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		<i>programs that we are not aware of, and it's not teachable through teachers or principals.” (Participant 25)</i>
RQ3: What do parents from low-income communities describe as their successes with being involved in their child’s early childhood education?		
Child Academic and Behavioral Improvements	Parents reported improvements in children’s academic performance (e.g., reading, writing, math) and behavior (e.g., focus, responsibility) due to their involvement.	<p>- <i>“I’ve noticed a lot of improvement in their behavior and their speech. They’re doing better in school activities.” (Participant 1)</i></p> <p>- <i>“Helping with homework has improved their reading and math skills, and they behave better in class.” (Participant 2)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s reading has gotten so much better since I started helping at home.” (Participant 3)</i></p> <p>- <i>“I see my child doing better in schoolwork, especially writing, because I</i></p>

		<p><i>help with assignments.” (Participant 4)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My involvement has helped my child improve in math and stay more focused in class.” (Participant 5)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s grades have gone up, and their behavior is better at school.” (Participant 6)</i></p> <p>- <i>“I’ve seen my child improve in reading and become more responsible in class.” (Participant 7)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s academic performance, like reading, has improved, and they’re better behaved.” (Participant 8)</i></p> <p>- <i>“Helping at home has made my child better at reading and more engaged in school.” (Participant 9)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s math skills and classroom behavior have improved a lot.” (Participant 10)</i></p> <p>- <i>“I see improvements in my child’s speech and how they act in school.” (Participant 11)</i></p>
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		<p>- <i>“My child’s grades are better, and they’re more disciplined in class.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 12)</p> <p>- <i>“My involvement has helped my child with reading and staying focused.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 13)</p> <p>- <i>“My child is doing better in schoolwork and behaves better in class.”</i> (Participant 14)</p> <p>- <i>“I’ve seen my child improve in writing and become more responsible.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 15)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s reading skills and behavior have gotten better with my help.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 16)</p> <p>- <i>“My involvement has improved my child’s grades and classroom conduct.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 17)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s reading and math have improved, and they’re better behaved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 18)</p> <p>- <i>“I see my child doing better in school</i></p>
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		<p><i>and acting more responsibly.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 19)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s academic skills, like reading, have improved, and they’re more focused.”</i> (Participant 20)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s reading and behavior have gotten better since I got involved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 21)</p> <p>- <i>“My involvement has helped my child improve in math and classroom behavior.”</i> (Participant 22)</p> <p>- <i>“My child is doing better in schoolwork and behaves better in class.”</i> (Participant 23)</p> <p>- <i>“Seeing my child get better at reading and being more focused in class has been great.”</i> (Participant 24)</p> <p>- <i>“It’s been great to see her improve in areas where she struggled, like reading and writing, because I worked with her teacher to get her the help she needed. Her behavior in class has also gotten</i></p>
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		<p><i>better, and she's more engaged."</i></p> <p>(Participant 25)</p>
Child Emotional and Social Growth	<p>Parents reported increased confidence, enthusiasm for learning, stronger parent-child bonds, and improved social skills as outcomes of their involvement.</p>	<p>- <i>"They're super happy going to school. They love waking up and knowing that they're going to school, which is amazing."</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p>- <i>"Seeing my child get excited about learning is the best. When I help with homework or go to school events, they're happy, and it feels good to see them improve, especially in confidence."</i> (Participant 2)</p> <p>- <i>"My child is more confident in class and loves learning now."</i> (Participant 3)</p> <p>- <i>"My involvement makes my child feel supported, and they're more excited about school."</i> (Participant 4)</p> <p>- <i>"My child is happier and more confident because I'm involved in their education."</i> (Participant 5)</p> <p>- <i>"My child is more engaged and feels proud when I help at school."</i></p>

		<p>(Participant 6)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s confidence has grown, and they enjoy school more.”</i> (Participant 7)</p> <p>- <i>“My child loves school more and feels more confident with my support.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 8)</p> <p>- <i>“Helping at home makes my child excited about learning and more outgoing.”</i> (Participant 9)</p> <p>- <i>“My child is more confident and loves sharing what they learn.”</i> (Participant 10)</p> <p>- <i>“My child’s enthusiasm for school has grown, and they’re more social.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 11)</p> <p>- <i>“My child is happier and more confident because I’m involved.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 12)</p> <p>- <i>“My involvement makes my child feel supported and excited about school.”</i></p> <p>(Participant 13)</p> <p>- <i>“My child enjoys learning more and is</i></p>
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		<p><i>more confident in class.” (Participant 14)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s confidence and love for school have increased.” (Participant 15)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child is more excited about learning and gets along better with others.” (Participant 16)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My involvement makes my child happy and more confident.” (Participant 17)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s confidence and enthusiasm for school have grown.” (Participant 18)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child is happier and more social because I help with their education.” (Participant 19)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child is more confident and loves school because I’m involved.” (Participant 20)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My child’s enthusiasm for learning and confidence have improved.” (Participant 21)</i></p> <p>- <i>“My involvement has helped my child love learning and feel more confident.” (Participant 22)</i></p>
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		<p>- <i>“My child is more confident and enjoys school more with my support.”</i> (Participant 23)</p> <p>- <i>“When I go to events or help out, they get so excited, and it makes me feel like I’m making a difference.”</i> (Participant 24)</p> <p>- <i>“Seeing my daughter get excited about reading and learning has been amazing. When I read with her class or help with activities, she’s so proud to have me there. It’s strengthened our bond and her confidence.”</i> (Participant 25)</p>
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Appendix H

Codebook

Category	Theme (Complete Sentence)	Aligned Codes
RQ1: Experiences with Parental Involvement		
1. School Communication	Parents value consistent communication with teachers to support involvement.	1. Teacher meetings, 2. Newsletters, 3. Parent-teacher conferences, 4. Email updates, 5. Phone calls, 6. School app notifications
2. Home-Based Involvement	Parents engage in educational activities at home to support learning.	7. Reading to child, 8. Homework help, 9. Educational games, 10. Storytelling, 11. Flashcards, 12. Discussing school
3. School Event Participation	Parents attend school events to feel connected to their child's education.	13. School plays, 14. Parent nights, 15. Field trips, 16. Classroom volunteering, 17. Open houses
4. Community Support	Parents rely on community networks for involvement resources.	18. Church groups, 19. Community centers, 20. Neighbor support, 21. Parent groups, 22. Local workshops
5. Cultural Practices	Parents incorporate cultural values into educational involvement.	23. Storytelling traditions, 24. Family values, 25. Cultural celebrations, 26. Language reinforcement, 27. Heritage education
6. Emotional Bonding	Parents strengthen emotional ties through educational involvement.	28. Encouraging child, 29. Celebrating achievements, 30. Discussing goals, 31. Building confidence, 32. Emotional support
7. Time Allocation	Parents prioritize time for educational involvement despite constraints.	33. Scheduling study time, 34. Evening routines, 35. Weekend activities, 36. Prioritizing education, 37. Time management
8. Parent-Child Interaction	Parents engage directly with children to enhance learning.	38. Joint projects, 39. Interactive play, 40. Asking about school, 41. Teaching life skills, 42. Modeling behavior
RQ2: Barriers to Parental Involvement		
9. Time Constraints	Parents struggle to find time for involvement due to work and responsibilities.	43. Long work hours, 44. Shift work, 45. Multiple jobs, 46. Household duties, 47. Time scarcity, 48. Fatigue
10. Financial Limitations	Financial constraints limit parents' ability to	49. Lack of funds, 50. Transportation costs, 51. Childcare expenses, 52. Material costs, 53. Event fees

	participate in school activities.	
11. Transportation Issues	Lack of reliable transportation hinders school involvement.	54. No car, 55. Public transit delays, 56. Distance to school, 57. Transportation costs, 58. Scheduling conflicts
12. Language Barriers	Limited English proficiency restricts communication with school staff.	59. Language difficulty, 60. Need for interpreter, 61. Misunderstanding forms, 62. Limited school communication, 63. Cultural language gaps
13. Lack of Information	Parents lack awareness of involvement opportunities.	64. Unclear school policies, 65. Limited outreach, 66. Missed communications, 67. Lack of guidance, 68. Unfamiliarity with system
14. Work Demands	Demanding work schedules impede parental involvement.	69. Inflexible hours, 70. Overtime demands, 71. Job insecurity, 72. Work stress, 73. Employer policies
15. Childcare Challenges	Childcare responsibilities limit parents' ability to engage.	74. Sibling care, 75. No babysitter, 76. High childcare costs, 77. Single-parent duties, 78. Conflicting schedules
16. Educational Barriers	Parents' limited education affects their confidence in involvement.	79. Low literacy, 80. Lack of school knowledge, 81. Unfamiliarity with curriculum, 82. Self-doubt, 83. Past negative school experiences
RQ3: Successes in Parental Involvement		
17. Academic Support Success	Parents successfully support children's academic progress.	84. Improved grades, 85. Homework completion, 86. Reading improvement, 87. Math skills, 88. School readiness
18. School Engagement Success	Parents successfully engage with school activities.	89. Attending meetings, 90. Volunteering, 91. Joining PTA, 92. School event participation, 93. Teacher collaboration
19. Child Motivation	Parents successfully motivate children to value education.	94. Encouraging effort, 95. Setting goals, 96. Praising achievements, 97. Fostering curiosity, 98. Building aspirations
20. Community Resource Use	Parents leverage community resources to enhance involvement.	99. Library access, 100. After-school programs, 101. Community workshops, 102. Local mentors, 103. Free events
21. Home Learning Environment	Parents create effective home learning environments.	104. Study space, 105. Educational materials, 106. Routine establishment, 107. Technology use, 108. Quiet time
22. Advocacy for Child	Parents advocate successfully for their child's educational needs.	109. Requesting resources, 110. Addressing issues, 111. IEP meetings, 112. Teacher communication, 113. Special needs support

23. Parental Confidence	Parents gain confidence in their involvement efforts.	114. Overcoming barriers, 115. Learning involvement strategies, 116. Feeling empowered, 117. Building skills, 118. Self-efficacy
24. Family Bonding	Parental involvement strengthens family relationships.	119. Shared activities, 120. Family discussions, 121. Joint learning, 122. Emotional closeness, 123. Family pride, 124. Parent-child teamwork, 125. Family routines, 126. Educational bonding, 127. Celebrating milestones

