Uncovering the processes and consequences of Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences

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Uncovering the processes and consequences of Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences

By

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DISSERTATION

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2016
Abstract

For more than a decade, researchers have concluded that immigrant parents face several barriers to becoming involved in their children’s education. All studies agree that language and cultural differences are the most significant barriers to immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education, yet we know little about what these cultural differences are and how these cultural differences influence the school involvement of immigrant parents. This study integrates theories of cultural differences, acculturation, and culture shock and the corresponding literature to investigate the lesser involvement of immigrant parents in school-related activities.

A focused ethnographic design was employed and a thematic analysis was conducted on data resulting from interviews comprised of hypothetical scenarios and open-ended questions given to twenty Egyptian immigrants and ten school personnel of the Waterloo Region District School Board. In addition, several close-ended questions were asked of Egyptian participants for the purpose of collecting demographic and language information.

The findings of this study were categorized under four major themes of home-school relationship, cultural differences, acculturation journey, and resilience. Parent participants of this study had both positive and negative experiences with the Ontario educational system, were mainly involved in home-related activities and less involved in school-related activities, and had faced several barriers to their parental involvement in their children’s education.

Unlike previous studies, this study found that cultural differences have both positive and negative influences on Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. The three identified cultural differences in this study are the consequences of the determined four cultural dimensions (high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context); the differences between Ontario’s educational system and the educational system in
participants’ home country; and the differences between the ways in which participants and school personnel expressed their concerns. In addition, the findings of this study provide an understanding of the conditions, processes, and outcomes of the acculturation journey that influence parent participants’ involvement in their children’s education. This study concludes by providing a comprehensive model to understand Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education.

The implications of this study are of special interest to school personnel, social workers, settlement workers, educators, researchers, and any stakeholders who work with immigrants in order to provide immigrants with the services that best meet their needs.
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Part One: Introduction

Chapter 1-1: Dissertation Introduction

Statement of the Problem

For more than a decade, researchers have concluded that immigrant parents face several barriers to becoming involved in their children’s education\(^1\). These barriers include low socio-economic status, lack of sufficient time, inadequate knowledge about or unfamiliarity with the educational system in Canada, and language and cultural differences. As a result, immigrant parents are less involved compared to non-immigrant parents in school-related activities such as volunteering at school, attending school council, and communicating with their children’s teachers on a regular basis.

Moreover, immigrant parents face difficulties in trying to help their children learn at home, as they are not familiar with the new educational system. Even though all studies agree that language and cultural differences are the most significant barriers to immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education, there are very few identifications of these cultural differences, and very limited explanations of how these differences influence the school involvement of immigrant parents. In addition, understanding immigrants’ needs requires understanding their acculturation experiences.

However, there is a missing connection in the study of immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education between the difficulties that immigrants face in their acculturation process and their involvement in their children’s education. Moreover, Egyptian immigrants are underrepresented in the literature of parental involvement in their children’s education in comparison to other groups such as Chinese and Latino immigrants.

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\(^1\) Immigrant in this study refers to a person who comes to live in Canada and is presenting immigration status (temporary residents, permanent residents, or Canadian citizens).
Therefore, this study aimed to understand the lesser involvement of immigrant parents in school-related activities by utilizing cultural differences and acculturation theories. To achieve this purpose, focused ethnographic approach was adapted and Egyptian immigrants were chosen to be the target group of this study. This first chapter of the dissertation presents the background of the study, the purposes and questions of the study, the rationale of the study, and the organization of the dissertation.

**Background of the Study**

A good relationship between home and school is essential for all students. If a strong home-school relationship exists, children’s achievement will improve (Fuller, 2010; Humerez, 2007; Kakli, 2010). Numerous studies have proven the importance of parental participation in their children’s education at home, school, and community activities (Epstein, 1987, 2001, 2005, 2010; Epstein & Dauber, 1995; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Research has shown that immigrant students need comparatively more support from their parents, especially during their first few years after arriving in Canada, as they do not yet have the language skills that are essential for their learning (Dyson, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2011b; Worswick, 2001). Therefore, immigrant parents should have a positive and effective relationship with staff members of their children’s school in order to help their children navigate the new educational system.

Notably, the most common type of parental involvement that immigrants practice is involvement at home in activities such as helping their children’s learning through reading together and providing homework support (Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005). In addition, there is agreement that parents who speak English as their first language communicate more frequently with their children’s teachers than parents who
speak English as their second language (Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Li, 2004). Even though some immigrants become involved in their children’s schooling activities by communicating with their children’s teachers, attending parent council meetings, attending parent-teacher meetings, or participating in school fundraising activities, their involvement in such school-related activities does not occur on a regular basis and is limited to only a few activities (Dyson, 2001; Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

It is important to recognize that immigrant parents' involvement in school-related activities such as volunteering at the school, participating in social events, attending parent-teacher conferences, attending school council, and communicating with their children’s teacher is limited (Bernhard, 2010; Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005), especially in comparison with the involvement of non-immigrant parents (Humerez, 2007; Zhong, 2011). Immigrants who are disconnected from their children’s school will not be able to provide their children with needed support as they will not have the opportunities to learn about the available resources for parents or resources for their children’s learning. Understanding the barriers to immigrants’ lesser involvement in their children’s education in terms of school-related activities has not been adequately addressed.

In Canada, immigrants' barriers to parental involvement could explain the limited involvement of immigrant parents in school-related activities. The low socio-economic status of recent immigrants is considered a barrier to immigrants’ involvement in their children’s schooling (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Zhong, 2011). Immigrants also experience a lack of sufficient time to become involved in their children’s schooling due to working or studying demands (Zhong, 2011). Furthermore, some immigrants even experience barriers to their involvement with their children in home-related activities due to their inadequate knowledge
about or unfamiliarity with the educational system in Canada (Bernhard, 2010; Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Zhong, 2011). Bernhard (2010) suggests further barriers that include “institutional obstacles, cumbersome procedures, and teachers’ ignorance or assumptions about the supposed superiority of advanced Western Cultural norms and capital” (p. 321).

In addition, language and cultural differences have been identified as the greatest barriers for immigrant parents in terms of involvement in their children’s education and school activities (Dyson, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005; McBrien, 2011; Richardson, 2010; Tahtinen, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhong, 2011). However, these studies have not identified what these cultural differences are and how they influence the participation of immigrant parents in their children’s education.

Nevertheless, limited explanations of such differences exist. First, immigrant parents may believe that becoming involved in their children’s school without being directly invited would be rude. Epstein and Dauber (1991) state that:

...White middle-class teachers may value and reward independence and assume that parents will involve themselves in the school activities of their children. But other cultures may view it as rude for parents to go to school without an invitation. (p. 294) However, this explanation does not identify why some immigrant parents do not become involved in school activities such as parent council, parent-teacher meetings, and other events even though they receive invitations from their children's school to attend these events.

The second explanation states that unfamiliarity with the Canadian educational system reduces the opportunities for immigrants to be involved in their children’s school. For example, in an explanation of the cultural differences as a barrier to Chinese parental involvement in education, Zhong (2011) reported that:
Chinese immigrant parents are not familiar with the Canadian school system; they are not sure what to say and with whom to talk. They are afraid that they may offend the teachers if they ask or say something inappropriate, so they choose to remain silent. (p. 111)

However, it is not clear why Chinese immigrants, and possibly others, have these thoughts. What elements in their culture or in the Canadian culture direct their thinking in this way? The answers for these questions remain unresolved in the literature.

According to the literature, there is no direct connection between how cultural differences influence immigrants in their new society, especially when it comes to parental involvement in their children’s education. Most of the existing literature compares the educational systems of different nations, offering debate between what exists within some nations and the opposing systems within others (Denessen, Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2001; Hofstede, 1986). A study to understand how cultural differences influence immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s education in their new environment is urgently needed.

By reviewing the literature, I found that cultural differences theories (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hall, 1976) could be used to explain the consequences of cultural differences on immigrant parent involvement in their children’s education. Based on these theories, there are four main dimensions that differentiate countries from each other. These dimensions are collectivism vs. individualism, high power distance vs. low power distance, high uncertainty avoidance vs. low uncertainty avoidance, and high context vs. low context countries. Canada is described as an individualism, low power distance, low uncertainly avoidance, and low context country. Therefore, understanding what immigrants could experience in Canada if their previous experience is at the opposite pole of these dimensions will advance the knowledge on the impact of cultural differences on immigrant participation in their children’s education.
Furthermore, acculturation theories (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2009; Pedersen, 1995) could be used as a guide to understand the challenges that immigrants face in their new Canadian society and the strategies they may follow in their communication with staff members of their children’s school. Particularly, immigrants who were raised in a country where its political, economic, social, and educational systems are different from Canadian systems face difficulties in understanding and adjusting to the new Canadian systems. Yet, research on immigrants’ parental involvement in their children’s education ignores (either consciously or unconsciously) the connection between the difficulties that immigrants face in their acculturation process and their involvement in their children’s education. Therefore, there is a need to understand how cultural differences and acculturation process influence immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.

In addition, Arab immigrants in general and Egyptian immigrants in specific are the most underrepresented group in the literature in terms of parental involvement in their children’s education. Most studies in this field have been conducted on Chinese immigrants (Ma, 2005; Zhong, 2011) and Latino immigrants (Baeza, 2012; Burnett, 2008; Fuller, 2010; Luna, 2010; Muniz, 2007; & Niven, 2012). Considering the increasing number of Arab immigrants in Canada (Canadian Arab Institute, 2013) and the clear cultural differences between Arab cultures and Canadian cultures, there is a need to explore how Egyptian immigrants are involved in their children’s education.

**Purposes of the Study**

The purposes of this study were: (1) to describe Egyptian immigrant parents’ experience in their children’s education and how parents are involved in their children’s education; (2) to

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1 For more information about the rationale of choosing Egyptian immigrants as the target group of this study, please see Chapter 3-1.
comprehend how cultural differences influence Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education; and (3) to gain better understanding of how the acculturation process of Egyptian immigrants impacts their participation in their children’s education. In an attempt to achieve a clear understanding of how to enhance immigrants’ engagement in their children’s education and bridge cultural differences between immigrant families and their children’s schools, I adapted the applied ethnographic approach to understand this phenomenon and interviewed both Egyptian parents and school personnel of Waterloo Region District School Board\(^1\).

**Questions of the Study**

The main research question is what are the cultural barriers to Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education? The following questions should be answered in order to answer the main research question.

1- What are Egyptian immigrants’ perceptions about their children’s education in Ontario?

2- How are Egyptian immigrants involved in their children’s education?

3- How do cultural differences influence Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education?

4- What is the acculturation process that Egyptian immigrants go through in their new society, and how does this process influence parents’ participation in their children’s education?

5- How can cultural differences be bridged between home and school for immigrant families?

\(^1\) Please see Chapter 3-1 - the methodology chapter - for more information about applied ethnography approach and the rationale behind adapting this approach.
Rationale of the Study

Given the importance of parent involvement in their children’s education, the lesser involvement of immigrant parents in their children’s education, and the fact that Canada’s immigrant population increases every year\(^1\), it is important to know why some non-immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education, particularly in school-related activities, and why many immigrant parents are not involved at the same level and in the same ways. Knowledge and understanding of the aspects of cultural differences contributing to and/or impeding immigrants’ engagement may help educational institutions better meet immigrant parents’ needs and enhance their involvement in their children’s education.

This is especially important today when the Ontario Ministry of Education has outlined the importance of inclusive education in *Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario’s equity and inclusive education strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) and has developed the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) and the *Ontario Parent Engagement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). These policies emphasize the importance of engaging parents in their children’s education.

Knowledge of the consequences of cultural differences on immigrants may also serve as a baseline for educational administrators and practitioners in elaborating extended education and social policies, designing and developing programs to educate both immigrants and school personnel about cultural differences that might affect their communication with each other, and improving the inclusiveness strategies.

\(^1\) In the 2006 census, immigrants comprised 19.8% of the total population, climbing to an even higher 20.6% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011). Ontario hosts the highest number of immigrants of all the provinces and territories in Canada. In 2011, immigrants in Ontario comprised approximately 53.3% of the nation's immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2011).
In addition, cultural differences do not only influence immigrants, but they also influence how residents of the host country make contact with immigrants, as every individual is influenced by his or her own cultural practices. As such, misconceptions or misunderstandings could result from cultural differences. As a result, the acculturation process of immigrants in their new life would be affected. Aspects such as prejudice and discrimination are the most common factors that lead to the marginalization or separation of immigrants from involvement in community/societal activities in their host country (Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Sakamoto, Jeyapal, Bhuyan, Ku, Fang, Zhang, & Genovese, 2013; Tartakovksy, 2012) and in turn from their participation in their children’s education.

Moreover, one of the main commitments in the social work profession is to ensure sensitive and culturally competent practice (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005). Accruing cultural knowledge is important to address problems or difficulties in communications between minority and majority groups, to provide learning opportunities for both parties, and to bridge cultural differences between immigrants, educators, and practitioners.

Furthermore, previous studies have mentioned that there is a need for more research on parental involvement in children’s education in the Canadian context; moreover, there is a lack of research that examines parent engagement “through the eyes of parents, rather than through the eyes of educators” (Pusher, 2007, p. 9). In addition, Zhong (2011) reported that further research is needed to include both school personnel and immigrant parents in order to provide different perspectives on immigrants’ parental involvement in their children’s education. This study attempted to cover these gaps in the literature, as it includes both parents’ and school personnel’s perspectives on parental involvement in children’s education in the Canadian context.
Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized under several parts, with each part including related chapters. Part One: Introduction includes Chapter 1-1 that provides a statement of the problem, presents a literature review, outlines the purposes and questions of the study, explains the rationale of the study, conveys the significance of the study, and concludes with the organization of the dissertation.

Part Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework includes three chapters. Chapter 2-1 presents a background of parental involvement in children’s education both theoretically and practically, and highlights the needs of and barriers against immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education as described in the literature. Chapter 2-2 defines culture, examines variations in human nature with a specific focus on different cultural dimensions that have been used in this study, and discusses the limitations and consequences of these cultural dimensions on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. Chapter 2-3 provides an analysis of acculturation theory and suggests a framework for understanding acculturation process that should be taken into consideration when studying immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.

Part Three: Methodology and Procedures includes only one chapter. Chapter 3-1 presents the research design and describes the focused ethnographic research used in this study. This chapter also outlines data collection stages, criteria in choosing study participants, data analysis, thematic analysis, and ethical considerations of this study.

Part Four: Study Findings includes four chapters that reflect the findings of this study, with each chapter answering one or more of the research questions. Chapter 4-1 presents the findings that answer the following research questions: What are Egyptian immigrants’
perceptions about their children’s education in Ontario? How are they involved in their children’s education? The chapter provides findings related to Egyptians’ positive and negative experience of Ontario's educational system, the different types of parental involvement Egyptian immigrant parents are practicing, the barriers to involvement, and parents’ need to be involved in their children’s education. Chapter 4-2 presents findings that answer the following research question: How do cultural differences influence Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education? The chapter provides findings that identify cultural differences which have either positive or negative effects on Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education. Chapter 4-3 provides findings that answer the following research question: What is the acculturation process that Egyptian immigrants go through in their new society, and how does this process influence parents’ participation in their children’s education? Based on the suggested model of acculturation presented in Chapter 2-3, the findings of Chapter 4-3 are organized under the three main components of the model: acculturation conditions, acculturation process, and acculturation outcomes. Chapter 4-4 describes the characteristics of Egyptian study participants that enabled them to be resilient and resistant to failure despite cultural and acculturation difficulties.

Finally, Part Five: Discussion includes only one chapter. Chapter 5-1 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and provides a comprehensive understanding of immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. The chapter also highlights study limitations, significance and suggests implications for future practice and research.

Dissertation Format

The format of the current dissertation follows APA style (6th edition). The main format has been presented as follows. First, the dissertation has been formatted for five levels of
headings in APA manuscript (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 62). All headings are in 12-point Times New Roman font. I have followed APA style for the five headings, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Levels of Heading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of heading</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centred, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
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Second, please see (Appendix B) for samples of APA formatting for tables and figures.
Part Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2-1: Parental Involvement in Children’s Education

Introduction

Worldwide, a growing number of studies on parental involvement in education support the value of parents’ participation in children’s education in home, school, and community settings (Baeck, 2010; Deslandes, Bouchard, St-Amant, 1998; Epstein, 1995; Hornby, 2011; Pushor, 2007; Sterrett, Jones, Zalot, & Shook, 2010; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Parental involvement has been found to improve children’s academic success, increase the effectiveness of parenting skills, enhance school outcomes, and build better relationships between parents, teachers, and community (Episten, 2005; People for Education, 2009). In addition, Klinger (2000) reports a correlation between low academic achievement of students and families' negative attitudes and beliefs about schooling and learning. As a result, promoting parental involvement in children’s education has become a main focus of educational policy in many countries (Baeck, 2010; Dyson, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2010).

Parental involvement in education is particularly important for immigrant parents and their children, yet unfamiliarity with the host country's language and cultural differences hinder immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling activities (Dyson, 2001; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005; Zhong, 2011). Immigrant parents should maintain a positive and effective relationship with personnel of their children’s school in order to help their children navigate the new educational system, especially during their first few years after arriving in Canada (Dyson, 2001; Worswick, 2001). However, there have been confusing findings about immigrants’ participation in their children’s education as well as immigrant children’s academic success in Canada.
Bernhard (2010) argues that some immigrant groups experience “institutional obstacles, cumbersome procedures, and teachers’ ignorance or assumptions about the supposed superiority of advanced Western Cultural norms and capital” (p. 321). However, other studies present the successful practices of different schools in promoting immigrant parental involvement (Frank, 2010; Kerr, 2005; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). In addition, a number of previous studies in Canada have argued that immigrant children or children of immigrants are academically disadvantaged compared to non-immigrant children (Bernhard, 2010; Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Ngo & Schleifer, 2009). Yet other Canadian studies have found that immigrant children perform as well as or better than children of Canadian-born parents (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2011; Sweet, Anisef, & Walters, 2008; Worswick, 2001). These inconsistent findings may be due to the lack of considerable empirical research on this topic in the Canadian context as well as the articulation of research findings in other countries such as the United States.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on parental involvement in children’s education on both the conceptual and empirical levels. On the conceptual level, I raise an important thesis that too little attention is given to cultural differences and acculturation processes in research that aims to understand immigrants’ parental involvement in children’s education. On the empirical level, I raise another thesis that there is a need to understand immigrants’ parental involvement in their children's education in the Canadian context.

I present my theses in two main sections. The first section presents the conceptual understanding of parental involvement in children’s education, as identified by reviewing the literature of parental involvement in education in general. This section includes the definition of
parental involvement, the importance of parental involvement, and the theoretical perspective on parental involvement in which I discuss the value of including cultural differences and acculturation process in the research of immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education. The second section reviews empirical studies on immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education in Canada. I have focused this review solely on Canadian studies in order to clarify any confusion related to immigrants’ parental involvement in their children’s education as well as their children’s achievement in Canada.

**Conceptual Understanding of Parental Involvement in Children’s Education**

**Defining parent involvement in education.**

There is no clear definition of parental involvement in children’s education. Perhaps the term “parental involvement” is difficult to define, as the “involvement” itself involves different partners such as home and school (Kakli, 2010; Kozak, 2009). The complexity of home-school relationships that include different activities and practices makes it difficult to define parent involvement in education. Particularly, each partner perceives the concept of “parent involvement” differently. For example, teachers traditionally identify the parents who are involved in their children’s education as the ones who participate in their children’s school activities. However, parents who do not participate at school, on the other hand, may believe that working with their children at home reflects their involvement in their children’s education. These two conflicting perspectives influence how researchers operationally define the term. Some researchers focus on one side of the complex nature of the term, such as helping children with homework (Gorges & Elliott, 1995), while others focus on the other side of that relationship such as talking with teachers and attending school activities (Dyson, 2001). However, focusing
on one side without paying attention to the other does not reflect the essence of the concept. This leads other researchers to define the term by its types.

**Types of parental involvement in children’s education**

The work of Joyce Epstein (1987, 1995, 2005, 2010) has greatly influenced the understanding of parental involvement in children’s education. Epstein developed a widely used framework that describes the relationship between home, school, and community. She concluded that there are six types of parental involvement in children’s education, as presented below.

*Type 1: Parenting*

This type reflects basic obligations of parents towards their children in general and their children’s education in specific. This includes setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level, and providing children with the resources they need for their education such as school supplies or fees for school trips.

*Type 2: Communicating*

Communicating refers to school-to-home and home-to-school communication. This includes conveying information about school programs and children's progress. Communication about school programs and student progress is open between parents, children, and school staff.

*Type 3: Volunteering*

Parents become involved in school by volunteering to assist in different school activities such as helping teachers in the classrooms; helping administrators in the school library, computer lab, or organized parents’ groups; and attending student assemblies, classroom events, or any initiative created specifically for parents. Volunteering does not necessarily mean being in the school building, but could mean being present at any place and time that serves the children’s learning.
**Type 4: Learning at home**

Parents are involved in their children’s education at home by helping their children complete homework; providing advice in relation to their children’s educational choices or school work; and providing their children with opportunities to develop their skills in social, psychological, and educational aspects.

**Type 5: Decision-making**

Parents’ participation in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations is another type of parental involvement in education. This type is particularly important as it reduces the power differential between teachers and parents and enhances the opportunities for parents to be leaders in their children’s learning process.

**Type 6: Collaborating with community**

Parents are involved in their children’s education by approaching different community resources and services, agencies, or any service providers that strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning. Figure 4 provides an illustration of these six types of parental involvement in children’s education.

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*Figure 1. Illustration of Epstein's Types of Parental Involvement in Children's Education.*
As illustrated in Figure 1, the six types of parental involvement fall into three main categories of home, school, and community. Through these six types of parental involvement in children’s education, Epstein believes that parental involvement means the meaningful partnership between home, school, and community by all partners working together in different ways united by the common purpose of improving children’s academic success (Epstein, 1987, 1995, 2005, 2010). Epstein developed this framework of parental involvement types based on the theoretical perspective of “Overlapping Spheres of Influence” theory. This theory states that children have higher achievement and greater school success if their homes, schools, and communities share responsibilities for guiding and supporting student learning (Epstein, 1987, 2001). However, in reality there are different models of the home-school relationship that do not reflect Epstein’s comprehensive definition of parent involvement in education, as presented in the following section.

Models of parental involvement in education

In his recent book entitled *Parental involvement in childhood education: Building effective school-family partnerships*, Garry Hornby (2011) provides six models of parental involvement that reflect different practices; each model includes a different set of assumptions, purposes, and strategies, as presented in Table 2 below.

There are consequences of practicing some models of parent involvement in education that minimize the role of parents in their children’s education, such as protective, export, and transmission models. These consequences are described as follows: a) ignoring parents’ information about what is suitable for their children leads to misdiagnosis of children’s problems or abilities (Hornby, 2011); and b) parents may learn to be dependent on teachers in educating their children, who may tend to overlook important problems or abilities that the children have.
In addition, in the expert model, teachers who decide the interventions for children do not consider the ability of parents to help their children (Hornby, 2011; Baeck, 2010).

Table 2. Models of Parental Involvement Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Protective model</th>
<th>Expert model</th>
<th>Transmission model</th>
<th>Curriculum-enrichment model</th>
<th>Consumer model</th>
<th>Partnership model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are not professional enough to be involved in their children’s school.</td>
<td>Teachers are experts on all aspects of children’s development.</td>
<td>Teachers are experts in children’s education. However, teachers believe that some of their expertise can be transmitted to parents so that parents can carry out some form of intervention with their children.</td>
<td>Parents have important expertise to contribute and the interaction between parents and teachers around the implementation of the curriculum material will enhance the educational objectives of the school.</td>
<td>Parents are experts and could contribute significantly in their children’s education.</td>
<td>Both parents and teachers should contribute to children’s education, because teachers are viewed as experts on education and parents are viewed as experts on their children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Avoid conflict.</th>
<th>Limited role of parents in school’s decisions about children’s education.</th>
<th>Use parents as a resource to achieve school’s plans (e.g. help school with tasks that relate only to their children’s education).</th>
<th>Extend the school curriculum by incorporating parents’ contributions.</th>
<th>Listen to parents’ opinions and decisions regarding their children’s education.</th>
<th>Provide the optimum education for children.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Parental involvement type | Limited to type 1 of Epstein’s framework which is parenting; general obligations of parents towards their children (e.g. providing food, clothes, and school supplies) | Limited to type 2 of Epstein’s framework with only one direction of receiving information from the school about programs and children's progress | Limited to part of type 4 of Epstein’s framework which is learning at home with a limitation of working only on activities that are predetermined by teachers | Reflect two types of parental involvement: Type 2 which is two-part communication, and type 4 which is helping at home | Reflect type 5 of parental involvement in Epstein’s framework; however, parents are the ones who should make the decisions regarding their children’s education | Reflect the combination of the first five types of Epstein’s model without considering the role of community in the educational process |


On the other hand, when giving parents more authority over teachers in decision-making in regards to their children’s education, the probability of making a wrong decision may arise as a parent may not have the exact expertise that a teacher has in term of educational matters.
Therefore, the more appropriate model is partnership when parents and teachers work together to benefit children’s education. However, as a result of different practices of parental involvement in education, the concept of parent involvement is often unclear to both parents and educators. This encourages other researchers to draw upon the term parental engagement to emphasize the important role of parents as partners in their children’s education, or parental participation in specific school activities, as presented below.

As a result of different models of parent participation in education that do not fully reflect the comprehensive meaning of parental involvement, other researchers who argue that parents should have an actual role in their children’s education (specifically in regards to making decisions inside and outside of the school’s physical environment) prefer to use the term parental engagement instead of parental involvement.

For example, Pushor (2007) prefers the term “parent engagement” over “parent involvement” as the first term implies an equal partnership in decision-making between parents and educators. Pushor argues that parental involvement means bringing teachers and parents together in schools, where parents have limited roles as “audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides, and organizers” (p. 3). Parent engagement also means bringing teachers and parents together in schools; however, parents as well as teachers play major roles. Therefore, Pushor (2007) believes that the term “parent involvement” strengthens the power differentials between educators and parents which in turn create disconnection between family needs and school practices.

However, the term parental engagement is used interchangeably with parental involvement in many different studies and policies (Chen, Pisani, White, & Soroui, 2012; Backer, 2013; Ontario Parental Involvement Policy, 2005; Ontario Parental Engagement Policy, 2010).
Surprisingly, United Kingdom scholars Harries and Goodall (2008) use the terms parental engagement and parental involvement in the opposite way to what Pushor (2007) claims, stating, “there is a major difference between involving parents in schooling and engaging parents in learning” (p. 277). Engagement is used to refer to parents’ participation at home with their children’s learning. Similarly, parental engagement has been used in the American context to refer to parent participation in their children’s education at home (Chen, Pisani, Whilt, & Soroui, 2012).

Moreover, Smit et al. (2007 as cited in Menheere & Hooge, 2011) differentiate between “parental involvement” and “parental participation” by indicating that parental involvement is “the involvement of parents in the upbringing and education of their own child both at home and at school, and parental participation can be defined as the active contribution of parents in school activities” (p. 146). However, there is limited usage of the term “parental participation” with this intended meaning, especially in the North American context.

As illustrated above, there is no clear definition of parental involvement in children’s education and the term “parental involvement” has been used interchangeably with the term “parental engagement”.

**The definition of parental involvement in the current study**

As the term parental engagement is used interchangeably with parental involvement in Ontario’s educational system (Ontario Parental Involvement Policy, 2005; Ontario Parental Engagement Policy, 2010), I use the term “parental involvement” in this study with the meaning given by Epstein’s framework that indicates the partnership between home, school, and community. To explain, the term parental engagement, if used solely with Pushor’s (2007) meaning, would indicate another high level of involvement when parents participate in the
decision-making process. However, immigrant parents are not yet involved in school-related activities. Therefore, using a more generic term to describe their involvement will be more suitable to this study’s purpose of attempting to understand the barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education in general, not only in the decision-making process. In addition, if the term parental involvement is used in the context of Epstein’s framework (the partnerships between home, school, and community), it may include the implication within the term parental engagement that Pushor (2007) emphasizes. It is worth noting that the definition of parental involvement in their children’s education does not change whether discussing immigrant parents or non-immigrant parents.

**The importance of parent involvement in education**

Many studies have concluded that there is a positive association between parental involvement in education and students’ educational success (Groges & Elliott, 1995; Hara & Burke, 1998; Richardson, 2010; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Evidence indicates that when parents are involved in their children’s education, children have higher grades, improved school attendance, increased motivation, higher self-esteem (Michigan Department of Education, 2001), and children’s positive behaviour is promoted (Sheldon & Epstein, 2001).

In addition, in their review on parental involvement and children’s education studies, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that:

“Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enrol in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to post-secondary education” (p. 7).
Furthermore, parents who are involved in their children’s education through various forms such as at home and in school become more confident in their parenting, gain a better understanding of the teachers’ job and school’s function, strengthen their relationships with school personnel, and become more active in their children’s learning (Lim, 2008).

Additionally, by involving parents in their children’s learning, teachers, principals, and other school personnel perceive higher levels of respect from parents; acquire more knowledge about parents’ diverse cultures; and benefit from improved relationships with parents (Lim, 2008). As well, the support and engagement received from parents make principals’ jobs easier (Horvat, Curci, & Partlow, 2010).

**Theoretical perspectives on parental involvement**

*Hornby’s model of parental involvement*

Hornby (2011) provides a theoretical framework of parental involvement in children’s education, as presented in Figure 5.

As Figure 5 illustrates, the model consists of two pyramids connected at the base with the first pyramid at the bottom representing a hierarchy of parents’ needs. The second pyramid at the top represents a hierarchy of parents’ strengths or possible contributions (Hornby, 2011).

From this theoretical model, two main points are concluded. First, parents have different needs in terms of their involvement in their children’s education. Second, parents also differ in their contributions to their children’s education. A positive aspect of this model is considering parents’ needs. However, the model does not explain why parents differ in their contributions, nor does the model explain how parents’ needs could be determined. In addition, the model indirectly emphasizes the current reality of parental involvement in which most immigrant
parents are not involved in school-related activities (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Dyson, 2001; Li, 2004).

**Figure 2.** Hornby's Theoretical Model of Parental Involvement.
Understandably, not all parents will be involved in the policy formation process; for example, parents who do become involved in decision-making are likely to represent the non-immigrant parents, as non-immigrant parents are more likely to be familiar with the educational system. As a result, immigrants continue to be excluded from their children’s school. Therefore, the model is more likely to describe the reality of involved parents, but less likely to tell us why immigrants are less involved in school-related activities.

The theory of social capital

A number of researchers (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Bernhard, 2010; Jacobsen, 2008; Ma, 2006) have used Bourdieu’s theory of social capital to guide their research on immigrants’ parental involvement in children’s education (1977 as cited in Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Bernhard, 2010; Jacobsen, 2008; Ma, 2005). This theory suggests that parents’ participation in their children’s education is determined by the social capital (social network, family tradition, social status, etc.) that is available to them.

Based on this theory, the lesser involvement of immigrant families in their children’s education could be explained by immigrants’ lack of strong social networks established with members of the host country, or sometimes even with people from their own culture. In addition, their family traditions may differ from the traditions of people from the host country; and their social status is viewed as lesser than the social status of people from the host country.

Even though having a social network with school personnel may be of considerable benefit to immigrants in terms of their feeling of attachment, it is not necessary for parents to develop relationships with school personnel in order to have meetings with their children’s teachers, to communicate with the principal about concerning issues, or to attend school council and participate in decision-making.
In addition, networking and relationships as components of social capital could be a barrier to effective communication and decision-making. Haynes (2009) claims that:

Indeed, the three key factors affording social capital – source of social control, source of family support, source of benefits through related networks – can each be reinterpreted as hindrances to effective decision making through imposing obligations, implying restrictions or exclusion, and entailing unintended consequences and uncertainty. (p. 14).

Moreover, if the social capital proposition was correct, i.e. that immigrant parents are not involved in their children’s education because they may not have a strong social network; their family traditions may differ from the traditions of people from the host country; and their social status is viewed as lesser than the social status of people from the host country, then, a fortiori, acculturation theory and cultural differences theory are more suitable to explain the lesser involvement in children’s education for immigrant families.

These latter two theories comprehensively study different aspects that may influence immigrants in their new life and hence their participation in their children’s education. These aspects include language and cultural differences; the positive and negative conditions surrounding immigrants such as having community ties or social networks, immigrants’ level of education, immigrant status, and whether the external environment of immigrants is welcoming or discriminatory; the psychological consequences on immigrants from adjusting to their new life which may include culture shock, depression, and detachment; and the outcome of the adjustment process that may be integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization.

*The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model*

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) have developed a model of the parental involvement process and its subsequent modifications (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, &
Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model emphasizes that there are three main reasons why parents become involved in their children’s education. These reasons are: 1) parents’ personal construction of the parental role which refers to beliefs about their responsibilities and activities related to their children’s schooling; 2) parents’ personal sense of efficacy in helping their children succeed in school, or their beliefs regarding whether or not their involvement is likely to have a positive influence on their children’s education; and 3) parents’ reaction to various invitations from their children or from school personnel to be involved. Based on these reasons, for parents to be involved in their children’s education they need to believe that their skills and abilities will enable them to take on different roles in their children’s education, and that their involvement will have a positive influence on their children’s success. Once parents believe that their skills and abilities are of value in their children's education, then parents may be more willing to accept various invitations from school personnel or their children to participate in their children's learning.

However, it is important to know that during the acculturation process immigrants might lose their sense of their parental role and their self-efficacy that they could positively contribute to their children’s learning - not because they do not have the ability, but because they are currently undergoing a difficult process and need more support to recover. Consequently, parents might avoid becoming involved in their children’s education, despite receiving different invitations from school personnel or from their children.

Accordingly, based on the above review, I strongly believe that cultural differences and the acculturation process are the most suitable theoretical framework for the purpose of the current study, which is understanding the lesser involvement of immigrant families in their
children’s education. Therefore, further explanation and discussion on these theories is presented in the following chapters.

**Empirical Understanding of Immigrant Parents’ Involvement in Education in Canada**

Research findings about immigrant parents’ involvement and their children’s achievement in Canadian schools are occasionally confusing. Some research indicates that immigrant parents in Canada are marginalized and isolated from their children’s education; thus, their children’s performance is lower than children of non-immigrant background parents (Bernhard, 2010). However, other research indicates that immigrant parents in Canada are highly educated and participate in their children’s learning and schooling; therefore, their children succeed in school and their performance is greater than children of Canadian-born parents (Marks, 2005; OECD, 2011; Worswick, 2001).

By reviewing the literature on parental involvement in children’s education in general, I conclude that this confusion is due in part to the mixing of findings between immigrants in Canada and immigrants in the United States. As well, this confusion is an effect of the lack of sufficient empirical studies in the Canadian context.

For example, when studying parental involvement in education for immigrants in Canada, some researchers assume that immigrants in Canada and in the United States have similar barriers to parental involvement (Dyson, 2001). In addition, when discussing the lack of training that Canadian teachers have in regards to their communication with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds, some researchers cite American work (Graham-Clay, 1999). As a result of this blending of information from different countries, there is no clear picture of immigrants’ parental involvement in education in the Canadian context.
There are considerable similarities between Canada and United States in terms of accepting diverse populations of immigrants and the general structure of the educational systems (OECD, 2011). However, there are many differences between these two countries that might affect immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education. The first difference is the policy of immigration.

Unlike United States, Canada has declared that multiculturalism is the official policy of immigration in Canada. This multicultural approach has a significant influence on how immigrants adjust to their new lives. Immigrants settling in Canada may be confident that they can practice their culture of origin as well as become involved in their new culture; therefore, their chances of being involved in their children’s education may be increased (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011; Soroka & Roberton, 2010).

In addition, the Canadian policy of immigration uses the point system to admit immigrants, which increases the number of skilled immigrants in Canada. Borjas (1993) highlights this fact by indicating that “Immigrants in Canada are, on average, more skilled than immigrants in the United States” (p. 40). As a result, it could be expected that immigrants in Canada are highly educated and value education for their children; consequently, they are more likely to provide their children with the support they need.

Therefore, I focused my review on studies that were conducted in Canada in order to understand the types of parental involvement, the barriers to parental involvement, and the need to promote good parental involvement in children’s education for this specific group. First, to obtain Canadian studies, I entered the following key terms: parental involvement/engagement, children’s education, immigrants/newcomers, and Canada. I looked for studies in several sources including Canadian Journal of Education, International Journal of Early Years Education,
Canadian Journal of School Psychology, as well as Statistics Canada, Ontario Ministry of Education, and ProQuest theses. In addition, I utilized general research browsers including Google Scholar and the Wilfrid Laurier University library system of Primo to find full text articles and books respectively that are related to the topic of interest.

**Types of parental involvement in education that immigrants practice**

The most common type of parental involvement that immigrants practice is involvement at home in activities such as helping with their children’s learning through reading together and providing homework support (Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005). In addition, there is agreement that parents who speak English as their first language communicate more frequently with their children’s teachers than parents who speak English as their second language (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Dyson, 2001; Li, 2004).

Even though some immigrants become involved in their children’s schooling activities by communicating with their children’s teacher, attending parent council, attending parent-teacher meetings, or participating in school fundraising, their involvement in such school-related activities does not occur in a regular basis and is limited to only a few activities. (Dyson, 2001; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Immigrants’ barriers to parental involvement could explain the limited involvement of immigrant parents in school-related activities as presented in the following section.

**Immigrants’ barriers to parental involvement**

Several barriers to parental involvement in their children’s school-related activities have been reported by immigrants, with language and cultural differences being the two most common barriers (Dyson, 2001; Zhong, 2011; Ma, 2005; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). In addition, low socio-economic status for recent immigrants is considered to be another barrier to their involvement in
their children’ schooling (Zhong, 2011; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Immigrants also experience a lack of sufficient time to become involved in their children’s schooling due to working or studying demands (Zhong, 2011).

Furthermore, some immigrants even experience barriers to their involvement with their children in home-related activities due to their inadequate knowledge about or unfamiliarity with the educational system in Canada (Zhong, 2011; Bernhard, 2010; Bernhard & Freire, 1999).

Bernhard (2010) suggests further barriers that include “institutional obstacles, cumbersome procedures, and teachers’ ignorance or assumptions about the supposed superiority of advanced Western Cultural norms and capital” (p. 321). However, if there are cases in which teachers discriminate against some immigrant groups based on their race or nationality, this is not the attitude of all teachers and principals in the Canadian educational system. This is very clear by the educational policies in various provinces as well as the support that different schools provide for parents in general (Ladky & Peterson, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

In my view, immigrants might experience indirect discrimination in which “certain demands or rules seem to be fair, but actually keep some people out, such as those who are different in their citizenship; race; place of origin; ethnic origin; colour; ancestry; disability; age; creed; sex/pregnancy; family status; marital status; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; receipt of public assistance; and record of offence, or give some people special treatment over others” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, Grounds of Discrimination, 2013).

Unfamiliarity with school rules and general lack of knowledge about Canada's educational system prevent immigrants from being aware of the privileges that are available to them and their right to be a partner in their children’s education. This increases the demand that
schools should do their best to provide immigrants with sufficient information about the structure, function, mission, and vision of the school system.

**Immigrants’ needs regarding their parental involvement in their children’s education**

The lack of a sufficient amount of empirical studies on immigrants’ parental involvement in education in Canada prevents the identification of a pattern of common or different needs for the immigrant population. In particular, the only two immigrant groups that have been studied more than once are Chinese and Latin American, with the exception of only one study that includes different immigrant groups from Middle East, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

However, all of the reviewed studies indicate the following: immigrants need to have more in-depth communication with teachers about their children’s learning progress; immigrants need to understand or gain information about Canada's educational system; and school personnel should value the culture of immigrants by implementing multicultural activities in the classroom as well as in school events (Dyson, 2001; Zhong, 2011; Ma, 2005; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Bernhard & Freire, 1999).

In addition, Dyson (2001) reported that Chinese immigrants want the schools to apply behavioural discipline, while Bernhard and Freire (1999) reported that Latin American immigrants want a more personal approach in their communication with their children’s teachers. The emphasized need of parents to have more in-depth communication with their children’s teachers about their children’s academic progress raises important questions regarding whether or not teachers give enough information about children’s schoolwork to immigrant parents, whether or not immigrant parents request more information about their children, and how teachers respond to their requests.
Immigrant children’s achievement in Canada

Unlike what occurs in other countries, children of immigrant parents in Canada perform as well as or better than children of non-immigrant parents. In an analysis of data from the first three waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth 1994-1998, Worswick (2001) investigated immigrant school-aged children’s performance across Canada. Performance was measured by parents’ and teachers’ assessments on reading, writing, and math, as well as standardized test results. Findings indicate that immigrant children whose first language is neither English nor French had lower performance on the two measures of literacy, while their performance in mathematics was comparable to that of children of Canadian-born parents. However, the reading ability of these children increases rapidly over time. Moreover, the performance of these children in reading, writing, and mathematics improves and is equal to or greater than the performance of children of Canadian-born parents by age 13 in all areas of performance (Worswick, 2001).

However, another study indicated that immigrant children are underachieving. As an explanation for this phenomenon, Bernhard (2010) strongly believes that there is a power differential between immigrant parents and Canadian teachers. This power differential negatively influences parent participation in their communication with teachers and hence their participation in their children's education. As a result, immigrant children are underachieving. Bernhard (2010) supports her claim by providing background information on Canadian immigration and students in the Canadian educational system:

There is compelling evidence that children from some immigrant groups including Latino, African, and Portuguese continue to have lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates. At 39%, the dropout rate for Spanish speaking Toronto high school
students is almost double the average for English-speaking students. Only 10% of Latin Americans in Toronto graduate from university (Anisef, Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008; Bernhard, 2009). Although more than 36% of these come from economically disadvantaged families, the Canadian situation appears to be consistent with an international pattern. The 2006 PISA study of educational performance in 57 countries reported the widespread achievement gap of immigrant children (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006; Statistics Canada, 2007a). (p. 320-321)

However, Bernhard generalizes the fact of immigrant children’s underachievement without providing strong evidence to support this claim. Moreover, mixed results are presented that do not reflect the picture of specific age groups. For example, first high school students then university students are mentioned. It is important to know from different resources the figure of immigrant children across the various stages of elementary, secondary, and university education. Moreover, Bernhard supports this claim by citing the result of PISA 2006; however, the findings of PISA 2006 show the opposite conclusion:

PISA results suggest that within three years of arrival in Canada, immigrants score an average of 500 on the PISA exam, which is remarkably strong by international standards. For comparison’s sake, in the 2006 PISA assessment of reading, Canadian first generation immigrants scored an average of 520 points, as opposed to less than 490 in the United States and less than 430 in France. Canada is also one of very few countries where there is no gap between its immigrant and native students on the PISA. … Finally, Canada is one of the few countries where there is no difference in performance between
students who do not speak the language of instruction at home and those who do.

(Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2011, p.70-71)

The previous quotation of the PISA study indicates that children of immigrants perform just as well as children of the host country who speak English as their first language. In addition, a study by Sweet, Anisef, and Walters (2008) found that “[c]hildren raised in families with two foreign-born parents appear to perform better in school than do children raised either in non-immigrant families or families where only one parent is foreign-born” (p. 18). Furthermore, Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, and Phythian (2010) found similar findings at the university level. They reported that “despite considerable variability among first generation immigrants this group was more likely to opt for university than were second generation immigrants who, in turn, were more likely to make this choice than the third generation or native-born” (p. 46).

It is noted that immigrant children perform as well as children of Canadian-born parents even though immigrant parents are less involved than Canadian parents in their children’s school-related activities. This raises the question of whether or not parental involvement in the home is more effective than parental involvement in the school in terms of children's academic success. Little is known about the most effective type of parental involvement in children’s education.

In addition, there is a lack of knowledge about differences in performance among immigrants from different ethnic groups at the elementary and secondary levels. However, there is some available information for the university level. Using the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey, Abada, Hou, and Ram (2008) examined the group differences in university educational attainment among children of immigrants, and found that children of Chinese and Indian immigrants had higher university completion rates than children of Canadian-born parents. In
contrast, the university completion rate was significantly lower for children of parents from Philippines, United States, and Germany than that among children of Canadian-born parents. The data yielded these findings even after controlling the demographic (urban vs. rural places) and human capital (parents’ educational level and income) factors (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008). More research is needed to understand the differences in academic performance among children of immigrants from different ethnic groups and whether these differences are related to parents’ participation in their children’s education.

**Practices for promoting parental involvement**

As the educational system in Canada is decentralized, I look at the practices in the Ontario educational system as an example for this study. There are initiatives for enhancing parental involvement in education at the provincial level, school board level, and school level. At the provincial level, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed a Parent Involvement Policy in 2005 and a Parent Engagement Policy in 2010. Both policies acknowledge the important role that parents play in their children’s educational success and in the advancing of Ontario’s public education system as a whole (People for Education, 2009). In the engagement policy, more focus was given to consider parents as partners in their children’s education (see Appendix C for a list of actions developed by Ontario Ministry of Education to promote parental engagement in Ontario schools).

Although the Ministry has recognized the importance of immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s education, it is not clear if the Ministry has recognized that immigrant parents may be unaware of all of these initiatives, based on the fact that most immigrant parents do not attend parent council meetings during which such information may be presented. Therefore, this urgent question is raised: How do immigrant parents who are absent from their children’s education.

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1 The terms parental involvement and parental engagement are used interchangeably in the two policies.
schooling learn that there are ways available to them in their children’s school or in the regional school board that have been especially created for them to share their voices, their needs, or their concerns about their children’s learning? Furthermore, who is responsible for providing immigrant parents with this information? Does the ministry assume that all parents have access to the Internet and will open the ministry’s website to obtain such information with full understanding of its implications? This reality reflects the distance between theory and practice, and leads to questions about the roles of school personnel in facilitating and promoting a welcoming environment for immigrant parents by providing such information.

The board level and school level work collaboratively to support school councils in their efforts to reach out and further engage parents, students, school staff, and community members; the goal is for family, school and community to work together for the successful educational experiences of all students. There are two types of government grants available for the school board and for schools to be used for engaging parents in their children’s education. Unfortunately, not all schools make use of these grants (see Appendix B for descriptions of these grants).

This reality highlights two important points. First, although there are some initiatives in place to promote parent involvement, immigrant families are more likely to be unfamiliar with these opportunities, as they are not involved in school council. Second, there is lack of actions by schools to involve immigrant families in particular.

In terms of best practice, the Parent Involvement Committee in Peel District School Board conducted a study to understand the views of parents, principals, and teachers on parental engagement initiatives. Frank (2010) reported that the best school strategies in promoting parental involvement at the school level are events, followed by newsletters and notes home. In
another study seeking successful practices for immigrant parent involvement in Toronto, surprisingly, Ladky and Peterson (2008) found that “the results from this study point specifically to the potential for improved home-school communication embedded in the process of homework completion” (p. 87). In addition, participating parents preferred informal involvement rather than formal opportunities, including volunteering on field trips or at cultural events (Ladky & Peterson, 2008). These findings raise important questions related to identifying the needs of parents, which will vary from one parent to another based on different factors such as language abilities, the length of their stay in Canada, their adaptation to their new life, and their understanding of the new cultural context.

Conclusion

Parental involvement in children’s education refers to the partnership between home, school, and community in order to enhance children’s academic success and well-being. Therefore, it is important for children, parents, and schools as well as the community to enhance this collaborative work. Yet immigrant parents are less involved in school related activities. It is important for immigrant parents to attend parent-teacher meetings to ask questions and gather information that might help them understand the school’s expectations for their children, and in turn help their children navigate and understand the educational system. It is important for immigrant parents to attend school council to speak up about their concerns, their expectations of the school system, and their challenges as parents in coping with the new educational system, considering that school council is the only formal way to inform parents about events, educate parents about new topics that matter in their children’s education, and discuss new policies or initiatives that the school will put into action.
This chapter reveals that more research is needed to understand the lesser involvement of Canadian immigrant parents in school-related activities. The literature review indicates cultural differences and acculturation theories may help to uncover the barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. Therefore, the following chapters provide the theoretical framework of this study and present more details about these theories.
Chapter 2-2: Culture and Cultural Differences

Introduction

Studying immigrants and their integration into a new society inevitably leads to the topics of culture, identity, and cultural differences, as there is a strong belief that culture influences people’s experience and identity. However, the word “culture” itself does not have a unified definition. Instead, culture has historically been understood in a diversity of ways and is described as being constructed by various elements of human experience. For example, the historical view of culture is that it referred exclusively to the Arts and their historical and theoretical contexts.

However, culture has also been used as a synonym of civilization. A more recent and common usage for describing culture refers to the unique characteristics of a certain group of people belonging to a certain nation. Surprisingly, on the Ontario Canada website, for example, the word “culture” is used twice on one page, each with a different meaning. The first use of the word occurs in the following sentence: “Ontario has the most culturally diverse population in Canada” (Ontario Canada, 2013, para.1). Here, “culture” indicates the traditional or common meaning, which is the unique characteristics of a certain group of people. However, in the second usage, culture refers to art: “Culture is a key industry in Ontario. We have world-class ballet and opera companies and theatre that rivals London and New York” (Ontario Canada, 2013, para.3).

Moreover, in contemporary literature, when the word “text” is combined with the word “culture”, we understand yet a new meaning of “textual culture”, which refers to the study of production, transmission, reception, and regulation of texts (Bray & Evans, 2007). There is also “folk culture”, “rape culture”, “booze culture”, and many other meanings and uses of the word “culture” that cause difficulty in finding an agreed upon definition that is necessary for
understanding the common characteristics of the word and its various meanings and appearances in different disciplines.

Nevertheless, in this chapter, I will focus on the traditional and most common use of the word, which is the identifier of a people who are from a specific nation or area and share common characteristics. The main purpose is to understand the following questions: 1) What are the basic features of the concept of culture? 2) Are there any differences or similarities in the behaviours of people, who are from different cultures? 3) How does culture affect interaction between individuals? Understanding cultural differences will enable an understanding of the ways in which these differences might influence how immigrant parents encounter the new educational system and become involved in their children’s education.

Therefore, this chapter will include two main parts, each consisting of various sub-sections. First, “What is Culture” is concerned with the definition and main characteristics of culture and thus will seek to answer the first question above. Second, “Cultural Variation” focuses on theoretical perspectives about human behaviour, as well as cultural differences and their possible consequences for immigrants’ parental involvement in children’s education. This latter section will attempt to answer the second and third questions.

Part One: What Is Culture?

In sociology, there is a general agreement on the definition of culture. This definition mainly focuses on the components of culture, which often include values, norms, traditions, and material objects. However, slight differences do exist between the definitions of culture within sociology, with some sociologists defining culture as a list of components. For example, there is a proposed definition of culture as being “the knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a
human group or society” (Kendall, Murray, & Linden, 2004, p. 67). However, Macionis, Jansson, and Benoit (2005) define culture in very similar terms, but add behaviour as another component of culture, claiming that “culture is the value, beliefs, behaviour and material objects that together form a people’s way of life” (p. 33). Other scholars emphasize culture’s role in problem-solving situations. Brym (2008) defines culture as “all the socially transmitted ideas, practices, and material objects that people create to deal with real-life problems” (p. 31). On the other hand, in cultural anthropology, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) review 164 definitions of culture since the 1700s and conclude that it is better to avoid having a new formal definition of culture. Instead, these scholars provide a central idea of culture that is formulated by most social scientists as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 357)

Even in this central idea of culture, there is an indication that culture consists of patterns (the way in which people from a certain group consistently behave in similar situations), traditions, values, and systems that are all transmitted by symbols from one generation to another, which is somewhat similar to sociologists’ definitions of culture. In contemporary cultural anthropology, anthropologists categorize the components of culture into two main groups to emphasize the main aspects of culture: material culture and non-material culture. Material culture includes all of the physical or hard products that a society produces; while non-
material culture consists of soft products, such as values, beliefs, and norms (Scupin, 2012). In cross-cultural psychology, the main aim is to find adequate operationalizations of the concept of culture by determining the dimensions of cultural variation (Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996).

Although there are slight differences in these definitions of culture, most scholars agree on the following aspects:

- Culture is shared within a group of people.
- For a certain group, culture is the total of all elements associated with that group.
- Culture is transmitted from one person to another and from one generation to the next.
- Culture has different components that make it unique.
- Culture appears in people’s behaviour.
- Culture is the outcome of people’s experience.
- Culture is contested, as pointed out by Steckley and Letts (2007). This means that “there is no total agreement concerning any one culture by those who belong to it” (p. 69). Similarly, scholars in communication studies such as Eisenberg, Goodall, and Trethewey (2006) strongly believe that “culture is never so much about agreement as it is about a common recognition or intelligibility” (p. 127); this explains why people from the same culture sometimes have different practices.
- Culture is symbolic.
- Culture is learned.

This brief description of culture and its features entails a sense of the many meanings culture embodies in society. However, the main aspect in comprehending newcomers’ experience in a
new country is to understand if there are any differences or similarities in people’s behaviour and how culture affects interaction between individuals, as presented in the following section.

**Part Two: Culture Variation**

As a matter of fact, there are variations in people’s behaviour and interactions with others within a certain nation, in addition to variations between different societies. However, there is an old debate about whether human behaviour stems from nature or nurture. Three theories in literature demonstrate this debate. Understanding whether human behaviour is influenced by one’s culture or by nature is important for understanding how immigrants experience their new country and life. Therefore, this part will be organized into two main sections. The first section explores the theoretical perspective of human behaviour and the second section focuses on understanding cultural differences.

**Absolute, Relative, and Universal Perspectives on Human Behaviour and Culture**

The theory of absolutism assumes that human behaviour is the same in all cultures that there is a common nature to all human beings that can be used to explain human behaviour (Berry & Poortinga, 2006). For example, those who suffer from depression will share very similar symptoms regardless of the causes or geographical location. It is believed that people from different cultures laugh and cry the same way, feel the same pain if they suffer an illness or lose loved ones, react in the same way if they face frightening situations (within varying degrees based on their personality), and value honesty as a desirable quality regardless of their physical location in the world. Based on this position, culture has a “very limited role or no role in either the meaning or the display of human characteristics” (Berry & Poortinga, 2006, p. 55). Although this position draws attention to the commonality of human behaviour in general, it ignores the role of culture in human life and experience. To a certain extent, the application of this position
implicitly assumes that when people move from one culture to another they may face only minor challenges in order to survive in their new circumstances; however, this is not always the case. Based on this approach, it is difficult to answer the question of why some individuals face difficulties when they move from one culture to another.

In contrast, the relativist position assumes that human behaviours are best described by cultural context in which these behaviours exist and are developed (Adamopoulos & Lonner, 1994; Berry & Poortinga, 2006). This orientation emphasizes the role of culture in human behaviour and ignores any common characteristics between individuals. This means that the differences between people are culturally based. However, this approach inherently assumes that people from the same culture might behave similarly. Nevertheless, people who originate from the same country or even city sometimes behave in very different ways.

The third orientation, which I support, is the universalism theory. This theory combines the previous two approaches and assumes that people share similar characteristics and behaviours on a universal level, while at the same time recognizing that culture has an effect on people’s lives. Berry and Poortinga (2006) explain: “universalism perspective assumes that basic human characteristics are common to all members of the species, and that culture influences the development and display of them” (p. 55).

Adamopoulos and Lonner (1994) give an effective example to illustrate this point by noting that although aggression is a universal phenomenon, “aggression may appear in different forms and circumstances in various societies: as ritualistic dance in one, as barroom brawls in another, and as verbal shouting and jousting in yet another” (p. 132). I believe that people around the world have the same nature with variation between individuals. At the same time, one's culture influences one's practices in everyday life (Ramraj, 1999). When people move from one
culture to another, they have difficulties in understanding and adjusting to new cultural practices (please see Appendix A for my own thoughts on the definition of culture and how the proposed definition is different from and similar to other definitions). Yet the question remains: How does culture influence peoples’ practices? This question is explored in the following section.

**Understanding Cultural Differences**

Many attempts have been made to understand cultural differences. The work of Hofstede (1980), which has attracted much attention, is used as the starting point for many studies of cultural differences. Hofstede introduces four value dimensions that can be used to describe cultural differences. These dimensions are power distances, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity.

Because Hofstede’s work (1980) is based on a survey instrument that reflects Western culture, The Chinese Culture Connection (1987) tried to create an Eastern instrument based on the Chinese tradition. In doing so, a fifth dimension has been added to Hofstede’s four dimensions: Confucian Work Dynamism (p.152-154), or short-term versus long-term orientation (Bond et al., 2004). Subsequent research replicates most of these dimensions (as identified in Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996). Other researchers have tried to discover the dimensions of social axioms and general beliefs, and to evaluate their degree of overlap with the value dimensions of Hofstede and others (Bond et al., 2004).

Because Hofstede’s dimensions have provided a basis for many subsequent studies (Smith et al., 2002) and are commonly used for validation purposes in cross-cultural variation research (Bond et al., 2004), I present three of his five value dimensions of cultural differences that may exert consequences on parental involvement in children’s education. As well, I discuss some other dimensions identified by scholars, which add different inputs toward understanding
cultural differences. Next, I provide my perspective on studying other cultures. I conclude this section by illustrating how cultural differences theories guide the current study. I begin with the dimensions of cultural differences.

**Dimensions of cultural differences.**

*Power distance.* Power distance in Hofstede’s (1980, 2011) work refers to inequality in relation to authority within a culture. Hofstede found that there are some countries that have high Power Distance Index (PDI), such as the Philippines (94), Mexico (81), and Venezuela (81); other countries that have low PDI, such as Denmark (18), Israel (13), and Austria (11); and many other countries in between. The differences in societal norms between high and low PDI countries are presented in Table 3.

Based on Hofstede’s work and interpretation of the findings, Table 3 shows that both low and high PDI countries have power differentials and hierarchies, each with different meanings. High PDI countries emphasize the demonstration of authority and depend on hierarchical structure roles. In these countries, the dependence and inequality in society are enforced; therefore, unequal distribution of power is expected and acceptable. As a result, powerful individuals strive to maintain and exercise their power, while powerless individuals are blamed for any mistake that occurs in job-related work.

On the other hand, low PDI countries encourage equality and interdependence in society, with the belief that people are equal. Powerful individuals in low PDI countries perceive their power as legitimate and based on rules, and as potentially redistributed among others. Therefore, powerful individuals try to hide their power and encourage the powerless to actively participate in decision-making. As a result, there is a hidden harmony between the powerful and the powerless in society.
Table 3. Differences in Societal Norms Between High and Low PDI Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High PDI</th>
<th>Low PDI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inequality is acceptable.</td>
<td>Seeking equality in society is a target that should be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few are independent but most are dependent.</td>
<td>Individuals are interdependent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy means some individuals are better than others.</td>
<td>Hierarchy in roles does not mean that some individuals are better than others; instead, hierarchy is for the purpose of convenience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are significant differences between superiors and subordinates.</td>
<td>There is no difference between superiors and subordinates; they all are equal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The powerless person is to blame for any mistake.</td>
<td>All are responsible for the work; the system is to blame for any mistake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful individuals maintain and emphasize their power.</td>
<td>Powerful individuals should behave humbly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is hidden conflict between the powerful and the powerless.</td>
<td>There is hidden harmony between the powerful and the powerless.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Along with Hofstede, other scholars have studied power differentials and have reached similar conclusions (Bond et al., 2004; The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996; Fischer et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2002). Although power distance provides a meaningful insight into understanding a dimension of cultural differences, some questions remain. For example, what does Hofstede mean by the terms “depend on” or “dependency” when mentioning that powerless individuals depend on more powerful individuals? Do powerless individuals actually depend on powerful individuals, or do they only conform? If powerless individuals are constantly blamed for mistakes in job-related work, they will likely react negatively by not raising themselves against the more powerful because they are consistently left with the only option of doing what those above them desire. What does the term depend on actually mean? Does it mean unable to make choices, unable to make a decision, to conform, or
to have confidence in? To answer these questions, it is important to understand the context in which powerless individuals live.

**Individualism-collectivism dimension.**

Individualism refers to the relationship between an individual and other people in a society, including his or her own family. Hofstede (1980) describes individualism as “the relationship between an individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society” (p. 213) and “the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11). Table 4 represents the main differences between individualist and collectivist societies.

**Table 4. The Differences Between Individualist and Collectivist Societies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is supposed to take care of his or herself and his or her immediate family only.</td>
<td>People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I”-Consciousness</td>
<td>“We”-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of privacy</td>
<td>Emphasis on belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking one’s mind is healthy</td>
<td>Harmony should always be maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others are classified as individuals</td>
<td>Others are classified as in-group or out-of-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal opinion expected</td>
<td>Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task prevails over relationship</td>
<td>Relationship prevails over task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to learn</td>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language in which the word “I” is essential</td>
<td>Language in which the word “I” is avoided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Along with Hofstede, Triandis (2001) illustrates that unlike collectivist societies, people in individualist societies are independent from their in-groups, operate with more focus on their personal goals rather than in-group goals, and behave mainly on the basis of their attitudes rather than the norms of their in-groups. Importantly, other scholars use the same meaning of
individualism and collectivism to refer to independent and interdependent societies, respectively (Nisbett, 2003). However, Hofstede (1980) uses the word *interdependent* to describe the societal norms of low power distance countries, which are related to individualism societies, not collectivism societies. Moreover, Hofstede (2001, 2011) does not mention the term “interdependent” again in his following work. Therefore, the term “independent” is more likely to represent the concept of individualism, and the term “interdependent” is more likely to represent the concept of collectivism.

Hofstede (2011) observes that individualism is more likely to exist in developed and Western countries, while collectivism is more likely to exist in less developed and Eastern countries. However, I argue that it is possible to find characteristics of individualism and collectivism existing simultaneously in certain nations, to different degrees. The advent of open media from all around the world has influenced many areas of modern life. For instance, people often travel, study, or work abroad and return with transformed thoughts and concepts that influence not only themselves, but also the people they communicate with.

*Uncertainty avoidance dimension.*

Uncertainty avoidance refers to “the degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 5). There are some countries that have high uncertainty avoidance, such as Japan, East and central European countries, and Latin- and German-speaking countries. However, English-speaking, Nordic, and Chinese countries have low uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010 as cited in Hofstede, 2011). Table 5 provides the main characteristics of weak and strong uncertainty avoidance countries, as found in Hofstede (2011, p. 10).

Table 5. Differences Between Weak and Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Societies
Weak Uncertainty Avoidance | Strong Uncertainty Avoidance
--- | ---
The uncertainty inherent in life is accepted and each day is taken as it comes. | The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat that must be fought.
Ease, lower stress, greater self-control, low anxiety | Higher stress, emotionality, anxiety, neuroticism
Higher scores on subjective health and wellbeing | Lower scores on subjective health and wellbeing
Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious | Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous
Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos | Need for clarity and structure
Teachers may say ‘I don’t know’ | Teachers are supposed to have all the answers
Changing jobs is not problematic | Remaining in jobs even though they are disliked
Dislike of rules - written or unwritten | Emotional need for rules – even if not obeyed
Relativism and empiricism in religion, philosophy, and science | Belief in ultimate truths and grand theories in religion, philosophy, and science


I have several concerns regarding Table 4 (above), specifically the ideas of being “comfortable with ambiguity … vs. need for clarity…” and “changing job … vs. staying in job….” We cannot fully understand these differences without understanding the context in which these differences exist. For example, what kind of job are we speaking of? Is this job full-time or part-time? In some countries the concept of a part-time job is not as clear as it is in other countries. In some countries it is so difficult for people to find a full-time job that if one is obtained it would be difficult to leave it; in other words, the philosophy of “like what you do, not do what you like” may be necessarily implemented.

In addition, according to Hofstede and other scholars, English-speaking countries demonstrate weak uncertainty avoidance; however, most of these countries have a workable structured environment when it comes to transportation, employment-related work, health systems, and other aspects of life. So how exactly are such countries comfortable with
ambiguity? What kind of ambiguity? Where do these ambiguities exist if all systems are organized and structured?

Nevertheless, the general idea of uncertainty avoidance dimension provides an understanding of possible cultural differences. This general idea indicates to what extent people from different cultures feel comfortable or uncomfortable in unknown or unstructured situations.

**High context-low context dimension.**

Hall (1976) introduces a dimension that distinguishes between different cultures based on communication style. This dimension is high context (HC) vs. low context (LC) cultures. Cultures in which individuals provide more background information or context in a communicational situation are considered to be LC cultures, while in HC cultures, individuals expect that other people will understand the given information in a communicational situation without providing much background information or context (Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin, & Blue, 2003; Muraya, Miller, & Mjomba, 2011; Richardson & Smith, 2007; Thomas, 1998). The main characteristics of HC and LC cultures (Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin, & Blue, 2003; Muraya, Miller, & Mjomba, 2011; Nishimura, Nevgi, & Tella, 2005; Richardson & Smith, 2007; Thomas, 1998) are presented as follows:

**Low Context cultures:**

- Emphasize direct and explicit information
- Verbal skills are important to facilitate and deliver messages
- Giving background information is expected and desired

**High Context cultures:**
- Employ indirect verbal expression and the meaning of messages are embedded in the context and are implicit rather than explicit. The context can be body language, history between communicators, or assumption that the information is obvious.

- Confidence in the unspoken

- People do not explicitly present their messages, their needs, or their desires. Instead, it is expected that the interlocutor will understand. The reason for this expectation is that the primary goal of people from high context cultures is to preserve and strengthen relationships by saving face (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 4) and avoiding confrontation.

- Giving more background information is considered a waste of time or an incorrect assumption that the audience does not have enough information.

  Maraya, Miller, and Mjomba (2011) note that “most developing nations, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa, would be considered high-context countries, while low-context communication is typical of the Western nations” (p. 518). However, it is difficult to place nations at one edge of a continuum and other nations on the opposite edge. For example, it is possible to find some people from HC cultures that prefer to communicate in a typically low-context manner, and vice versa.

  **Critique of studying cultural differences.**

  In order to properly present my perspective on studying cultural differences, this section outlines my concerns regarding the current way of doing cross-cultural research.

  **Concerns about cultural differences study.**

  First, researchers - mostly cross-culture and anthropologist scholars - grouped participants into different geographical areas, then measured psychological aspects or constructs (such as value and self-esteem) (Hall, 1966; Hofstede, 1980) or behavioural components (Levine
& Noenzayan, 1999; Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001) and generalized or interpreted observed differences in terms of culture. Yet no attention was paid to the differences between individuals within a certain nation; unfortunately, this leads to incorrect generalizations and misunderstandings of a particular culture.

For example, in his book entitled *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Edward T. Hall, a well-known Western scholar on the study of cultural differences, mistakenly studied a group of Eastern individuals and generalized his findings as applicable to the entire Eastern population. Specifically, when discussing the Arab world, Hall writes, “Pushing and shoving in public is characteristic of Middle Eastern culture” (p. 144), and:

To the Arabs good smells are pleasing and a way of being involved with each other. To smell one’s friend is not only nice but desirable, for to deny him your breath is to act ashamed. Americans, on the other hand, trained as they are not to breathe in people’s faces, automatically communicate shame in trying to be polite. (p. 149)

Although Hall's (1966) biased information about Arab culture is obvious, this is not the target of this chapter. My point is that hasty generalizations must be avoided in cross-culture study. Who are the Arabs that Hall is referring to? Are the Arabs part of one nation? Is he describing Algerians, Bahrainis, Egyptians, Eritreans, Iraqis, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Omanis, Qataris, Saudis, Sudanese, Syrians, Tunisians, Emiratis, or Yemenis? Is he describing Muslim Arabs, Christian Arabs, or other Arabs? And who is he speaking of when he references Americans? African-Americans, Arab Americans, Western Americans, or other Americans? Shockingly, even though this work is now bordering on being outdated, it is still cited by many scholars (Nishimura, Nevgi, & Tella, 2008; Thomas, 1998).
My second point considers the lens that researchers use when they study cultural differences. For example, assume that there are two groups of individuals. The first group represents people from Canada (Western originally) and the other group represents people from Egypt (as I have experienced this culture). If the lens is measuring the characteristics of individuals at the micro level, then the Canadian group is more likely to represent the “individualism” dimension and the Egyptian group is more likely to represent the “collectivism” dimension. However, if the lens is measuring the organizational behaviour of different systems at a macro level in each country, then the situation would be reversed. The systems in Canada are more likely to represent the “collectivism” dimension, and Egyptian systems are more likely to represent the “individualism” dimension. In Canada, private-public partnerships exist between the educational system and healthcare system; additionally, there are community outreach programs, community-university initiatives, and many other collective works. In contrast, partnerships between private and public sectors and between different public systems are seldom found in Egypt.

The third point is concerned with the influence of the environment on peoples’ behaviour. Hofstede (2011) defines power distance as “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (p. 9). But the question here is whether a society accepts unequal distribution of power or whether a society is forced into unequal distribution of power. Are people likely to be treated unfairly because of unequal distribution of power? Consequently, are there individual differences in power distance, or are we solely influenced by our environments? Hofstede (2011) also mentions that close supervision in high PDI countries is positively evaluated by subordinates. Does this mean that individuals in high PDI countries like to be watched all the time? Does this mean that they are happy with
being considered untrustworthy? I believe that many individuals living in an autocratic society (political system with high power distance) dislike and disagree with the inequality that exists in their society; however, these individuals do not have the power to change this inequality, as those with power use all of their power to shut them out. The current study examined this point.

Based on these concerns, I believe that it is important for researchers to pay attention to the political, economic, social, and religious circumstances and conditions in all countries that they study. Misunderstanding of these conditions could lead to incorrect information about a certain country. Significantly, in some wealthy countries where people are able to easily fulfil their primary needs (according to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs), then it is understandable that such individuals will look for opportunities to fulfill their higher needs, which are related to self-regulation and freedom. On the other hand, in poorer countries people struggle to meet their most basic needs, which could be as simple as having healthy food and water to drink. It is impossible to fairly compare these countries without considering their political, social, and economic status.

How do cultural differences theories guide the current study? Consequences of cultural differences on immigrants’ parental involvement in children’s education

According to the literature, there is no direct connection between how cultural differences influence immigrant parents in their new society and their involvement in their children’s education. Most of the existing literature compares the educational systems of different nations, offering debate between what exists in some nations and the opposing systems of others (Denessen, Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2001; Hofestede, 1986). In this section, I am attempting to understand how these cultural differences, assuming that they do exist, influence immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s education in their new environment. Therefore, I am trying to analyze the possible consequences of cultural differences on parents when they move from their own culture to a new society that is different from their own in these respects.
Canada is described as a low power distance, individualist, low uncertainty avoidance, low context country. Table 6 presents what immigrants could experience in Canada if their previous experience is at the opposite pole of these dimensions - particularly, their experience regarding the educational system.

Table 6. *The Proposed Consequences of the Four Cultural Dimensions on Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Low (Canada)</th>
<th>High (Immigrants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>• Parents see themselves as equal to school personnel</td>
<td>• Parents see themselves in subordinate position to school authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents see themselves as having power and advocate for their children</td>
<td>• Parents see themselves as less powerful and do not advocate on behalf of their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>• Parents and teachers advocate for themselves (face consciousness is weak)</td>
<td>• Parents allow teachers to save face in a conflict situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Job relationship between teachers and parents</td>
<td>• Close relationship between teachers and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>• Confront unknown situations</td>
<td>• Avoid unknown situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>• Accept unusual situations as inevitable</td>
<td>• Feel uncomfortable with unusual situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
<td>• Provide detailed information</td>
<td>• Miscommunication due to lack of background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verbal message is often direct and explicit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6 shows, if immigrant parents see themselves in a subordinate position, then they will not be able to have an effective communication with school personnel. They might think that they do not have the power to contribute to their children’s learning outside of the home setting, that it is difficult to approach the principal to discuss any issue related to their children’s education, that teachers might use their power against students and their parents when parents challenge their work, and that they would not trust teachers as they are not accustomed to trusting powerful people.
Immigrants who previously lived in collectivism societies are more likely to save the face\textsuperscript{1} of others to avoid conflict or keep relationships. This point is very important, as it might prevent parents from advocating on behalf of their children or expressing their concerns.

Immigrants who experience strong uncertainty avoidance are more likely to avoid communicating with their children’s school, as they may not know how the school system works and is structured; avoid attending school council, as they may have only limited information about this and they may not know what their role would be; avoid communicating with staff members from their children’s school, as they may not know their role or what is expected from them; prevent their children from attending some social events (e.g. friends’ birthdays, school trips, social clubs, etc.) as they may not have experience with or knowledge about these activities; and avoid attending parent-teacher meetings, as they may not know what to do or what to expect in these meetings.

Immigrants who come from high context countries might experience misunderstanding or miscommunication with their children’s teachers, as they may assume they should know certain information without having to ask detailed information during discussions. They may be unable to obtain the correct information, as they might not believe it is safe to ask fully detailed questions. They may be wary or hesitant about asking too many questions, and they might end the discussion without fully obtaining the information they need.

Ozaki (2011) reported that some immigrant parents “see themselves in subordinate positions because of their respect for teachers. Their belief about their position keeps these parents from engaging in discussions with teachers about schooling and their children’s academic progress” (p. 22). Similarly, “Chinese immigrant parents are not familiar with the

\textsuperscript{1} Saving face, in general, means avoiding embarrassment. Saving other people’s face means saving others from embarrassment by not challenging them even if they are clearly wrong.
Canadian school system; they are not sure what to say and with whom to talk. They are afraid that they may offend the teachers if they ask or say something inappropriate, so they choose to remain silent” (Zhong, 2011, p. 111). There is no explanation in these studies of why some immigrants see themselves in subordinate positions or why Chinese immigrants are afraid that they may inadvertently offend their children’s teachers.

Interestingly, the consequences of cultural differences may explain such findings. Immigrants who come from high power distance countries, for example, may be accustomed to being in subordinate positions in relation to people with authority. When such individuals immigrate to another country, they may practice the same behaviour with those who are in positions of authority regardless of whether or not citizens of the host country abuse or take advantage of their power.

Moreover, immigrants who come from collectivism countries are accustomed to allowing others to save face, meaning that they avoid causing offence to others. When these immigrants move to countries that value individualism and practice this behaviour with people in the host country, misunderstanding and miscommunication can occur.

Understanding the possible consequences of cultural differences can potentially explain misunderstanding and miscommunication between immigrants and people in the host country, particularly school personnel. It is evident that the more cultural differences that immigrants experience, the more difficulties they face in their new society. Many studies have reported that cultural differences are barriers to immigrants’ participation not only in education (Dyson, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ma, 2005; McBrien, 2011; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Richardson, 2010; Tahtinen, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhong, 2011), but also in accessing health services (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009).
In my dissertation, I have developed education-related hypothetical scenarios that reflect the proposed consequences of the four cultural dimensions. The responses of immigrant parents to each scenario are analyzed to determine if their reactions or expectations are influenced by certain values of their cultural dimension system, and how these reactions or expectations are different from the responses that are expected from Ontario’s educational system.

**Conclusion**

Cultural differences could act as a major barrier to the parental involvement of immigrants in their children’s education. The importance of understanding cultural differences rests in comprehending the potential of these differences to explain immigrants’ perceptions, expectations, and visions of their children’s education and how these perceptions differ from and are perceived by school personnel. Cultural differences not only influence immigrants, but also influence how residents of the host country make contact with immigrants, as every individual is influenced by his or her own cultural practices. As such, misconception, miscommunication, or misunderstanding could result from cultural differences.

There are four main dimensions that differentiate countries from each other. These dimensions are collectivism vs. individualism, high power distance vs. low power distance, high uncertainty avoidance vs. low uncertainty avoidance, and high context vs. low context. It is important to consider the possible consequences of these dimensions on parents when they move from their own culture to a new society that differs from their own in these respects. Canada is described as a low power distance, individualist, low uncertainly avoidance, low context country. Therefore, the main objective of my dissertation is to understand the possible experience of immigrants in Canada if their previous experience is at the opposite pole of these dimensions - particularly, their experience regarding the educational system.
Chapter 2-3: Acculturation

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I illustrated four main dimensions that distinguish cultures from one another and concluded how these differences may affect parental involvement in children’s education, keeping in mind my own perspective on the concept of culture and cultural differences. However, further questions remain. How do immigrants encounter a new country? Why do some immigrants integrate into a new environment more than others? Why are some immigrants considered marginalized? Do immigrants consciously choose to assimilate or separate from the dominant culture?

In this chapter, I try to understand what happens to people when they meet different cultures in order to gain insight into the lives of individuals who undergo this experience. Understanding the process that immigrants go through in the host country will enhance our understanding of how immigrants react to and perceive their new lives, and will facilitate our comprehension as to why immigrants become involved or remain uninvolved in their children’s education. In order to gain further understanding into how immigrants encounter new cultures and their experiences during these encounters, I explore the acculturation process.

Definition of Acculturation

The most dominant definition of acculturation is presented in Chirkov’s (2009) research: acculturation occurs as a result of a contact of two or more cultures; following this contact some changes or mutual influences take place in the interacting parties; these changes and mutual influences occur over time; and acculturation may occur either at a group or individual level, or both. (p. 98)
Berry (2005) specifies these changes even further into cultural and psychological changes, with acculturation defined as “the dual process of cultural and psychological changes that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698).

For others, acculturation is defined in terms of culture shock. In his book *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents around the world*, Paul Pedersen (1995) defines culture shock as “an internalized construct or perspective developed in reaction or response to the new or unfamiliar situation…. It is a process and not a single event” (Preface vii). If we look at this definition and the two previous definitions, it is apparent that they are all referring to the same concept: acculturation is (a) a process; (b) the result of facing a new culture, environment, or situation; and (c) the outcome of the acculturation process is a change in interacting parties, such as the development of a new internalized perspective. Sometimes this internalized perspective is defined as “culture shock”, yet in my view culture shock differs in meaning from that of acculturation.

Generally, culture shock refers to “a feeling of confusion, doubt, or nervousness caused by being in a place (such as a foreign country) that is very different from what you are used to” and/or experiencing “a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2013). Moreover, culture shock is not a process, as illustrated in my proposed ideal acculturation process later in this chapter.

Accordingly, when the term “culture shock” is used to refer to the acculturation process, I include this and the associated theoretical model under the umbrella concept of acculturation, and reserve the specific term “culture shock” for referring exclusively to instances where the
above definition by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary applies. Acculturation has also been used interchangeably with the individual terms “adaptation” (Kwok-bun & Pluss, 2013; Lu, Samaratunge, & Hartel, 2011) and “culture change” (Gibson, 2001), as well as in combination with both terms (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). The fact is that the issue of acculturation conceptualization is unresolved (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012). However, in this thesis the concept of acculturation refers to the process that describes how people function in a new society after moving from the societies in which they were initially raised.

**Theoretical Perspectives of Acculturation**

Berry’s bi-dimensional model of acculturation is the most prominent and widely accepted theory (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2009; Berry & Sabatier, 2010). According to Berry’s acculturation model, immigrants in a new society face the challenging decision of whether to keep their own culture or to make contact with other cultural groups in their new country. Therefore, Berry’s two main questions are: “is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s own distinctive identity and cultural group’s characteristics? And is it considered to be of value to maintain positive relations with my group and others within the society?” (Berry, 1984a, p. 357, 1984b, as cited in Ward & Kus, 2012, p. 473). As shown in Table 7, these two questions reflect two dimensions of “culture maintenance” and “intercultural contact”.

**Table 7. The Combination of Berry's Two Dimensions: Four Acculturation Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intercultural contact dimension</th>
<th>Cultural Maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Separation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 7, four strategies of acculturating were derived from the combination of immigrants’ attitudes towards the intercultural contact and cultural maintenance dimensions. These strategies are: integration, when immigrants are interested in maintaining both their cultural heritage and contact with the host cultural groups; marginalization, when immigrants have little interest in cultural maintenance or in forming contacts with other groups in the host country; assimilation, when immigrants wish to form contacts only with the host culture group and have little or no interest in maintaining their own culture; and finally separation, when immigrants prefer to maintain their own culture and have little or no interest in interacting with the other cultures in the host country (Berry, 2001, 2010).

A number of researchers use Berry’s model of acculturation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) as is, while other scholars have sought to modify the model based on their own theories. For example, Bourhis, Moise, Perreautt, and Senecal (1997) reported that the two dimensions of Berry’s acculturation model do not refer to the same psychological concept; the first dimension, cultural maintenance, refers to an attitude concept, while the second dimension, intercultural contact, refers to a behavioural concept. Accordingly, the scholars proposed replacing the second dimension (intercultural contact) with cultural adoption and therefore modified Berry’s two dimensions to be “cultural maintenance” and “host cultural adoption”, while keeping the four strategies the same (Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012).

Another group of researchers (Navas et al., 2005) has provided an alternative model for acculturation strategies that distinguishes between the real acculturation strategies that immigrants practice in the host country and the ideal situations or attitudes they wish to practice. Navas et al. (2005) developed and tested the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) by distinguishing acculturation attitudes and self-reported behaviours, and adding other
variables into consideration that might influence immigrants’ acculturation strategy. Such variables include family relations, religious beliefs, social relations, ways of thinking, economics, and work. Using the RAEM model, Navas, Garcia, and Rojas (2006) reported in a study conducted in Spain that there are no differences in acculturation strategies between real situations and ideal situations in the areas of family relationships, religious beliefs, and ways of thinking; however, African immigrants did choose separation in these areas for both situations. Contrarily, in social relations and friendships, the results show that in real situations there is no single strategy; African immigrants appear to be undecided on whether to integrate or separate, or may not have an opinion one way or the other, whereas in ideal situations, they chose the integration strategy. Bourhis et al. (1997) provide an explanation of this result by mentioning that it is difficult to achieve integration in real situations for different reasons, but it still remains the preferred strategy regardless.

In conclusion, Berry’s model of acculturation strategies has been used, tested, and modified by many scholars (Bourhis et al., 1997; Magnet de Saissy, 2009; Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012; Navas, Garcia, & Rojas, 2006; Navas et al., 2005; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008; Ward & Kus, 2012). Despite these modifications, Berry's model is still the most useful framework for understanding acculturation strategies, particularly after his modification of his original work, which focused only on acculturation attitudes. In this later work (Berry, 2005; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) Berry incorporated identities, behaviours, and motivations in a more comprehensive notion of acculturation strategies (Berry, 2009).

However, in my view, I do not think that the word “strategies” is correct. Instead, I view integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization as outcomes that describe immigrants’ ways of coping given the circumstances in which they live. They do not plan how to become
accustomed to their new culture in one way or another; rather, their surrounding circumstances influence their choices of how to cope and adjust to their new life. Therefore, I believe these models describe the outcome of the acculturation process but still fail to provide an explanation of the process itself. This shortcoming in these models motivated a broadening of my search in the literature into the process of acculturation. While some theoretical perspectives explain the process that immigrants go through in their new society, most of these were labelled under the concept of “culture shock” as opposed to acculturation. I include these perspectives here in this context, as I believe they are more representative of the acculturation process.

Most of the theoretical perspectives of culture shock take the form of a U-curve model, meaning that they start at a high point, then drop significantly, before raising back up to a high point (if plotted on a diagram this looks distinctly like a capital “U”), and include three to five stages (Pedersen, 1995). As illustrated in Figure 3, the first stage reflects the honeymoon stage (the first high point in the U-curve), in which immigrants are fascinated, optimistic, or excited with their new environment. The next stage, when immigrants become confused and/or disappointed as they face many challenges or crises, is the disintegration stage (s); this is the lowest point of the U-curve. Finally, there is the reintegration stage, in which immigrants feel more adapted to their new environment; this is the second high point (Winkelman, 1994; Pedersen, 1995).

As an example, a report by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) entitled “Adapt to a new culture” mentions that there are four common stages of adapting to culture shock. These stages are the “happiness and fascinating stage; disappointment, confusing feelings, frustration and irritation stage; gradual adjustment or recovery stage; and acceptance and adjustment stage”
(Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010, para. 2-4). These stages in this exact order may apply to some but not all subjects, as not all immigrants start with a honeymoon stage.

Figure 3. U-Curve Cultural Adaptation.

In addition, most of the culture shock models are based on foreign students’ perspectives (Pedersen, 1995). Moreover, it is not really clear how individuals move from the happiness stage to the frustration stage, which is a sharp decline, and then move back to gradual adjustment before finally reaching acceptance. These stages describe the feelings of immigrants but do not tell us about how immigrants function, nor do they explore the mechanics of the acculturation process. In addition, U-curve models in general assume that the only fixed outcome is accepting or adapting to a new environment; however, this is not the case for all immigrants, as illustrated in the previous discussion on acculturation strategies.
Accordingly, I found that the outcome models in terms of acculturation strategies and the process models, with their limitations in terms of culture shock, do not reflect many immigrants’ experiences in the new society. In addition, there is no one theoretical perspective that connects the process and the outcome of the acculturation process in order to entail a clear understanding of immigrants’ experiences when encountering a new environment. Therefore, I propose a theoretical framework that combines the processes that immigrants go through when they meet a new culture and their acculturation outcomes as a result of these processes, as well as the cultural differences dimensions mentioned in the previous chapter. This theoretical framework is based on a review of the literature discussed above and in the previous chapter, as well as on my own experience as an immigrant and my work with other immigrants. By using this framework, I attempt to offer a new heuristic way to understand immigrants’ acculturation process.

Conceptual Framework on the Acculturation Process

Before presenting the components of this conceptual framework, I begin with its premises, as follows. I use the term “immigrants” in general to refer to both immigrants and refugees with the understanding that these two groups are different in many aspects. However, in this context I consider them as one group with individual differences. Immigrants who are described in this framework are educated up to the university level, were settled and had a job in their home country, and have experience and professional credentials. In addition, the framework assumes that people in general need to be socially connected with others. Based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, people are motivated to maintain a social connection with others, and if their sense of social connectedness is threatened, then their ability to self-regulate suffers (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012, p. 513).
As shown in Figure 4, there are three main components to the current acculturation framework. The first component, presented by the long rectangles, includes two elements, which are cultural differences and host cultural determinants. The second component, presented by the six small rectangles in the centre of the figure, is the process of acculturation. This process includes six stages: unknowing stage, loss of self-confidence stage, losing one’s knowledge stage, comparing and contrasting stage, regaining one’s knowledge stage, and gaining new knowledge stage. The third component, presented by the four rhombuses on the right side, is the outcome of the acculturation process and includes four outcomes: marginalization, separation, integration, and assimilation. More details on these three components are provided below.

First component

This first component, comprised of two elements, is best described as the context - or the input in terms of a logical model - of the acculturation process, as immigrants are different in how their culture influences them as well as in their experiences with types and levels of positive and negative support in their host country. The variation of these two elements influences how immigrants acculturate to their new environment and what outcomes of acculturation they experience in their new lives, as illustrated in the following two points.

Cultural differences.

As presented in the previous chapter, there are some dimensions that might influence immigrants’ behaviours toward and expectations and perceptions of everyday life in their new environment. For example, immigrants who present high uncertainty avoidance characteristics might take more time to become familiar with their new society than immigrants who show low uncertainty avoidance attributes.
Immigrants who used to be involved with their family members in their home country (collectivism dimension) might feel isolated and lonely in their new society, as they are apart from their family members. Immigrants are varied in their acculturation outcomes in their new society based on their variation on these dimensions, as well as others. In general, the greater the differences between the home culture and the host culture, the greater the variation in acculturation outcomes.

**Figure 4.** Components of the Acculturation Conceptual Framework.

**Host culture determinants**

The element of host cultural determinants is crucial, as it consists of the motivational and inhibitory aspects of the acculturation process.

**Motivational aspects**

Some motivational aspects include having friends or family members in the host country, social support received by immigrants, ability to survive with dignity in the new country, ability
to communicate within the language of the host country, economic status, and acceptance immigrants receive from citizens of the host-country. In addition, in the host country, motivational aspects can be a positive policy that welcomes immigrants and encourages a multicultural perspective, as well as any other positive aspects that encourage immigrants to become engaged positively in their new society and involved in mainstream events and culture.

**Inhibitory aspects**

Constraints, such as prejudice and discrimination, are the most common factors that lead to the marginalization or separation of immigrants from their host country’s people and civic society (Tartakovsky, 2012; Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Sakamoto, Jeyapal, Bhuyan, Ku, Fang, Zhang, & Genovese, 2013). Other aspects, such as economic difficulties and unfamiliarity with the services and resources available in the host country, also prevent immigrants from being active members in their new society (Canadian CED Network, 2010; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Unlike other immigrants, those who face some or all of these factors or difficulties are more likely to struggle during the first three stages of the acculturation process (the unknowing stage, loss of self-confidence stage, and losing one’s knowledge stage), and take longer to become familiar with their new society. In addition, these immigrants might end up exercising a marginalization coping strategy. However, in general, immigrants go through the acculturation process with different degrees of difficulty, as presented below.

**Second component: Acculturation process**

The acculturation process describes what happens to immigrants when they face their new environment. This includes the psychological and mental processes that immigrants undergo and whether or not they are conscious of these processes. This process consists of three main levels. The first level includes the first three stages: unknowing stage, loss of self-confidence
stage, and loss of one’s knowledge stage. These three stages usually occur in this order during the first two to four years of being in the host country and represent the most difficult stages in immigrants’ new lives.

The second level consists of one stage, the comparing and contrasting stage, in which immigrants move from the first level to the third level. The third level consists of two stages: regaining one’s knowledge stage and gaining new knowledge stage. These two stages occur after or within the comparing and contrasting stage.

The outcomes of the acculturation process are the different acculturation coping methods that immigrants end up practicing in their new lives. The more positive support they receive from the host country, the more they will become involved, active members in their new environment. Although acculturation outcomes in this framework are the same as acculturation strategies as in previous studies (Berry, 1997), they are not solely based on immigrants’ answers to the questions of “if they would like to keep their heritage or identity” or “if they would like to maintain contact with people from the host country” (p. 9).

Instead, the acculturation outcomes in this framework are based on the main result of how immigrants experience their new environment, the degree to which they receive and experience positive or negative support from the host country, and how they are culturally different from the host country. This acculturation process could occur over an immigrant’s life many times, depending on how many times he or she relocate, but it is generally easier and less stressful for an immigrant to acclimatize to the acculturation process in subsequent experiences. More details about this process are presented below.
First level of acculturation process.

In the first stage, the unknowing stage, immigrants experience a lack of knowledge about almost everything in the new environment. Most immigrants have no prior experience with their new culture; they have to re-learn everything in the context of their new environment, from basic tasks such as shopping, finding affordable housing, and accessing health services to more complicated tasks like understanding how different systems work and what their rights and responsibilities are.

In addition, a lack of understanding and knowledge of the host country’s language increases the difficulty of the situation and increases their ignorance of their new society. Chirkov (2009) states “…the language of the host country is an instrument of constructing a new cultural context, but in many aspects it is alien to immigrants” (p. 100). This lack of knowledge about the new country and difficulty with speaking and understanding the new language increases immigrants’ chances of being excluded from the mainstream culture and greatly reduces any opportunity for their involvement in aspects of their new life.

As a result, they experience symptoms of culture shock, which include but are not limited to despair over not having genuine connections with people of the host country, the desire to return home, and uncertainty and fear about being alone. Moreover, for immigrants, “one’s own ignorance becomes apparent, as any child clearly functions better than oneself” (Roberts, Thakur, & Tunnell, 1999, p. 2). These symptoms not only influence psychological well-being, but also have the ability to cause physical and mental effects. Furnham (2012) mentions that “going to ‘strange places’ and losing the power of easy communication can disrupt self-identity, world views and indeed all systems of acting, feeling and thinking” (p. 12).
In addition, challenges such as lack of recognition for their professional credentials and experience along with prejudice and discrimination could lead immigrants to the next stage of acculturation, in which they lose self-confidence. Immigrants in their home country play different roles and form self-identities and confidences that are attached to each role. However, in the host country, immigrants must often begin at the bottom again and are often forced to re-establish roles for themselves in society and re-earn the credentials they have already earned from their home country, or else face unemployment.

Accordingly, immigrants might reach a point of chronic role strain. Role strain could develop when immigrants do not know the appropriate rules of behaviour, do not do the appropriate work required by their training and skills, or play multiple roles that overlap with each other (Rosenberg, 2004). Role strain could lead to distress, as immigrants feel that they are useless, strangers, rejected by members of their new culture, without history, and confused in their new roles. As a result, immigrants accept the fact that they are unable to do what they used to do before and gradually they forget (or are no longer conscious of) the knowledge they previously acquired, as illustrated in the third stage.

In the losing of one’s knowledge stage, immigrants begin to believe unconsciously that what they knew, learned, and believed in their home country is completely different from what exists in the host country. As a result, they do not use their pre-existing knowledge in many situations and instead try to learn the host country’s way of doing things. However, the unconscious struggle between using their previous knowledge or the host country’s knowledge leads immigrants to behave inappropriately in different situations, as they cannot fully master the new culture and simultaneously their thinking and behaviour is influenced by their original culture; in turn, they reach a stage of internal conflict between their knowledge and beliefs and
the host country's culture. This internal conflict can also enhance their chances of being separated from society. In general, immigrants at this level who face these difficulties and challenges are likely to adopt marginalization or separation as coping strategies or outcomes of acculturation process.

**Second level of acculturation process: Comparing and contrasting stage.**

In this stage, immigrants may have the opportunity to compare and contrast the practices of their home country with similar practices they may encounter in their host country. For example, immigrants may witness an individual from the majority group in their host country saying or doing something in the same way that they have heard or seen someone say or do something in their home country. The more that immigrants find that their prior knowledge has a value and could be used in their host country, the better they feel and the more confident and trusting in themselves they become. At this point, immigrants usually feel confident and motivated enough to seek new knowledge.

**Third level of acculturation process.**

The regaining one’s knowledge and gaining new knowledge stages occur after or within the ‘comparing and contrasting’ stage. As soon as immigrants recognize that there is value in their prior knowledge and that they can use it in a new context, they have the opportunity to choose whether they want to apply their pre-existing knowledge from their home country, the new knowledge they have gained in their host country, or a combination of both. Similarly, at the end of this process, immigrants might choose to integrate, separate, or assimilate in the new environment. However, their acculturation outcome is not a fixed or predetermined practice; it depends on a variety of factors or situations. In general, the acculturation process is not a single and fixed process for all immigrants. Rather, acculturation is a complicated and rich process that
consists of many diverse and related aspects that immigrants might experience differently in each instance. However, the process that is presented in this current theoretical framework is one explanation, and while it may not apply to all immigrants, it is certainly applicable and valid for some.

**How does this theoretical framework guide the current study?**

In this framework, three components of acculturation have been identified. These components are acculturation conditions, acculturation process, and acculturation outcomes. In my study I have paid attention to these components in the data collection and data analysis stages. For example, in the data collection stage, I asked some closed- and open-ended questions to collect data on participants’ conditions in their new life such as their level of education, the length of their stay in Canada, their status in Canada, whether they have family members living with them in Canada, their employment status, and their perspectives of how school personnel communicate with them and whether they experienced discriminatory situations. In addition, there were some open-ended questions to collect data on participants’ perception of their acculturation process and outcome. In the data analysis stage, I presented the findings that reflect the three components of acculturation which immigrants have gone through.

**Conclusion**

Acculturation is a process that describes how people function in a new society after moving from the society in which they were initially raised or rooted. Four outcomes have been used to describe the way immigrants behave or prefer to behave in their new country. These outcomes are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. However, I believe that acculturation outcomes cannot be understood without understanding the conditions that surround
immigrants in their new society and the process they go through in their lives that lead them toward one outcome or another.

For example, it is doubtful that immigrants who are marginalized choose to be in that category. Instead, we should consider the conditions and processes that immigrants encounter in their new lives and explore how these encounters influence their acculturation to the new country.

The current theoretical framework that I propose outlines the conditions, processes, and outcomes of acculturation in a meaningful way to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of immigrants’ experiences in their new country in general, and more specifically in their children’s new educational system.

In my dissertation, I have looked at and listened to participants’ voices and whether or not their participation in their children’s education has been influenced by the acculturation process of being in a new society.
Part Three: Methodology and Procedures

Chapter 3-1: Methodology

Research Design

As the aim of this study is to understand conditions, experiences, and processes that contribute to immigrant parents’ comparatively lower involvement in their children’s schooling and how cultural differences affect immigrant parents’ participation in school-related activities, I adapted Applied Ethnographic design for this research (Pelto, 2013). Specifically, I applied focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005), which is sometimes called quick ethnography (Handwerker, 2001). In a diverse society like Canada, focused ethnography is important as “a strategy that has been widely used particularly in the investigation of research fields specific to contemporary society which is socially and culturally highly differentiated and fragmented” (Knoblauch, 2005, para. 2).

Focused ethnography is suitable for the purpose of the current study, as it has been found to be highly significant in the field of education and in bridging cultural differences in home-school relationships (Hurtig, 2004; Pelto, 2013; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). When school personnel experience difficulties in understanding the cultural background of their immigrant population, and these cultural differences are considered a barrier to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education (Dyson, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ma, 2005; McBrien, 2011; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Richardson, 2010; Tahtinen, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhong, 2011), focused ethnography is a useful framework for collecting essential data for educators as well as immigrants to understand cultural differences and to determine ways to improve home-school relationships.
Traditionally, ethnography was understood as “a branch of anthropology that deals with the systematic description of specific human cultures” (Pelto, 2013, p. 21). This means that ethnographers tried to understand communities or cultures to gain knowledge about their behaviours, values, attitudes, languages, and customs in real situations or natural settings. Ethnographers have tried to understand the explicit and implicit dimensions of culture that influence the behaviours of the members of that culture or subculture (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013). In order for ethnographers to obtain such knowledge, they have spent long periods of time conducting fieldwork and using different methods to collect data (Handwerker, 2001). These methods included interviews, questionnaires, field notes, documentary analysis, and participant observation as the most foundational methods in ethnography (Pelto, 2013).

However, in today’s applied ethnography, ethnographic research is being used in many other fields such as human health, education, business, management, community development, and commercial marketing (Handwerker, 2001; Pelto, 2013). As a result, many features of traditional ethnography have been changed to suit these new research demands. The two most influential demands are the need for quick results from ethnographic research, and the challenges of understanding and working in a culturally diverse society (Handwerker, 2001).

Therefore, quick, focused, and rapid ethnography appeared to fulfill these demands. In spite of there being slight differences between these types of applied ethnographic research, they share certain characteristics including the short-term duration of the research. Applied ethnographic research takes less time to collect high-quality ethnographic data (Handwerker, 2001). As a result, there may be less opportunity for participant observation; however, there are alternative ways to participate in observation such as by “taking part in local social events,
mingling with local people, and seeking out ways to take part in some of the local daily life” (Pelto, 2013, p. 12).

Second, as opposed to traditional ethnographic researchers who travel to other countries, applied ethnographic researchers are usually members of the societies or certain groups that they study (Knoblauch, 2005). Therefore, they know (from personal experience) the cultural context of a certain group. However, the purpose of focused ethnographic studies is to understand specific activities, settings, and actions related to the study phenomenon, and this requires more time invested in interviewing and data analysis. Knoblauch (2005) illustrates this point:

One goal of focused ethnography is to acquire the background knowledge necessary to perform the activities in question. Thus it still addresses the emic perspective of the natives’ point of view, yet in a very specific sense: specified with respect to certain situations, activities and actions. This does not mean that it needs to reconstruct the cultural stock of knowledge necessary to act in the whole field. It only aims at certain elements of (partly embodied) knowledge relevant to the activity on which the study focuses. (Para. 24)

Knoblauch (2005) defines focused ethnography as ethnographic research of short-term duration that is practiced in one’s own culture, and that focuses on specific parts of this culture. Therefore, fieldwork becomes shorter, since researchers are not engaging themselves in entirely foreign cultures; instead, they already have prior experience in this social and cultural milieu (Knoblauch, 2005).

Unlike traditional ethnography, focused ethnography “examines specific issues in a single social situation among a limited number of people within a defined period of time” (Gerrish, Naisby, & Ismail, 2013, p. 2287). Focused ethnography is:
able to address specific aspects of fields in highly differentiated organisations, it presupposes an intimate knowledge of the fields to be studied. And although data collection may be reduced to shorter visits, it demands a large amount of work in preparing and analysing data collected in the field. (Knoblauch, 2005, para. 4)

Table 8 highlights the main differences between traditional and focused ethnography.

Table 8. The Main Differences between Traditional and Focused Ethnography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Ethnography</th>
<th>Focused Ethnography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entire social field studied</td>
<td>Specific aspect of field studied with purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open field of investigation as determined through time</td>
<td>Closed field of investigation as per research question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher gains insider knowledge from participatory</td>
<td>Background knowledge usually informs research question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement in field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants are often those with whom the researcher has</td>
<td>Participants usually hold specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed close relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion in long-term, experiential-intense fieldwork</td>
<td>Irregular and purposeful field visits using particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense narrative</td>
<td>timeframes or events, or elimination of observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8 presents the following characteristics of focused ethnography (FE).

The following characteristics differentiate focused ethnography from traditional ethnography:

- FE investigates specific beliefs and practices of a particular issue or process as held by participants, practitioners, educators, or other groups in society.

- FE focuses on a certain problem and specific context.
FE is considered to be data intensive, meaning that it produces a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, FE requires an intensive analysis of data.

As researchers study their own culture or subculture, time must be invested in inquiring, interviewing, and retrieving background knowledge about study phenomenon. In addition, participant observation can be limited or sometimes deleted. However, alternative means of gathering some background knowledge may be obtained from observing some events that are related to the study phenomenon (Knoblauch, 2005; Pelto, 2013).

However, as both traditional and focused ethnography are still ethnographic inquiry, they share some similarities, as presented below:

- Both traditional and focused ethnography have the flexibility of using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. Pelto (2013) emphasizes that “the qualitative-quantitative mix” has not changed since traditional ethnography (p. 7).

- Both traditional and focused ethnography have flexibility of research design. In different stages of the research, there are opportunities to revise research questions and create new methods to collect data in cases when new or unexpected information may emerge.

- Both traditional and focused ethnography utilize a variety of different tools to collect data, as time permits, such as participant observation, social event observation, questionnaires, and interviews. Focused ethnography invests more time on interviewing due to its short-term duration (Knoblauch, 2005).

- There is no fixed procedure to conduct ethnographic research, as ethnographic research has been used in different disciplines such as education, health, management, business, and cross-cultural studies.
Ethnographic research is more than a method. Whitehead (2004) states that ethnography has ontological and epistemological properties: “ethnography may share many of the ontological, epistemological, and methods orientations of qualitative methodologists, it may also share some with so-called quantitative researchers, and have certain orientations that are not found in either” (p. 8).

**Procedures of Focused Ethnographic Research**

As mentioned above, there are no fixed procedures of focused ethnography. However, my study has been guided by applied ethnography, in general (Pelto, 2013), and focused ethnography, in specific (Handwerker, 2001; Knoblauch, 2005). In addition, focused ethnography has been widely used in the health field (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013; Pelto, 2013). Therefore, I adhered to the following procedures to conduct my study on the topic of immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education in Waterloo Region District School Board, with the focus on understanding the barriers to Egyptian immigrants’ involvement in school-related activities and how cultural differences influence their participation in their children’s education.

**Pre-data collection: Literature review**

Literature review is the initial phase of research planning. The purpose of the literature review is to gather knowledge about the theoretical and practical issues related to the study topic and the characteristics of the study field in order to determine appropriate questions to generate new findings that are useful for practice (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013; Pelto, 2013). By reviewing the literature, the focus of my study has emerged. I have found more than one theory to guide the current study to understand the lesser involvement of immigrants in their children’s school activities. Cultural differences and acculturation theories were considered in this study.
Data collection

First phase: Initial contact for selection of target group (study participants)

This first phase began on Tuesday, May 6th, 2014. My purpose in this phase was to collect information on which group of immigrants should be included in my study. The literature review indicated that all immigrant groups have barriers to parental involvement in their children’s education to some extent. I was interested in helping immigrants to understand their children’s educational system and at the same time wanted to produce a study that would be helpful to the school board as well. Therefore, I went to the school board to attend a committee meeting of which the main purpose was to involve parents in their children’s education.

This committee included the school board director, a school trustee, parents, school principals, and teachers. My intention was to gather some knowledge about the problems that the school board may have been experiencing in involving immigrant parents, and to identify which group of immigrants needed the most support in order to focus my study. Regrettably, I did not find a quick answer to my question of which group of immigrants requires more attention. However, from that point I started to make initial contact with parents, staff from the school board, and some school personnel.

To determine the target group of my study, I relied mainly on the literature review and took into consideration my interest in understanding how cultural differences influence immigrants’ participation in their children’s education. My choice of target group was influenced by the profiles of different countries, as presented below.

The target group of the current study

Based on my literature review of statistical information related to the immigrant population in Ontario, Canada, I identified my target group of Arab immigrants. The rationale

\[1\] For confidentiality purposes, names of all committees that I was involved in are not displayed.
for choosing this immigrant group is Arab immigrants have come from countries that are different from Canada. Some Arab immigrants may be more likely to exhibit cultural differences than some other groups, as they may want their children to maintain their Arabic language for their religious faith in addition to maintaining their value system.

Moreover, according to the Canadian Arab Institute (2013), in 2010, Arab immigrants represented 12.4% of the total immigration to Canada, second only to the Philippines (13.0%) and, for the first time, ahead of China and India (at 10.8% each), long the top two source countries of immigrants to Canada. In 2011, Arab immigration dropped slightly to 12.25% of total immigration, remaining in second place behind the Philippines. (para.1).

Statistics Canada (2011b) reported that “Asia (including the Middle East) was Canada's largest source of immigrants during the past five years” (para.1). Furthermore, under today’s political conditions, there is always confusion, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation about Arab immigrant culture. In addition, there are very few studies that have been conducted on this population as most studies on immigrants’ participation in their children’s education have focused on Chinese immigrants (Ma, 2005; Zhong, 2011) and Latino immigrants (Baeza, 2012; Burnett, 2008; Fuller, 2010; Luna, 2010; Muniz, 2007; Niven, 2012).

However, Arab immigrants come from various countries. Considering the specific nature of ethnographic research, it became clear that I should focus my study on a target group from one setting. A search of statistical information related to immigrants from Arab countries yielded the following information: the top three source countries of Arab immigrants are Iraq, Algeria, and Egypt (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013); the majority of Arab immigrants live in either Ontario or Quebec (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013; Lindsay, 2001); and Arab
immigrants from Algeria are more likely to live in Quebec as they have already mastered the French language.

In addition, to develop an understanding of the impact of cultural differences on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education, the target population should be immigrants, not refugees. As refugees, by definition, undergo difficult processes, it is possible that many other factors other than cultural differences influence their participation in their children’s education.

Therefore, Arab immigrants from Egypt were the potential participants of the current study. As this group of immigrants usually receives higher education in Egypt before moving to Canada, their education level meets the entry immigrant conditions. They enter Canada for various purposes including studying, working, or immigrating. These highly educated parents are (compared to some other immigrant groups) more likely to value the education of their children, more willing to share their experiences and perspectives about their children’s education, and thereby more likely to contribute to my study purposes.

The inclusion criteria for potential participants were 1) living in Canada for less than ten years; 2) having at least one child in elementary school (grades one to eight), and 3) presenting immigration status (temporary residents, permanent residents, or Canadian citizens). The exclusion criterion for potential participants was having grown up in a country other than Egypt.

Parents with children in elementary school were chosen based on the rationale that children at this age accept and rely on their parents more heavily than older children, and therefore require more parental involvement. In addition, parents with children attending high school are more likely to be less involved in their children’s education because their children are usually old enough and mature enough to navigate the system by themselves. Parental input at
this stage may be limited to providing suggestions or offering advice (Ozaki, 2001; Zhong, 2011).

**Second phase: Mapping social interaction and parent involvement in school-related activities**

Pelto (2013) emphasizes that “direct observation of behaviours and events are increasingly important in applied ethnography research” (p. 235). As the current study attempted to understand barriers to immigrant parental involvement in school-related activities, it was important to observe some school-based activities and gather information about the structure and interaction between parents, school personnel, and board staff.

This knowledge is important in order to grasp the possible expectations regarding the involvement of immigrant parents and the challenges that they may face in joining different school-related activities. As well, this process is necessary to produce highly credible and solid data about people's interactions (Pelto, 2013).

Therefore, I decided to become personally involved in different school-related activities in which immigrants were not involved. My main purpose was to observe and reflect on the context and the interaction between school personnel, school board staff, non-immigrant parents, and any immigrant parents who may attend in order to understand sources of misunderstanding and hidden assumptions that prevent mutual understanding between immigrants and school personnel. Some school-related activities have been created especially for immigrant families; in this case, my observation and reflection would be on immigrants’ communication with school personnel as well as the process of their involvement (i.e. the school's method of invitation, the activity, and the materials that were used). I investigated these aspects in order to understand the
possible barriers, including cultural barriers, of immigrant parents’ involvement in school activities created specifically for immigrant parents.

For the purpose of this study, I have been intensively involved in school-related activities for two school years (from September 2014 - present). I have volunteered in three different committees and participated in the corresponding activities. From being involved in such activities as an immigrant, I was able to make various observations and reflect on my own experience. I used these observations to help me understand and interpret some of the experiences of this study’s participants. Maxwell (2005) emphasizes that long-term involvement enables a researcher to gather complete data while ruling out unauthentic associations and premature theories. The findings of my long term involvement are presented in the findings chapter.

**Third Phase: Key informant study participants**

My involvement in the previous activities helped me to become acquainted with people who may be good key informants (Pelto, 2013). The aim of interviewing key informants is to provide information that is not obvious to the researcher. In this current study, my potential key informants included English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, classroom teachers, and school principals or vice principals who are familiar with the Canadian school system and who communicate with immigrants in many different situations.

My purpose with the key informant interviews was to collect information about the challenges that face school personnel in communicating with immigrant parents, particularly Arab immigrant parents; the expectation of school personnel regarding immigrants’ roles in participating in their children’s education; and the conflict situations, if any, that exist between immigrant parents and school personnel.
This information is important on many different levels. First, information provided by key informants may reveal hints about the hidden power structure of school personnel and the assumptions that school personnel may hold about immigrants. Second, this information guided my study and the development of recommendations that may be helpful in bridging cultural differences between home and school for immigrant parents.

This study included ten key informants: four were ESL teachers, three were principals, two were vice-principals, and one was a classroom teacher.

**Fourth phase: Interviews and use of hypothetical scenarios with parent participants and school personnel participants**

Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with Egyptian immigrant study participants. The purpose of the structured interview was to collect demographic information that is essential to understanding participants’ acculturation conditions such as immigrant status, employment status, language ability, and participants’ educational level (see Appendix D).

A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to use an interview guide and to modify the wording of questions so as to be suitable for each participant. Thus, the purpose of the interview guide is to ensure that different interviewers will cover the same topics while remaining open to probe into unanticipated responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). I used an interview guide that includes three parts. The first part of the interview contained questions about participants’ experiences in their children’s education and in their communication with their children’s schools. I tried to keep my questions general while avoiding leading questions.

The second part of the interview presented hypothetical scenarios as a method to collect data about sensitive topics (Pelto, 2013). Immigrants are not usually very aware of how their
culture influences their behaviours and expectations (Hall, 1959; Lee & Zaharlick, 2013). Therefore, using a hypothetical scenario is a good strategy to obtain information indirectly, and thereby obtain important aspects of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of a certain group of people (Herskovits, 1950 as cited in Pelto, 2013).

The purpose of hypothetical scenarios in the current study was to collect information about the impact of the four cultural dimensions on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. König, Steinmetz, Frese, Rauch, and Wang (2007) emphasize that “scenarios measure culture and cultural orientations via people’s behavioral preferences in concrete social situations” and should be used in cross-cultural study instead of scales based on Likert items (p. 214).

Hypothetical scenarios used in focused ethnographic studies have been found to be the most productive way to collect data about people’s behaviours and perceptions (Pelto, 2013). This method also allows for probing to gather more information about a certain response. I developed several scenarios that cover the four cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and high context (see Appendix A for definition of terms and Appendix E for study participants’ hypothetical scenarios). Each scenario began with the word “imagine” and ended with the question of “What would you say or do?” I anticipated that participants from Egypt who would be expected to rate high on these dimensions would respond differently than people from Canada (such as school personnel) whom I expected to rate low on these dimensions.

For the power distance dimension, I expected Egyptian immigrant participants to see themselves as not equal to school personnel and to put themselves in a subordinate position. I also expected these participants to avoid advocating on behalf of their children and to instead
accept the decisions of school personnel without taking part in negotiating. Therefore, participants would likely be less involved as they would not think they had the ability to contribute to making decisions related to their children’s education.

For uncertainty avoidance, I expected my study participants to avoid unknown situations and to indicate a lack of trust in school personnel. As a result, they may not feel comfortable participating in opportunities such as school council, for example.

For collectivism dimension, in a conflict situation between parents and school personnel, I expected study participants to avoid voicing their actual feelings in order to allow others to save face, meaning that they would avoid causing offence to others. As a result, they may feel unsatisfied or unhappy with the results of conflict situations. This dissatisfaction may lead to miscommunication between immigrants and school personnel, as people from Canada may not understand why immigrants are still unhappy.

Finally, for the high context dimension, I expected that study participants would not provide detailed answers in parent teacher interviews, for example, and that they would expect teachers to understand what they meant without asking detailed questions. As a result, miscommunication between study participants and school personnel could occur.

The third part of the interview guide included some questions intended to gather information on participants’ barriers to parental involvement and their thoughts and feelings regarding the need to be more involved in their children’s education.

The interviews took place at a location of each participant’s choice, and were audio taped with each participant’s permission for the purposes of transcription. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration and was attended only by the participant and myself. The interviews were conducted in English, in Arabic, or in both languages. Eleven interviews
were conducted in Arabic, seven interviews were conducted in English, and two interviews were conducted in English for the first few questions and then in Arabic for the remainder of the questions.

The interview guide for key informants (school personnel participants) included the following four parts: The first part contained demographic questions. The second part asked questions about key informants’ perceptions regarding immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. This second part aimed to collect data on the expectations of school personnel regarding immigrants’ roles in participating in their children’s education, and to identify any potential conflict situations that exist between immigrant parents and school personnel.

In order to fully understand whether or not the four cultural dimensions influence parent participants’ responses on these scenarios, the third part of the key informants’ interview presented key informants with the same hypothetical scenarios that would be presented to participants. I provided the key informants with the same scenarios. Each scenario began with “Imagine” and ended with the question “What would you hope a parent would say or do?” This third part was designed to allow comparison between how parent participants thought they would respond in a hypothetical situation with how key informants would want parents to respond in the same hypothetical situation.

I expected to observe different patterns in the responses of participants and school personnel. These differences may lead to misunderstandings based on different expectations and behaviour patterns. However, I kept in mind that similarities may exist and that it was possible for new information to emerge from the data. The fourth part of the interview asked questions
about obstacles faced by school personnel regarding the involvement of immigrant parents (see Appendix F).

The interviews with school personnel participants took place either at the participants’ school location or in a study room at the library of Wilfrid Laurier University. The interviews were audio taped following each participant’s permission for the purposes of transcription. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was attended only by the participant and myself.

**Sampling and recruitment of the target group**

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques (Rubin & Babbie, 2011) were employed in this study. A purposive sample is a non-random sample that intends to select people based on their expertise on the topic under study (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). A purposeful sample of key informants and Egyptian immigrants was selected to participate in the current study.

In addition, the snowball technique was used to recruit participants as needed. The snowball technique is “appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate” (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p. 356). I started by recruiting Egyptian parents and key informants (ESL teachers, teachers, school principals, vice principals) with whom I have had contact. First, I sent them the information letter by email (please see Appendix G for the information letter for parent participants and Appendix H for the information letter for school personnel participants) for their reference and to offer potential participants an idea of what would be included in the interview. After interviewing those who agreed to participate in my study, I asked parents to connect me with other Egyptian parents and I asked school personnel to connect me with other potential school personnel as needed.

In addition, I obtained initial agreement with three schools for participating in my study upon the approval of the school board’s ethical review committee. Two out of the three schools
agreed to conduct the interview. However, one school later chose not to participate, as they did not have any Egyptian families enrolled in their school.

The sample size for school personnel were ten key informants; I interviewed 20 Egyptian immigrants (20 Individual families) (more details about participant characteristics are presented in the findings, Part 4).

**Field notes**

I kept a journal during the research process. During and after finishing an interview, I recorded participants’ gestures and specific expressions. In addition, I recorded my reflections of each interview and any ideas that emerged that would inform my next interviews or my understanding of the data. Moreover, I recorded my feelings after communicating with school staff about inviting a certain school to participate in my study. It was helpful for me to understand the degree to which certain schools cared about its immigrant population.

**Data Analysis**

Applied ethnography research, in general, is “descriptive and meant for practical use within the limited locations where the data gathering takes place” (Pelto, 2013, p. 199). Data analyses occurred in different stages, as data was gathered over different phases. I utilized thematic analysis and tabulation or grid techniques for analyzing data. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data…and offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data…” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77).

In thematic analysis, themes come “both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). In addition, themes could be semantic (descriptive)
or latent (interpretative). Descriptive themes are identified with the “explicit or surface meanings of the data” while latent themes “go beyond the descriptive meaning of the data and “start to identify the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualization and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

For the data gathered from fieldwork observation in school-related activities, key informants, and semi-structured interviews with participants, I adhered to the following guidelines of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87):

1- I transcribed one interview verbatim and then hired two transcribers to transcribe the other nineteen interviews. An Arabic-English-speaking transcriber was hired to transcribe interviews that were conducted in Arabic or in both Arabic and English. For the parents' interviews that were conducted in English as well as the interviews of school personnel, I hired an English-speaking transcriber. I asked both transcribers to ensure the confidentiality of participants. They both signed a confidentiality agreement that I have created (please see Appendix J for confidentiality agreement). After receiving each transcription, I listened again to each interview and made sure that the data were transcribed verbatim. After that I read and re-read the transcriptions to sift out initial ideas.

2- I read the data again to identify general codes across parent data and then proceeded to identify general codes with the school personnel data.

3- I collated codes into potential themes using NVivo software to organize themes and sub-themes with the corresponding extracts. In this step, two types of themes emerged: themes that are theoretically-driven and themes that are data-driven.
4- I reviewed the identified themes and sub-themes in relation to the coded extracts and the research questions and developed a thematic map.

5- Clear definitions were assigned to each theme.

6- I conducted final analysis of selected extracts and related the analysis to the research questions and literature.

For the hypothetical scenarios method, I analyzed the data by using tabulation sheets (Pelto, 2013, p. 242). I systemically compared participants’ responses in order to look for patterns or to perceive differences between individuals. In addition, I used tabulation sheets to compare what school personnel mentioned regarding Ontario’s educational system with what parents mentioned regarding their home country’s educational system. This enabled me to identify the differences between the two systems that may cause misunderstanding or confusion.

**Verification methods for credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence that the findings of a particular inquiry represent the phenomenon which is being observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Based on what Lincoln and Guba propose, there are five strategies to enhance credibility of an inquiry. These strategies are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; peer debriefing; negative case analysis; referential adequacy; and member checking.

In this study I have attempted to ensure credibility by using member checking in order to provide findings that are original and authentic and that reflect parents’ voices. I used member checking techniques with five parent participants. Parents believed the findings to be accurate and reflective of their voices.

In addition, regarding methodological triangulation, I utilized different sources for data collection. I collected data from both parents and school personnel in order to look at the study
phenomenon from different perspectives. Second, the interview for parent participants included open- and closed-ended questions to ensure the consistency of parents’ perceptions regarding the barriers to their involvement in their children’s education. In addition, my prolonged engagement in school-based activities enabled me to see the whole picture of what parents disclosed and what is out there for parents. I made various observations and reflected on my own experience. I used these observations to help me understand and interpret some of the experiences of this study's participants.

Moreover, peer debriefing was used to help ensure that my interpretation was free from my biased opinion. I asked the two transcribers to send me the message they gathered from the interviews, and found that they each mentioned some of the themes that I had created. This gave me confidence that my interpretation reflected parents’ and school personnel’s perspectives.

In addition, I have attempted to provide a detailed description of the participants, data analysis, and findings in order to ensure the transferability of the study and increase its trustworthiness.

**Role of the Researcher**

I recognize the relationship between the researcher and the culture(s) being studied is important, as this relationship impacts the relationship between the researcher and the participants of the study and how the researcher interprets the findings. A researcher could have an emic and/or an etic perspective: “Emic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is a member of the community being studied. Etic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community being studied” (Naaeke, Kurylo, Grabowski, Linton, & Radford, 2011, p. 1). In this current study, I believe that I had both emic and etic perspectives, as presented below.
**Emic perspective**

In studying immigrant Arabs from Egypt, I believe that I had an emic perspective as I share their political, economic, and social context. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that people from the same country might have very different perspectives; therefore, it is very difficult even for a researcher who belongs to the same community to have an “absolute emic” perspective.

**Etic/partially etic perspective**

On the other hand, in terms of understanding how Canadian culture influences non-immigrant parent participation in their children’s education, I had an etic perspective. However, I had a partially etic perspective with non-immigrant participants (key informants), as I have resided in Canada for almost ten years, I speak the English language, and I have been involved in the school context for most of my time in Canada.

**Cultural mediator**

In addition to emic/etic perspectives, I believe my role is to bridge Arab cultures and Canadian cultures by offering insights and knowledge where these two cultures differ and intersect. By participating in various parent committees in the Waterloo District School Board, I observed the means of communication between mostly non-immigrant parents and educators; the role of parents; and how different activities represent the expectations regarding the home-school relationship. As a result of such observation and the knowledge obtained from interviewing study participants, I was positioned to reflect on the challenges that immigrants might face in attending such activities and offer recommendations regarding an integrated approach to engaging immigrant parents in their children’s education based on knowledge about diverse cultural perspectives (Hepburn, 2004).
Ethical Consideration

This study received approval from Wilfrid Laurier University ethics board as well as WRDSB ethics committee. In addition, I applied the ethical conduct of research as follows: I protected the privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and safety of all my key informants and participants. I did not disclose the names or identities of my research participants and I made sure that all research materials (transcripts, audio recordings) were kept in a safe place. I was the only one to have access to these materials.

For the structured and semi-structured interviews, I ensured the maintenance of respect for human dignity by gaining full informed consent from participants and key informants. I informed participants and key informants of the nature and purpose of my research, and they were assured that their participation in my research was voluntary and they could refuse to participate without penalty. In addition, during the interviews I informed participants and key informants that they had the right to refuse to answer any of my research questions or to stop participating at any time.

To reduce the power differential between researcher and participants, I informed participants that their participation in this study would contribute to the advancement of knowledge and may help many immigrants to become more involved in their children’s education. I showed respect and an egalitarian attitude toward participants’ cultural practices, attitudes, and beliefs.

I had the privilege of belonging to my participants’ cultures; however, I had to be aware of my own assumptions and prior knowledge of the field by being open to emerging information from participants and limiting any behaviour that would impose my perspective on the data.
collected from the participants. I strongly believed that I had to pay attention to differences in individuals within the same culture.
Part 4: Study Findings

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the main purpose of this study is to understand why immigrant parents are less involved in school-related activities such as volunteering at school, attending school council, and communicating regularly with their children’s teachers. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, I posited that cultural differences and the acculturation process could explain the lesser involvement of immigrant parents in their children’s education. Therefore, the study first examined parent participants’ perceptions of their children’s education in order to understand their experience regarding their children’s education, the types of involvement in their children’s education, their barriers to parental involvement, and what would help immigrant parents to be more involved in their children’s education. Secondly, the study examined the predetermined four cultural differences dimensions (high/low power distance, individualism/collectivism, high/low uncertainty avoidance, and high/low context) to understand the consequences and implications of these differences on participants’ involvement in their children’s education. Finally, the study examined participants’ acculturation process to their new country and how this process influenced their participation in their children’s education.

Therefore, the findings of this study included themes which have emerged from the data, as well as themes that are connected to the theoretical framework. Following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Figure 5 shows the major themes of the findings presented in a thematic map. Each theme is presented in more detail in the following chapters.
As Figure 5 shows, the involvement of immigrant families is a complicated process. Three aspects influence how immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education: the relationship and communication between home and school, the existing cultural differences, and the acculturation journey of immigrants in their new society. In addition, the emerging resilience theme reflects the different ways in which participants help and support their children despite the difficulties they face. Under each theme there are subthemes. These major themes and corresponding subthemes are presented in the following chapters. Demographic information of study parent participants and school personnel participants followed by my own experiences in the long-term involvement in school-related activities are presented below.
Participants’ Demographic Information

Parent participants

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, there were 20 parent participants (20 individual families) in this study. The following information reflects parents’ demographic information at the time of conducting the study (May-October, 2015).

Table 9. Number of years living in Ontario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years living in Ontario</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Parent participants' status in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status in Canada</th>
<th>Number of parent participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary resident</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent resident</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian citizen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As presented in Table 9, most parent participants had resided in Canada between six and ten years. Table 10 presents the status of parent participants in Canada and reflects the three immigration categories in which most parent participants belonged: temporary resident, permanent resident, and Canadian citizen. Only one parent participant arrived in Canada as a permanent resident, while 19 parents first arrived as temporary residents whether for studying purposes or working purposes. After residing in the country for at least two years, parent participants were eligible to apply for permanent resident status in Canada. Nine had received permanent resident status and nine had become Canadian citizens. Immigrants need to obtain
permanent resident status to be eligible for applying for Canadian citizen status. This process varies from one individual to another based on when they arrive in Canada as well as other factors that are determined by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Table 11. Gender of Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of parent participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 11 presents, the majority of parent participants were female. At the onset of this study I asked potential participant families to identify whether the mother or father were more involved in their children’s education, particularly in school-related activates such as communicating with school personnel. Based on their answers, I asked for permission to interview the more involved parent so that I could gather accurate information about immigrant parents’ involvement in their children's education. From Table 11, it is clear that the mothers in this study were more involved than the fathers in their children’s school activities.

Table 12. Age Categories of Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of parent participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 12 presents, the majority of study participants (13 parents) were between 31-40 years old.

*Table 13. Highest level of education for parent participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>Number of parent participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master degree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 13 presents, all parent participants of this study had university degrees and six parent participants were either pursuing or had already earned their doctoral degrees. This data indicates that parents of this study were highly educated; consequently, this high level of education may have provided parent participants with certain privileges, which other groups of immigrants may not have.

*Table 14. Participants’ Employment Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working part-time/full-time</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after children while searching for job/studying opportunities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 14 presents, most study participants (10 parents) were looking for opportunities to either find a job or to earn another degree so that they could find a job. Of the six parents who
were working, two were working in full-time positions while the other four were working in part-time positions. Almost all participants (17 parents) were looking for a job that could ensure a level of financial security in their life in Canada.

In addition, only two parents had other extended family members living in Canada. One parent had a member of their extended family living in Ontario and another parent had a member of their extended family living in another province. However, the rest of the parent participants (18 parents) did not have any extended family members living in Canada. For immigrants, having members of their extended family living in Canada could be helpful, as during times of need, family members who are living in the same country will often come and visit to provide support. Unfortunately, this study group of parent participants did not have the privilege of having extended family members living in Canada to support them.

It would be reasonable to expect that parents’ attitude would change based on the length of time they have been in Canada. However, this was not the case in this study (See additional discussion on P. 182). If readers have interest in verifying this for themselves, I have included Appendix L that presents parent participants’ unique study identifiers/codes linked to some of this demographic information. Similarly, no systematic difference were found in responses of school personnel based on the position they occupied. Descriptive information on school personnel also is included in Appendix L.

**Demographic information about school personnel**

The following data reflect school personnel’s demographic information at the time of conducting the study. Ten school personnel were interviewed in this study. Of this number, four were ESL teachers, one was a classroom teacher, two were vice-principals, and three were principals. In addition, three school personnel were male and seven were female. This study’s
sample of school personnel participants reflected school staff members who frequently work with immigrant families and they were representing five different public schools in WRDSB.

**Long-Term Involvement Experience**

This section presents my personal experience of being involved in school-related activities including volunteering on various committees with the Waterloo Region District School Board. The main purpose of my involvement was to understand the complete picture of immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. With almost no other Egyptian immigrant parents participating on these committees, I reflected on my own experience to identify what an Egyptian immigrant parent could possibly encounter during their potential involvement in these committees. The information presented below reflects only my own personal experience and does not reflect any policy or procedures unless specifically mentioned below. My experiences are organized into the following two categories: personal experiences and why involvement in school-related activities is important, as I witnessed.

**Personal experiences**

This section reflects my feelings and thoughts that I have experienced in various situations throughout my participation in school-related committees. I present my feelings and thoughts for the purpose of offering examples of what may happen when individuals like myself become involved in school-related activities and also to make the reader aware of experiences that may affect my interpretation of the data – in spite of my conscientious attempts to avoid any bias.

**Being new in an unfamiliar setting**

Being in an unfamiliar setting was not easy for me as an immigrant who did not know the procedures of holding a formal meeting in Canada. During my first general meeting, I did not
know what was happening around me and I did not understand the meaning of what was being discussed. To illustrate, at the beginning of the meeting one of the co-chairs of this committee said, “I want a motion for the minutes.” She then waited for one of the attendees to raise his or her hand. When an attendee raised her hand, she identified her name followed by “Second.” The co-chair then waited for another person to raise his or her hand. When this happened, this person stated her name. After that she said “Vote,” and then all the people in the room raised their hands.

Meanwhile, I did not understand what was going on. I did not raise my hand, as I did not know why the other attendees had raised their hands. At this moment I felt that I was so ignorant. I told myself that there was a lot for me to learn, and I questioned how I would be able to learn everything. Mixed feelings were inside me. I thought about asking the co-chair for an explanation, as I usually ask questions when I do not know about a certain thing. But at the same time I feared that asking such a question would be considered really “silly”.

However, I sensed that the co-chair was a welcoming person, and this encouraged me to ask her my question later when she was alone. She told me that this procedure was followed to approve the minutes and the agenda, and then she started to explain the process to me. I was grateful, for she did not give me a bad look or say anything to hurt my feelings in response to my simple question. In addition, trying to understand acronyms or abbreviations is another challenge that I have faced. Therefore, through my own experiences I believe that it is very important for me and for others who work with immigrants to clearly explain procedures to all new attendees of school-related committees.
Invisibility is a sensation that I have encountered when attending meetings with non-immigrant parents or school personnel who did not know me and to whom I was not introduced. For example, in November, 2014 I attended a conference in Toronto about education. As one of seven members (parents) of a committee, I was the only Muslim and visible minority person. When we arrived at the allocated room, we all sat down around the same table. A teacher from our board knew one of the parents who had come with me. They greeted each other and the teacher sat with us at the same table. After that she started to introduce herself to and shake hands with the others who were sitting at our table.

However, she just skipped me. In fact, I had expected her to shake hands with me as this is a normal expectation for anyone in the same situation. But this did not happen. At this moment I felt so humiliated. I tried my best to hold in my tears and emotions. I shifted my position and looked in the other direction so that no one could see me. I needed a chance to calm down. Many thoughts were in my mind: Why had she done that? Had I done something wrong to her? We had never met each other before, and so why didn’t she like me? I also told myself, “Well, after all it is her right to not greet or shake hands with me.” Later, I chose to sit at another table. I knew that this was a way of escaping the scene, but that is what I did. This was my first time facing this type of negative experience, and I did not know how to respond to such a situation. I had never imagined that a person could act in this way.

Unfortunately, since then I have had similar interactions with other people. For example, as the co-chair of a committee that was planning to offer different workshops for immigrant families in a certain school, another committee member and I had a meeting with the school personnel of a certain school to explain our project and investigate the possibility of
collaborating. When I arrived at the school and entered the school office, I introduced myself to
the secretary and explained why I was there.

The principal heard me and came to greet me, as he had been expecting us. He told me
that the other member had not arrived yet, and we waited for her to come. When she arrived, the
principal told us that we would be meeting in the library and that the ESL teacher would be
attending the meeting as well. The ESL teacher was already in the library. When we reached the
library, the principal told the ESL teacher that we were about to hold the meeting.

When she came to the table, she introduced herself to the other member, shook hands
with her, and sat down without even looking at me, as if I was completely invisible. I did not
have any explanation for her behaviour. The ESL teacher knew that she would be meeting with
two people. There were two people sitting at the table, and I was sitting very close to the other
member.

This time, I told myself, “Well, I will not let it go.” I stretched out my arm toward her
and said: “Hello, my name is Hend.” She stood up and shook hands with me. I did not feel
normal at all. My heart was wounded, and something very big was inside my brain and my heart.
Why did she do that? Was she not ashamed of her action? She was an ESL teacher who
communicated with immigrants and Muslim parents. How did she treat them, if she could not
even control her hatred - as I felt this was the reason - with me for one moment?

I really do not have any other explanations for such behaviour but to conclude that those
two persons, and possibly others, did not like me because I am a Muslim. This is the only thing
that they could have known about me based on my appearance.

These situations have prompted me to ask what would happen if similar situations
occurred to other immigrant parents for whatever reason. How could this affect their
involvement in their children’s education? How could this affect their feelings toward people of the host country? It was not easy for me to experience these situations and other similar situations. I have been discouraged several times from continuing my volunteer work. But I have tried to convince myself to continue working and helping other immigrants, as I know that if I did not do that and if everyone who faced similar situations stopped volunteering, then who would help newcomers? Who would advocate for their rights? And who would speak up and educate people about how to accept others?

Disconnected services

I had the opportunity to speak with settlement workers, supervisors, and managers about how they help immigrants and whether or not they serve all immigrant categories. Before talking with them I believed that they only served refugee immigrants. But after asking many questions, I learned that settlement services are available for anyone who is new to Ontario regardless of their immigrant status. However, temporary residents must pay for any services they request such as language classes. Settlement workers provide workshops to parents that cover a broad range of topics including introduction to the education system, how to open a bank account, searching for a job, learning English, etc. No in-depth workshop was provided about the education system.

In addition, I recognized that as immigrant parents arrive and their children attend school, principals and school secretaries should connect parents with settlement services; however, this may not happen. This could explain why some immigrant parents with whom I communicated were unaware of this service. I found that settlement workers, supervisors, and managers are aware that there is a gap in promotion of their services and they struggle to reach out to all
immigrants. However, due to financial constraints they cannot provide sufficient outreach and communication.

They emphasized that principals and secretaries need to learn how to create a welcoming environment for new immigrants; furthermore, they believe that principals and secretaries need to have accurate information about settlement services.

It is important to mention that the above observations that I made are not easy for anyone to be aware of and familiar with. My face-to-face communication with settlement workers and supervisors enabled me to ask questions and receive answers. The disconnection between schools and settlement services is a great challenge that school boards must find ways to resolve in order to make good use of available services to immigrant families. It is important for school personnel to connect parents with settlement services, as this is the expectation of settlement services.

**Why involvement in school-related activities is important, as I witnessed.**

Being a member of my children’s school council, I found that school council is the main vehicle to connect parents with the school board and Ontario’s Ministry of Education. When the ministry would like to communicate with parents, they direct their questions to school council. For example, while developing the Health and Physical elementary education curriculum between 2011 and 2015, the ministry consulted parents who were members of school council at each school in Ontario. Therefore, parents who did not attend school council meetings did not have the opportunity to voice their concerns, if they had any.

In addition, I found that parents who attend school council have the opportunity to become aware of different upcoming events at their children's school such as graduation, science fair, etc.; to voice their concerns about certain issues that affect students at the school; to learn
about any new rules or regulations that could be applied at their children’s school; to become familiar with the different educational concepts that schools use which their children are accustomed to; to participate in the decision-making process related to issues that affect all students in the school; and to have the opportunity to attend other committees within the school board, as these types of committees are usually open to parents who are members of school council.

Unfortunately, I found that some school councils have only between three and five parent members who are responsible for speaking and making decisions on behalf of the entire school population. It is regrettable that parents in general and immigrants in specific are not fully represented in school council, while at the same time school council is the main channel to voice their concerns about school issues.

In addition, based on my experience of participating in several committees within the board, I found that I had opportunities to learn about various educational topics and to understand the specific procedures of certain processes such as children’s discipline practices (for a list of topics presented by board staff and other educators to parents, please see Appendix K).

I strongly believe that some committees are very useful to parents for gaining information about the school system. Thus, it is clear to me that more immigrant parents need to participate in these committees, as they may not be familiar with the school system. Providing translators and childcare for immigrant participants who need these services is an essential component that could motivate immigrant parents to attend.

Based on my long-term school involvement experiences, I believe that there are some beneficial opportunities available for parents to gain information about their children’s
education. As well, based on my experience I believe that there are some obstacles involved in these opportunities that parents may face.
Chapter 4.1: Home-school relationship

Introduction

Home-school relationship in this analysis refers to parent participants’ experience of communicating with school personnel. The home-school relationship theme also includes a description of the different types of immigrant study participants’ involvement in their children’s education, the barriers to their involvement, as well as what would help them to be more involved in their children’s education. An overview of the organization of themes and subthemes is presented in Table 15.

Parents’ Experiences of Ontario’s Educational System

Parents have both positive and negative experiences regarding their children’s education in Ontario schools. Positive and negative experiences refer respectively to what parents like and dislike about their children’s education in Ontario’s educational system. Three subthemes were identified under positive experience, while four subthemes were identified under negative experience. Some of these subthemes were created through reliance on the actual words of parent participants. The findings of positive and negative experiences are presented below.

Positive experience

There is consistency in parents’ perspectives in what they appreciate regarding their children’s education. Figure 6 shows the number of parents satisfied with each subtheme discussed below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15. Home-School Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Home-School Relationship**

- **Parents’ experiences of Ontario’s educational system**
  - Positive experience
    - Enhancing students’ soft skills
    - Differentiating between students based on their various needs and interests
    - Accepting atmosphere
  - Negative experience
    - Lack of educational resources
    - Inconsistency in education
    - Weak accountability and incentives
    - Open loop parental involvement system

- **Type of Parental Involvement**
  - Involvement at home
  - Communicating with teachers
  - Volunteering at school

- **Barriers to Parental Involvement**
  - Language barriers
  - Distraction (busy, lack of time)
  - Incognizance (lack of knowledge, the system, process)
  - Disinterest (lost interest due to lack of cooperation, no follow-up)
  - Cultural barriers

- **What Parents Need to Be More Involved in their Children’s Education**
  - Enhancing school cultural sensitivity
  - Providing child-care
  - Accessibility of their children’s work
  - Accessibility of educational materials
Enhancing students’ soft skills

Soft skills in this analysis refer to attributes such as critical thinking, creativity, presentation skills, collaboration, and working as part of a team.

Most parent participants identified differences between their home country’s educational system and Ontario’s educational system when explaining what they like about their children’s education in Ontario. Eighteen out of twenty parent participants appreciate that their children have the opportunity to improve their soft skills. PP3\(^1\) presented his observations as follows:

But in general there are some good things in the system here, especially the times they are giving to the students, they [students] are not as pressured as they are in our country. And also they [teachers] can improve the soft skills of the students in terms of presentation skills, working as team, time management, learning by doing, critical thinking.

Further explanation was given by PP4:

\(^1\) Quotations by participants are identified as follows: PP#. The letters stand for “parent participant” and the number reflects the case number. Similarly, the letters in SPP# stand for school personnel participant and the number reflects the case number.
What I like about my children's education: uh, as I told you, they give enough attention to soft skills. Uh, this attribute is not, uh, is not found in my country. So, how to make eye contact. So, I saw how the teacher, uh, the teacher giving my daughter evaluation, when she’s doing, uh, presentation, so it is the same—it is very cute, but it is the same big idea as we are doing in the university. You—covering the topic, you make eye contact, your voice tone. You use the same voice tone, or you changed it, so I am so happy that my daughter is going through this experience when she is young, so when she’s, uh, older, she, she goes from it since she’s very little. For me, when I came here, uh, for Ph.D., it was—I told you it was a big—it was a big shift, so I like that they, they put the kids, you know, for many, many experiences.

PP4 elaborated that the system allows students to express their point of view and learn presentation skills, as this enhanced her daughter's self-confidence.

The positive is that they build confidence in her, um, from early—from early years, she knows how to present, how to read books, and re—make a presentation about it, about it. She knows how to think about the books. She can, uh, say whatever she thinks about. She’s open. She doesn’t have anything to be afraid—to be shy—to say. Whatever she thinks about, she said.

Not only do parents appreciate that their children learn presentation skills, but they also value that their children are taught how to think critically, how to communicate their thoughts, and how to be independent in doing their work.

Here they [children] express their opinion. …They allow children to rely on themselves on the presentation. This is the best thing here. They allow them to make search, to make a presentation, they stand in front of the class and speak about anything; it is not necessary that it is a certain thing. On the other hand, we did not have this chance, I don’t know how to explain it to you, what I mean that we were asked a question and we answered that question whether true or false. PP10

So many things that I like. Uh, first of all, uh, (participant’s older daughter) came here, she was like, uh, five years old. She had attended a school in Egypt before she, she came here. And I noticed a big difference in her personality, like, now she’s able to, to communicate well, to deliver whatever ideas in her mind to, to other people. This is a very important thing that I like about, uh, about her education here. So, they, they let the student talk. Say whatever you want. Explain, and discuss. Not, not, not like in Egypt, for example. That’s it, and you can’t even explain. You can’t even, uh, complain about anything, so this is something that I really like about education here in, in Canada. Uh, giving, uh, self-confidence to the students. Uh, you are free to explain, to, to express what you feel, what you like and what, what you dislike. PP13
In addition, the enabling of student voice is another advantage that PP2 valued about her children’s education in Ontario.

What I like that they [teachers] give, um, the kids, um, a space to think, and to, to look to everything with their ways, not only taking rules—“You have to study this,” or, “You have to do this.” … this is very good, because they [teachers] let them [children] get all what they have inside.

Parents value the opportunities given to their children to learn presentation skills at an early age, as they believe this is what will be required from them in the workplace when they grow up. Participants recall how they themselves were not given this chance to learn presentation skills when they were young.

From the first day of school, from the beginning of JK, there is a show and tell. The idea that every week someone, you bring something and show it to your friends and say something about it. It puts a face to people and helps them speak, and without telling them “one, two, three” they can speak. This is also very important especially because we are missing this, so when you feel that it's compensated in your kids, the things that are important that you saw when you were working, very important, and they raise them based on these things. PP5

There is agreement among parent participants that their children learn presentation skills, discuss their ideas, express their interests freely, and develop critical thinking and creativity in Ontario schools. As a result, their children gain self-confidence. Participants mentioned clearly several times that they did not have such opportunities to practice these skills in their home country. Parents’ recognition of their own missed opportunities could possibly result from their past experiences of coming from a high power distance country in which students are not allowed to challenge teachers’ ideas. Surprisingly, parents were able to perceive these differences between the two educational systems and prefer the opposite practice to their country-of-origin’s system.
This influences my conclusion that parents in high power distance countries may often disagree with high power distance practices; however, they do not have the power to change these practices. Moreover, this challenges the notion provided by Hofstede (2011) that people in high power distance countries accept unequal distribution of power. Hofstede (2011) defines power distance as “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (p. 9). Contrastingly, parents in this study show their appreciation of low power distance practices and critique their country of origin’s high power distance practices. Further explanation is provided in the following Chapter 4-2.

**Differentiating between students based on their various needs and interests**

Differentiating between students based on their various needs and interests means that teachers are able to identify students’ development levels, learning styles, and interests. Hence, teachers are potentially able to give helpful feedback to parents, to make modifications and accommodations to lessons or activities in order to meet students where they are and to stimulate growth, and to work with each student to reach his or her full potential.

Almost one-quarter of parents expressed their appreciation for teachers’ abilities to work with children based on their needs. PP10 explained how the teacher guided her child away from inappropriate behaviour to practice a good habit:

I had a problem with my son, who is in grade three. He loves to talk a lot. I mean: as long as he sits in the class, he talks. In our home countries, what they will do? The teacher will send him to the principal’s office; the teacher will punish him in a certain way. Here is different, the teacher starts to tell him, “Whatever you want to tell, write about it, write a book”. The boy starts to come to me, he has a fertile imagination, and started to write, …., maybe every week he started to come to me with pages full of stories, and full of things, he has great imagination. She knows the best way to deal with him, and oriented him to do the best thing.

When teachers reached a similar understanding as parents of their children’s personalities, then parents appreciated teachers’ work.
My daughter, she barely speaks, and she takes her time, and she also doesn’t like to say anything unless she is 100% sure it’s right. She doesn’t answer questions unless she knows and she knows she’s right. I told her [the teacher] that she gets shy, I didn’t say that she doesn’t say it unless she knows it’s right. We just discovered this personally in the last year. For example, in Quran, she doesn't say the chapter unless she knows she knows it fully. She refuses to recite anything unless she knows it 100%. So I found in the last report from school, those exact words, that she does not say things unless she’s 100% confident. So-- You understand? So I was really happy because it’s the same realization. They are really taking care and have the ability to understand the personality of every person. PP5

PP4 explained her appreciation that the teacher knew the needs of each child:

The teacher for my little daughter, I, I—she have about 20 kids in the class, but she knows everyone, so when I go to volunteer, she told me, “Can you sit with this?” She has folders for everyone, and she knows this kid doesn’t know how to write his name, or, she asked: “(participant’s name), can you help him, because when he pick the pen—the pencil, he pick it in the wrong way.” She showed me a way want him to pick the pen would be like this. “Let him know how to pick it correctly, how to hold it correctly, and help him to write his name.” So, I feel she knows everyone very deeply, so I’m not sure if all the teachers like this, or not, but I like, here, how, how, how some teachers knows everyone, how she helps everyone with what he needs. It is not, you know, it is not like, uh, a machine. I want to do A-B-C. No, she will do this A only, and she will do this A and B and C. She will do the other one, maybe, extra day, so she is—she is flexible. She is giving everyone—she is helping everyone with what he needs. So, I like—I like this point a lot.

In addition, PP8 liked how teachers in Ontario's educational system focused on interactive activities and delivery of information:

They are doing a lot of activities; they have a kind of interactive educational system so it is not just that they deliver something and then... I mean they are doing this kind of learning in an interactive environment like they give things then they doing activities for these things, then they are doing the problems like in math or science for example. But in my country things were different because they just focus on delivering the curriculum and then the application, but there are no activities, or just a small amount of activities relative to here. Here they are giving a small piece of information then they do a lot of activities, they are not focusing on the application [exercises/problems] that much they are focusing on the activity. In my country they are focusing on the curriculum and the application and the activities are very small. PP8

Parents reported being happy that their children had time to practice their hobbies with teachers encouraging their children to do what they liked.
…But what is really nice here that they let the kids practice their hobbies and improve it. Like my older daughter I didn’t know that she likes drawing until we come here. She drew for her first time here and it was not a good drawing, then the art teacher gave her some tips on how she can draw a face and some other things and she became very skillful. So drawing is very important for her now not just a hobby like it was in the past, so that is an advantage for the education here. PP1

When there is a regular communication between parents and teachers, students’ achievement should be improved. PP17 told how her daughter’s teacher sent her a note saying that her daughter read in a proper way but she did not concentrate on the specific incidents of the story. The teacher asked PP17 to work with her daughter and help her with that point. PP17 pointed out:

She [the teacher] always tells me that my daughter reads in a proper way but she doesn't concentrate on the story, so when the teacher asks her about the story after finishing, she doesn't understand the incidents of the story she just concentrate on how to read. So I started to read with her the story page by page and ask her about every detail, and when we reach the end of the story I ask her some questions to know that she starts to concentrate more on the incidents of the story. PP17

**Accepting atmosphere**

In this analysis, an accepting atmosphere means first of all that teachers welcome parents’ questions and concerns by providing respectful support in responding to those questions or concerns. Second, teachers show sensitivity to language barriers of immigrant families by speaking slowly, by being respectful in not showing that parents have made language mistakes, and by providing written explanations if needed. Third, the educational system promotes children’s well-being.

Almost half of parent participants (11 parents) expressed their appreciation of teachers who were helpful and cooperative. Furthermore, parents valued the system for taking into consideration the psychological aspects of each child. Parents reported the following:

But if you go and ask them, they wouldn’t delay. If I go and ask them, “What does my son take? I actually want to follow up with him at home”, they give me a website, they
give me... They tell me what to bring ... If I bring books, I show them to the teachers and ask if these books are good for my child, they answer, “Yes, it does”, or “No, it doesn’t”. And so on, you know. PP10

Yeah, they—here, they are very patient, and they are very friendly. They explain for you everything, and they—if you—if you—they found you—your English is not that good, they will slow down and explain more, yeah. They are good, yeah. PP14

When PP1’s child’s teacher discovered that PP1 had not received a certain message, the teacher wrote a note and gave it to PP1 so that she could either have the note translated or could ask her husband or older children to help her understand the meaning. PP1 said:

I was invited to a meeting and I didn’t get why she wanted me to come, so she wrote for me notes to talk it and read it with my husband or my girls, so I really appreciate what she did because there are so many points which I didn’t get. I showed the paper to my husband and he told me what she meant. PP1

Several parents expressed their appreciation for the educational system in promoting their children’s wellbeing.

I like that they are amusing their childhood without any stress. PP9

There is no great load on the kid in the education and the exams that is very good. PP12

I really like how they evaluate students as they never make them feel stressed and that is what makes students love the school more, he doesn’t feel afraid while they are going to school. PP15

PP3 added that children liked going to school, as the system was friendly and accepting:

The system is very flexible to accept students who immigrated very fast. It is very friendly; the environment is very friendly. They allow the students to be, especially the kids, to be kids so they can enjoy their time at school. PP3

The positive experiences discussed above illustrate that parents like how Ontario’s educational system enhances students’ soft skills including presentation skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and working in a team. Furthermore, parents appreciate how Ontario’s educational system differentiates between students based on their various needs and interests, and offers parents an accepting atmosphere where parents can feel comfortable in asking
questions and communicating with school personnel. Nevertheless, parent participants also highlighted some negative experiences of Ontario’s educational system. These are presented below.

**Negative experience**

Five subthemes were identified as characterizing parents’ negative experiences of the Ontario educational system. These negative experiences caused parents to report that they were unable to help and support their children’s learning, felt confused, and had lost their motivation to continue communication with staff members of their child’s school. Figure 7 shows the number of parents dissatisfied with each subtheme discussed below.

![Negative Experience](image-url)

*Figure 7. Negative Experience.*
Lack of educational resources

Educational resources in this analysis mean any educational materials that can tell parents what their children are studying at school and how they are performing. These materials could include, but are not limited to, students’ work papers at school, notes from children’s teachers, textbooks, homework sheets, agenda of the curriculum, examples of lessons, or any other information that could facilitate parents’ understanding of the curriculum and how they could follow up with their children.

All parents were concerned that there was a lack of educational resources that they received from schools which caused them to feel irrelevant to their children’s education. Coming from a country where children receive books for every subject, parents feel lost in the Ontario system where there are no books provided to children and hence they are not able to know what their children study in schools. In addition, as they have not been educated in the system, they are not able to navigate the new system. PP9 explained her struggle of not having any school resources to guide her understanding of what her child was studying at school:

I don’t like that I don’t have the curriculum, and they always tell me to search the Internet and I feel lost when I do so. I can't hold the curriculum in my hands to teach my kids… But there are no books, which you can hold in your hands and say that is, what my son will finish throughout the year. There is nothing defined, and that is what really bothers me. I cannot teach them anything and I cannot help them. At the same time there are many resources in the Internet and I cannot choose between them. I always feel lost when I surf the Internet. I find million resources for grade one and for sure the kid cannot cover all of these things just in one year. So you cannot know what your son achieved throughout the year and what he excelled in and what he is weak in. So that what I really

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1 In Ontario's educational system, textbooks and other learning materials are intended for use in school; students do not receive school textbooks at the beginning of each year to be brought home for study purposes. The Waterloo Region District School Board policy regarding fees for learning materials and activities states that “Each school defines/determines the basic materials and activities required for courses” (WRDSB, Board policy 6011, 2.3). The implication here is that “the choice about materials depends on teachers’ preferences, knowledge and comfort levels” (People for Education, 2014). This indicates that “Students may or may not need textbooks and workbooks for each and every subject. Teachers will likely make use of many different resource materials, such as library books, information on the Internet…” (COPA (le Centre Ontarien de Prévention des Agressions), 2012, p.12).
don’t like here, because there is no defined curriculum and because there are no books that you can know from them what your son took. PP9

Other parents had a similar concern:

The only thing that we are suffering from here is that they don’t send us books, so how can we help our children? PP1

Actually they don’t give us a chance here to know the curriculum. … It is not that clear what my son is learning at school, which is not clear for me. PP12

I can’t see a definite curriculum. She [her daughter] only brings home few French words to write and in Math. She had already done everything at school and I only review what she did. I have only a general idea about what she is taking at school, but if I want to know more about a specific period of time, I can’t. All I have is her Agenda. PP19

It’s, uh, the big, main concern, is always there are no guidelines; there is no curriculum. Like, it’s well known for everyone here in Canada, you don’t have any curriculum, and you have to go outside to purchase some extra stuff. PP20

The struggle that parents expressed may indicate that parents did not find school personnel or other stakeholders able or willing to explain Ontario’s educational system and how it works. It took a great deal of time for some parent participants to understand the educational system here in Ontario:

With my daughter, it took for me a very long time to understand the education system here. Uh, for me, I was always, uh, we can say A plus student, so I always n—I always know how to study and have good results, and I want my daughters to be the same. I want them to study, and get good results, but there are no resources for me to help them study at home. They only bring some papers once a month, depending when the teacher—one a month, once a week, want to show me what they are doing in school, and it is, uh, already solved sheets in school, so I don’t have a lot to do with them…So the negative thing is that I don’t have resources to follow with my daughter, and the success of the education process, every year, depends on the teacher’s personality. PP4

Here I don’t know anything about the curriculum, after a while I knew that there is a website that we can use to know the children's curriculum. Imagine that I am an illiterate mother and I don't know English; what shall I do in that case? Actually I started to do all my best to understand; for sure I will not translate each and every word. I have to do an insane effort in every aspect. PP7
In spite of the fact that some parents know that they can check the Ontario curriculum online, they found that the curriculum is so generic that it does not give a clear idea of what their children were actually studying at school, as each teacher determines the content of a certain topic in the curriculum. PP2 explained:

First I see that, uh, regarding to the curriculum of the schools here, it’s not very clear for every parent. You don’t know exactly what your kids are taking at school, because you have the curriculum—for example, here we have Ontario curriculum—which is, we can check in the Internet, or with the school, but actually, what they take in the school, there is no control about what they are taking in school. PP2

Parents, however, acknowledged that they receive some of their children’s work from school, but the papers that they received were not sufficient to give them an idea of what their children were doing in school and how they could help support their children’s learning. In addition, these papers were not being sent on a regular basis:

They just give me a table for each month, contains just very short title for each topic. I don’t know any details or the activities they do. If I want to strengthen her in a specific topic, I don’t know what are the topics which she good at and what are the topics which she is behind in. PP8

They send me a paper from time to time, but I don’t know when he took these things which are written in the paper, and I don’t know the order of the topics and when did he finished it. And even sometime they do not send you anything... for example I didn’t get any papers this year for (son’s name), they just send very simple things. For sure it is impossible to know what he took throughout the whole year. PP9

I don’t usually know what she is taking at school. They rarely send anything; they send things when there is an exam or something. Or when they didn’t finish work in the class so they send you the unfinished work. But you can’t know what she takes daily, as there is no book, or any file they send to you or any notes. PP16

Furthermore, parents knew about parent-teacher interviews and they found them helpful, but they were considered insufficient for them, as they occurred only twice per year:

In general, I don’t know what my son takes in school except when I go to the parent’s interview that is twice a year, at the very beginning of the year, when they tell you the child takes what, but I also need to follow up with him in regular basis, as if they give me the plan of every month, and give me the work they did in class. I still feel that I don’t
understand what my child takes in school. I hope they bring curriculum, or they bring at least a plan that is supposed to be made throughout the year or that we are going to follow. PP10

Not only do parents want to have resources that explain what their children take in school so they could follow up with them at home, but they also want to understand and see examples of the current teaching method(s) that the teacher uses which are suitable for their children’s grade level so that they could help their children in appropriate ways. PP16 emphasized the following:

I do not like that they do not send me a textbook, or at least to send any notes. Like in math I cannot follow up with her. If she comes home with some questions to be answered, I don’t even know the way they discussed in the class to answer that types of questions. I can give her any level to answer that question from elementary to university. But I don’t know what exactly she took. I can explain to her the things I took in the university or I can explain things, which I took in middle or high school. So as you know, there are many different ways and I don’t know which way she took. Sometimes I ask her to search for any example or any explanation. She just can tell me if she was concentrated in the class. Sometimes I ask her to get me the textbook. Actually I can't remember if she got me the textbook… but I don't think that they [teachers] ever send me the textbook. PP16

Although all parents tried to support their children’s learning by buying books related to the subject being studied, most of them did not know whether their children had studied the topics included in these books yet. PP17 explained:

For resources, I feel like I am all by myself. No one told me to use a specific book to work with her at home. I went to tell her [the teacher] about the book I bought, and she told me, “It is okay, there is no harm to use it,” but the book I use to study with her has a different arrange of the topics than the school. Each school chooses how to arrange the topics throughout the year. And the book has a different arrangement for the topics, so when I open the book I feel puzzled to know which topic she took and which one still will take at the end of the year and which one is not included in our province’s curriculum. She just told me about the topics they will not cover here in that province, but for the rest of the topics I don’t know exactly what comes first. PP17

Yet parents found that their children refused to do any extra work at home, not because they did not want to, but because they had been told in school to not study at home¹. These opposing

¹ In Ontario's educational system, “There is no established 'right' amount of homework. Researchers and educators agree that there should only be limited homework in the early grades, with the amount gradually increasing as
points of view between school and home concerning students’ studying at home caused parents to believe that the educational system disables their ability to work with their children at home:

When I was asking my kids to study at home they refuse saying, “In school they are telling us not to study at home, you can play at home.” I ask them to do one lesson for math and one lesson for English daily at home, and that is all what I want from them and then they can play, they can finish just in one hour to do all of these things if they are concentrated, it may take an hour just because their language is still weak. When I did that at home they come back from school saying, “There are no one like us working at home, and no one is doing any homework. Why do you want us to work at home?” and they don’t want to study at home. Just once or twice a week that is all. That is because they are telling them at school not to work at home, and also their friends tell them that they are not working at home. PP7

They disable a very important thing; they disable the parents and the home, so they don’t give me a power to work more with my daughter. They convince her that working with your mother is useless, and homework is not a beneficial thing to do. Like they press on a button, but it is a very important button and it can make the child’s life different, and they switch it with the child’s consent. That really makes me suffer to work with them. That is what really bothers me here. PP8

The consequence of this struggle experienced by parents could be that they feel discouraged from supporting their children’s learning at home. PP15 reflected on this point by indicating the challenges that he went through and his decision of not helping his child at home to cope with the system:

Again because we compare with how we were living, in our country we used to go to school to take a book, and it is stated inside the book lesson one is from an exact page number to an exact page number and the same thing for lesson two, etc. As a parent, I know what my kid is going to take in school the next day. The second thing, which is considered a challenge for us, is how to help our children. I tried once to help my kids, but I tried to help them using our concept that we learnt to follow up with them at home, which it doesn’t work, so I took my hands off. I tried at first but I felt that would harm them and will not be useful for them so that was the challenge that you deal with your kids with the same way that you have learnt before which was not applicable here, so that was the challenge. PP15

students move into high school” (People for Education, 2009, par. 4). As a result of this open-ended viewpoint, the amount of homework will depend on the decisions of school personnel, which may differ from one teacher to another. It is apparent that many school personnel believe that students should not do any school work at home, as mentioned by the school personnel and study participants in this study.
It is very clear from parents’ voices that they are struggling to understand what their children do and study at school. Parents believe that their main role is to support their children’s learning by strengthening their abilities. They feel that they are not able to practice this role, as the system does not encourage the involvement of parents in their children’s work at home.

**Inconsistency in education**

Another subtheme that emerged from parents’ stories is the inconsistency in the educational system. Almost all parents (16 out of 20) did not like the deviation between different teachers (in different schools and even in the same school) in terms of expectations of children’s achievement, regularity of student work and information that has been sent home, and amount of work required from students. The burden on parents to understand the system increases when they have discovered inconsistencies in curriculum between schools and noted variations between what is communicated to parents by teachers:

Unlike Egypt you have all books and you know every day what they took and what they did in the school. Here, teachers are different, even teachers of the same grade. Each class takes different things depends on its teacher and that is really tiring for us as parents when we try to help kids at home. PP1

So, for example, in—if you have two grade eights in the same school, in science, they will not take the same aspects and the same stuff, if they have two different teachers, so—and the same problem will be if you have different kids in different schools, or in different, you know, cities. PP2

She [other parent] .. asked me that, uh, “Is your daughter have exams in June? That’s EQAO, I think…” .. I told her, “No, I don’t know .. what you [refer to],” and she said, “No, they have exams in June for grade three, and this is important, …” I Googled it, and I found, really, they have exams in the website, but, uh, why my …daughter’s teacher [did not] say anything about [it]. PP14

When PP6 moved her child to another school that offers French immersion, she found that they expected him to know how to write, as he was supposed to learn that in his previous school:

After, like, uh, like, two months or so, I f—like that, his teacher wrote that she want to see me, and then when I went to her, she said that (her son)—she showed (her son’s)
writing, compared to the other kids, so, so the first thing—his, his school is—like, the school that he went to for French immersion, it’s a bit higher than the other school, so I think they prepare the kids for JK and SK to, to do more work, that he has not been prepared to in the other school, and then when he went to grade one, they were expecting the kids to write, while actually on the other school, (her son) almost didn’t write anything. So, she was expecting them not to trace. It—it’s like, like, “What did you do on the weekend, over the weekend,” for example. So, it was actually a shock for him, …. It was really, really stressful for him.

Similarly, PP8 found differences between her children’s previous school and their current school:

The report card which I used to receive from the previous school was different. It has a lot of things and they used to tell me the good things and the things that we need to work on. But here [the current school] I don’t have a plan, I don't know what are the things which I need to work on it. PP8

PP11 was upset that her child in SK did not receive any home reading books, as he was receiving different books from the school when he was in JK. She explained:

The curriculum as I mentioned... they choose the curriculum based on what they see. I mean each teacher choose the curriculum based on his/her view or personality. For example, the teacher of last year her view is to sending books home. But this year’s teacher is different; her view is that children cannot read at this stage even though they become older. Then each teacher chooses the material and the amount of it based on his or her own way and this mean that there is no clear curriculum. This is an annoying issue; it is supposed to be a curriculum. PP11

Providing students with homework is another issue that reflects a deviation between teachers:

Maybe that [the homework] is the only thing that I don't like about education here. It differs from one teacher to another, by the way it is not a policy; I mean the principal doesn’t oblige teachers not to give homework. They leave the choice for teaches whether to give homework or not. I have many examples with my three children, I saw some teachers who give daily homework to the students, even if it is 15 to 20 minutes a day. There are other teachers who don't care. I think it is better to put a defined clear policy saying that kids should take homework to do. I have discussed similar issues with them and they have a point. Whether those who give or those who don’t give homework; both have a point of view. But from my own point of view, I think homework is an essential thing even for 15 minutes per day. For my point of view I think it is not an advantage here, that they leave the choice for the teachers whether to give homework or not. PP15
Interestingly, PP20 moved his children from a public school to a Catholic school. While he was satisfied with the system of the new school, but he felt sorry for those who have children in public schools, as there is inconsistency in the public system. He clarified his feelings by the following:

I faced this problem [not receiving school books] in the previous school, but, uh, in this school—the new one—I found it’s interesting, because all the kids, they have their own, uh, books for each subject, one in class, and one at home, …, which is good. And, sadly, this is, this is good for my kids, but I found it’s not fair, …, so the system is not consistent, and it all depends on the teacher, it all depends on the school, it depends on the principal. That’s why you find this big variance between different schools, and different teachers, yeah. PP20

Parents’ voices clearly indicated that they felt there are inequities in the education system in terms of the inconsistency in education that they experienced.

**Average expectations and weak incentives**

Average expectations in this analysis refers to teachers, consciously or unconsciously, having average expectations for most of their students (achieving levels 2 or 3\(^1\)) and providing, accordingly, work that does not challenge students’ abilities and their potential. Weak incentives refer to the absence of an environment that motivates students to put high expectations on themselves and to try to achieve them. This subtheme was expressed in different ways by half of the parent participants.

These parents believe that teachers should place high expectations on all students. PP1 contrasted the educational system in her country, where high expectations (level 4) are placed upon all students regardless of their abilities, with the educational system here, where high expectations are placed upon only the gifted students. She explained:

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\(^1\) In Ontario, reporting on student academic achievement includes a report card grade, which includes four main levels. Level 4 (A- to A+) indicates that achievement surpasses the provincial standard, Level 3 (B- to B+) indicates that achievement meets the provincial standard, Level 2 (C- to C+) indicates that achievement approaches the provincial standard, and Level 1(D- to D+) indicates that achievement falls much below the provincial standard.
In Egypt there was the spirit of competition, kids always wanted to improve their marks and grades, for my girls who were brought up in Egypt were really different than the other two who brought up here. My kids who got an education in Egypt always love to be number one. Here, teachers always tell them that grade B is okay, it is good and that is enough, but I want them to have A. Here they say it is too hard to have grade A. It is for specific students I can’t remember what they call it. PP1

She believed that her children could achieve the highest level if they worked hard and exerted more effort:

I feel it is not that hard to have an A. I feel if a student exerts some extra effort he can reach it. But here they tell students that B is okay. Even when I try to talk with my girl and tell her, “I want you to have an A,” she tells me, “My teacher tells me that (B) is a good mark,” so that is really disappointing. I want them always to be among outstanding students. PP1

Similarly, PP8 complained that her children have learned from school to place average expectations upon themselves.

Here they are not evaluating the kids. I am facing a real problem with my kids here. (daughter's name) believes that if she got 70% that will be good as she passes. Unlike us, we are not used to that. They [her children] are not convinced that if they can do better so they have to do better, they don't like to develop their selves, I don't know why they are acting like that; maybe because there was no grading system, or maybe because there is no one better than that. PP8

However, this is also different from one teacher to another; some teachers really care and provide parents with some guidance to support their children in improving and other teachers attribute low performance to low ability and believe that children cannot do better. PP6 reflected:

If he [her son] needs more practice, something like that. So, it’s, it’s fine telling them, but again, they’re not all responding the same way. Um, some people would, would help more, would try to find different strategies to help the child, because they’re really willing him to be better, but, uh, some others would just take what you’re saying, and then, OK, maybe this is a child thing, and it’s not going to be improved, so they just don’t really care about it. PP6

Having average expectations for students influences the pace and amount of information students received. And hence, students’ interest diminishes. Parents complained:

What I don’t like that they are lazy, a thing that may take half an hour working; it can take them a week or two or maybe the whole month. They can give kids more things as
they are still young and they are able to learn more, it will not be overload for them or anything. They give children very little amount of information. I feel like they teach kids how to be lazy, through the way they give them information, and through the kids work and studying. Kids have a massive power; school doesn’t make use of this power. They teach them how to play, or to have fun. Everything is good or awesome even if kids don’t do anything, so how could kids study after that. PP7

As a result,

What really surprised me, I found my other sons don’t want to go too [go to school]. I told them you don’t want to go because you are doing a lot of work at school. They told me “No, we are not doing any work at school, school became very boring.” They don’t do anything at school; they got bored because all the time they are having fun. I hope that was a good example for you. PP7

Having average expectations for students also influences the communication between parents and teachers in such a way that teachers do not maintain contact with parents as long as their children are succeeding in their studies. Some parents do not approve of this, as they want their children to be better and need teachers to collaboratively work with them to enhance their children’s abilities and grades:

Anytime I go to the teacher she tells me, “(daughter’s name) is awesome.” I know that she is awesome but I need to know which thing she needs to improve so I can work with her at home, I can support her in a good way at home. For sure there is a difference between me and an uneducated mother. I have to help the school to make my children better. I will be satisfied that way. So instead of being cooperative together, that made me work in a different way than they work on. PP8

What I don’t like is that I don’t see that there is enough engagement between the teachers and the parents, they are like just take the children from us and they go to school. No more communication, like, “That is what we do.” Every month I got this paper saying, “We are going to do this and we are going to do that,” but there is no more explanation. I don't know where is the miscommunication comes from, maybe from me maybe from the teacher but I think there is definitely a miscommunication between them and me. PP18

Moreover, some parents did not approve of the lax instructors and unenforced rules. PP2 explained:

They give them too much flexibility, because (her son), for example, he—they told him to read every day, but he doesn’t like to read at home, so it ends up with doing nothing, so I think they have to give them targets to do. PP2
PP3 provided further explanation:

There is lots of freedom [in the Ontario educational system] but you also have to teach the kids how to manage the time and how they can manage the stress if they are overloaded, and also how they can compete, and also how to co-operate. The system emphasizes more on how to co-operate. But also how to compete is very important. In real life we will be competing more than co-operating. So, if the students for example fail an exam. I don’t know why to give them the chance to repeat it as many times as they want, I don’t like this idea. They have to pay the price. My daughter for example each time she fails or she gets a bad grade she’s very relaxed and says, “Yeah I can repeat it as many times as I can,” because the teacher allows her to do so. So, she doesn’t have any pressure to study hard because there’s no competition, there’s no competition. PP3

PP16 did not like that teachers neither asked her child to finish her work nor contacted the parents to tell them about her child’s progress:

… but in grade 4 it was a turning point, they feel that kids have to be more independent, but even if that is their point of view they have to support the kids who need help. It was not normal to go to school in March and the school year is about to finish and we found out that she didn't finish 75% of her work, that was not acceptable. It was the teachers’ problem. The two teacher she had was not good, they even let us see my daughter’s work and compare it with another student who finished all his work and our daughter just finished its quarter. If she has three or four things so you find that she just finished 20% of her work, that is not normal to leave kids to be like that. PP16

Parents believed that the system should reward high-achieving students, so other students become motivated to do their best. Parents had the following to say:

My son for example, when he works hard and he did a lot of progress in Dream Box and solving math problems, he doesn’t get any recognition on his report card. And when I went to the teacher and asked her why he doesn’t get for example A instead of C and she said to me that she doesn’t want to give excellent because next month he might not be able to get excellent, so this will affect him psychologically. And actually, I’m not highly convinced of that because he has to be affected psychologically in order to work hard and to improve himself. PP3

They have to appreciate the ones who work, so it would motivate those who don’t work to be like them. PP7

We have to appreciate those who are doing well. We can’t start this too early but at the same time they cannot… here they are putting them all in the same boat and keep telling them that you are good and everything is okay they are not putting any stress on them. At the same time, they never let them feel that they have to do their best to get the 100% if
they can do it. They are fully convinced that they don’t have to get the 100%, it is enough for me to pass or to get over 50%. PP8

Parents of this study had high expectations for their children and believed that if their children worked hard and schools motivated them to do their best, then they would meet these high expectations. Parents were concerned that their children who were good at school would lose interest, as they had learned to place average expectations upon themselves, were not challenged enough at school, and the school environment was not stimulating students to do their best. These differences between what parents expected and what they found in their children’s school system might lead to conflict that could thereby discourage their involvement in their children’s education.

**Open loop system**

“I don’t know if they consider this feedback, these comments from me, or if they just ignore them… there’s a kind of open loop system”

As expressed by a parent, open-loop system in this analysis refers to a system that is not responding to parents’ feedback and provides very limited opportunities for parents to participate in the decision-making process. Seventy percent of parents complained that the Ontario educational system is an open loop system.

Parents felt that school personnel do not respond to their concerns or suggestions. PP3 found that her daughter in grade eight did not learn math concepts during the year, as the teacher decided not to teach math as usual; instead, he thought that students would learn math and science via creating a roller coaster or wheelchair. PP3 did not like the idea of teaching only by doing. He believed that it should be a balance between teaching by doing (constructional approach) and teaching by instruction (instructional approach):
So, it’s very important also to have a right balance between instructional activities and constructional activities that allow the students to do something meaningful for them… So, because he [his daughter’s teacher] was not explaining anything to the students. For example, he was asking them to create a roller coaster without explaining the background or even providing some sort of background that allows the students to look and search by themselves and to understand the meaning behind all the things they were doing. So, they were just constructing a roller coaster or wheelchair without understanding the science behind. So, it’s not enough actually… the teacher didn’t really explain anything about force, balance and how you can make load distribution to balance the load in the wheelchair in order to make it stable, for example. PP3

Therefore, when he found out that his daughter had created a roller coaster but had not learned any math or science, he went to the teacher to discuss this issue, but found that the teacher ignored his suggestion without appropriate explanation:

And even when we have a meeting with the teacher, they don’t listen actually carefully. This is also something I can talk about in details, but I don’t feel that they are listening to us carefully, especially if you have a lot of strong accent. So, the—I don’t know about that. That’s what I’m feeling actually. When I discuss with the math teacher the idea of—I have a paper actually about (the topic) and how there’s a right way to balance instructional and constructional activities and the concept of constructionism and instructionism and all of this stuff. He didn’t accept actually any feedback from me about it’s not a good idea only to rely on learning by doing. It’s very strong educational paradigm, but …we have to also provide some sort of activities based on instructionism as well.

He elaborated:

So, like, so I get the feeling that after the meeting it didn’t change anything. It’s just a kid doing what he was doing and they are not that open minded actually to receive feedback from the parents. That’s from my personal experience… I don’t know. I feel also these meetings are kind of systematic meetings. Teacher just explained some comments on the report and listen to feedback from the parents but I don’t see any follow up. There is no follow up. I don’t know if they consider this feedback, these comments from me, or if they just ignore them. So, I don’t see—there’s a kind of open loop system.

PP6 also was very disappointed when the principal of her child’s school appeared unwelcoming of her concerns and suggestions for her child’s safety:

I mean there aren’t any teacher that would take care of my son, that he’s JK, and he’s there playing in the playground for, like, 15 minutes before the school starts, so I went and talked to the principal at that time, and I said, “My son comes to school by bus, and, uh, there isn’t any teacher that’s taking care of him.” So, he said the school starts at
maybe—I don’t remember—like, let’s say 8:45 or something, so the teacher has to be here 8:45, or five minutes before. …I told him JK and SK, they have to be under, ..., different supervision. They have to be inside the school, or even if outside school, ..they had to have, like, more supervision, even if a teacher is, is responsible for these kids until maybe the school starts, but I, I felt that he is taking my, my words like, like, “What are you saying?” Or, “Why are you saying this?” Like, there is supervision. PP6

She clarified her feelings with the following:

I was really, really mad… but the way even his facial expression that he was doing with his face makes me feel like you’re not even taking my words serious. Like, as a mom, when I have something, and you have even—like, when I tell you my, my worries, you have to answer me with something that convince me, or even convince you as a principal. Like, do you feel this is enough, uh, supervision? PP6

Furthermore, PP8 was disappointed that she did not receive any of her daughter’s work from school for four months, and to find that her daughter was placed in a class full of Arabic students. She went to discuss these issues with the principal and vice-principal, but nothing was solved:

Actually I was shocked because I found that they are gathering the Arabs in one class and their teachers were not as good as I was expected. I know that is because of my high expectations, but I mean for my daughter I found that the sheets and the class work in general... this year she is in grade three, her sheets and her class work in grade two were harder and better than in grade three so I didn’t feel satisfied. I went to the school principal and I asked them for a meeting with the vice-principal and the principal, I brought everything: all of her sheets and her graphs of grade two and everything I have for grade three to show them that everything is different. But I didn’t find any... they just told me that they can’t move her from this class telling me, “That is your belief. We don’t classify people in different classes as you think.” But I told them that I want my daughter to be better and to learn more. When I found that her product in grade two is better than her work in grade three, that is very frustrating for me. PP8

She elaborated:

Actually he was very stiff as I directly asked them to switch her from this class to another class, because I am not satisfied. He told me that this is not acceptable; we cannot do that, as she is good. When I told him that I need some sheets for my daughter as she remains for four months without any papers in her bag, so I told him that I need some papers to come to me at home to know what she is doing at school. The principal himself told me, “If I found that the teacher send any papers from the school I will give her a bad evaluation.” PP8
Regrettably, when some parents suggested another way of communicating with their children, teachers did not accept it and appeared to be personally offended:

… do you know that the time I told her (my son) needs a special way of communication and, “You should think of reducing the punishment, or time out,” I felt that she was upset as I am telling her what to do. I felt that she want to say that I shouldn’t tell her what to do. As a result, she did not say hi to me for one week after this conversation. Even though she used to say hi to me when I pick up my son, and to say, “Go (her son) to your Mom.” After this conversation, she did not look at me, she did not speak with me and I keep looking to her to say hi, but there is no way she look at me. I felt that she was angry that I just comment on her way of communication with my child and suggested another way of communication for her to try with my son. PP11

Moreover, PP9 struggled to convince school personnel that her child didn’t need a special education program. She believed that her child only needed some support, as he was psychologically unwell. They did not respond to what she said:

My boy was psychologically not OK, he didn’t want to learn anything new because he felt that he is neglected and they are ignoring him. They had to try to help him without putting him in the IEP program. They can even wait till he finishes grade one then they can judge in grade two they have to wait some time. But they wanted to get rid of him from the start and they wanted him to be in the IEP and that is it. Throughout the year we are having discussions and meetings, as I was trying to convince them that it is not necessarily for my boy to go to the IEP he just needs some support. He needs some self-confidence and they were insisted to put him in the IEP. The secretary told my husband that she has no time to sit with him—that is their system. PP9

Surprisingly, when PP9 moved her son to another school, the evaluation of the new school with respect to her son was inconsistent with the evaluation of the previous school. She added:

They were a little bit biased, that is why he [her husband] needed to listen to someone neutral not us and not the other school. So he talked to her [his child’s teacher in the new school] and told her, “I need your evaluation,” so she told him, “Give me two weeks I will put your child under examination and I will get back to you after two weeks whether he needs an IEP or not,” and that is what really happened. She called us after two weeks and she told us that our son doesn’t need IEP and they will just supporting him by putting him in the ESL program, and that is it. It is proved that we were right, if the boy needed IEP they would never say no. … But here [the previous school] they told me that the priority [in the ESL class] is for who just come from his country and he doesn’t know anything about the language at all. So that really bothered me because there was an option to put him in the ESL class from the very beginning once he joined the school.

PP9
Equally important, parents mentioned in different places their worries with respect to the new Health and Physical Education curriculum and their concern that they were not involved in the decision-making process in implementing this curriculum. Parents had the following to say:

Actually, we are very worried about the new curriculum, especially for the little ones. For the older ones we already have passed that stage, even for my high school daughter you feel like she is mature and she already knows everything, but for someone like (daughter’s name) in grade four and you have to talk with her about dating and how to touch her private parts and if she doesn't want to be a girl she can turn to be a boy so I see that you are killing her purity when you talk with her about such stuff. PP1

The other annoying thing is the new curriculum which they want to apply: it is not a democracy act. When you force me to take something which [is] against our religion that means you want us to go outside this country or go for the home schooling option or for the private schools, or to find any other solution. PP9

The, the new curriculum. The—that even they, they didn’t send anything to the school. I, I came to know that it will be in, in place, starting the new year, and at least, parents should be, like, aware, sh—should—they should send something about this to, to parents, that they—“We will be teaching your, your child” such and such. They didn’t even do this, yeah. PP13

It is clear from parents’ voices that they are struggling to understand the Ontario educational system, as there is a lack of educational resources provided to them and an inconsistency in education that increases their confusion about the system. Parents are also concerned that school personnel do not welcome their ideas and feedback. Based on parents’ voices, there are legitimate reasons as to why parents need to have school resources that explain

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1 Beginning in September 2015 the revised health and physical education curriculum was implemented, as outlined in *Health and Physical Education, Interim Edition, 2010*. Parents in this study have several concerns regarding the new curriculum. Their concerns include, but are not limited to, teaching children about sex at a younger age than they had previously been taught, and teaching children that masturbation and gender transformation are acceptable. However, analyzing the new health curriculum, the facts and myths around it, and parents’ perspectives are topics which extend beyond the scope of the current study.
what their children do and study in school. These reasons are: to feel that they are connected with their children’s education and not relegated to outsider status; to follow up with their children, so that they can support them in reaching their full potential; to understand how teachers teach students, so they teach their children in a fashion congruent with current modes of teaching pedagogy that are suitable to their age; and, to feel that they are involved in their children's education. For many parents, their struggles to understand the Ontario educational system and to work collaboratively with school personnel led them to feel discouraged about being involved in their children’s education.

Types of Parental Involvement

Based on the work of Joyce Epstein (1987, 1995, 2005, 2010), there are six types of parental involvement in children’s education. These six types are parenting, involvement at home, communicating between parents and school personnel, volunteering in school, participating in school and board decisions (by attending school council or the board’s different committees), and approaching different community resources and services, agencies, or any service providers that strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning. To facilitate a clear understanding of these types, I have organized them under two categories of home-related activities and school-related activities. Both parenting and involvement at home are grouped under home-related activities, whereas communicating with school personnel, involvement in school, participating in decision-making, and approaching other community resources are grouped under school-related activities.

Parent participants in this study showed strong involvement in home-related activities. For school-related activities, parents were strongly involved in one out of the four types, which is communicating with school personnel. A few parents were also volunteering at school
occasionally and approaching community resources, while no parents were participating in school decisions or any other committee at the board level.

**Parental involvement in home-related activities**

All parent participants were involved in their children’s education in home-related activities. Based on parents’ stories, parents contributed to their children’s learning at home through the following activities:

- Setting home conditions that support children’s learning, and providing children with the resources they need for their education such as school supplies and fees for school trips.
- Investing in their children’s education by buying different books that include math, science, and language. In addition, some parents have their children take a tutorial.
- Enhancing their children’s learning by providing extra work at home, particularly in math and language.
- Supporting children with their homework and/or projects.
- Improving their children’s work habits.
- Providing opportunities for extracurricular activities such as swimming lessons.
- Supporting children in learning their first language and religion.

Parents in this study believed that supporting their children’s learning is one of their main roles and responsibilities towards their children. They invested in their children’s education, as they believed that education would ensure their children’s future:

I told them that our children’s education is a very important thing for me and I will never leave them without knowing what do they take at school. If that is your system so it is okay for me, with you I have no other solutions to do, but I can get some extra work to study with them. But you are disabling me that way, although I want to help you. That is the message I tried to convey before I leave, then I left. But actually, I am not satisfied with what is happening, as here it is not your choice to do something. PP8
Parents had high expectations for their children and could not accept that their children would attain anything less than a university degree.

So that is our culture, we came here for our children to give them an opportunity to excel and to join the university here. At least they have to be just like their parents, but also we need them to be better than us. PP7

Even though parents were involved in their children’s education at home, the lack of educational resources and the absence of a clear understanding of what their children study in school led parents to experience difficulties in supporting their children’s learning at home.

I face difficulties when I try to help her [her daughter] —it’s a big challenge for me, is a deficiency for books. If there are books like high school, I’ll be more than happy. [laughter] PP4

I found some difficulty to support her [his daughter], because I, I ha—I don’t have the material. I don’t have, like—like, even if you have, uh, this kind of class net information, as I was telling you before, so I just have one paper—one sheet of paper, mention, “Now, we are going to study science about the human body.” So, the human body—I can have some information from starting from grade one up ‘til someone is in medicine university, like. PP20

Some parents of this study reported that they had lost all interest in following up with their children’s learning even at home because school personnel did not respond to parents’ concerns and feedback, as presented in the barriers to parental involvement section.

**Parental involvement in school-related activities**

All parent participants communicated with school personnel whenever they had any concerns or to respond to any concerns that school personnel had about their children. However, for some parents language difficulties prevented them from communicating with their children’s teachers on a regular basis. All parents also had attended at least one parent-teacher interview after receiving their children’s report card; however, only seven parents (35% of parent participants) were volunteering in school. One of those parents was helping in the nutrition for learning program, participating in a fundraising bake sale, and providing translation assistance to
new Arabic-speaking families. Another parent was helping in the library, volunteering on field trips, and helping at the science fair. A third parent was helping her child’s teacher in the classroom. The other four parents were volunteering on field trips. The parents who were not volunteering in school attended school events such as science fair, a workshop for immigrants, or multicultural night; however, none of the parent participants attended school council. These results may indicate that immigrants are less involved in school-related activities. The current study reveals various barriers that prevent parents from being involved in school-related activities, as presented below.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Five barriers to parental involvement in children’s education were identified from the parents’ interviews. These barriers are language barriers, distraction, incognizance, disinterest, and cultural barriers. More details of these barriers are presented below, with the exception of cultural barriers, which will be presented in the following chapter as it requires deep understanding and is a major focus of the current study.

**Language barriers**

Parents who had been in Canada for more than five years mentioned that language differences were the greatest barriers to their communication with school personnel during their first years in Canada. For parents who had been in Canada five years or less, the language differences were a current major barrier to their involvement in their children’s education. Their difficulty in speaking English discouraged parents even from normal contact with school personnel:

Most of the times I think more than once before I go and speak with teachers because I cannot deliver all what I want to say. PP1
The problem is my language and that make me sometimes to be dependent on my husband for similar meetings. Therefore, if my husband is free and can attend with me, I will accept, for sure. I prefer for something like that my husband to be with me or he is the one to attend because his speaking is better than mine. So if he want to suggest something or say something, he will be able to do that better than me. If my language was good and I can express what I want, I would, for sure, attend. PP11

It is really a disaster when you meet a pharmacist and you know that she doesn’t know how to speak English. PP7

The difficulty to speak the language makes parents feel a lack of confidence in their ability to be involved in school-related activities at their children’s school. Parents expressed:

The first barrier I will think about is the language. I feel that other people can volunteer easily in the school because they have a good language but I will not be able to communicate well with students and teachers, so that really discourage me to be a volunteer at school. Maybe I will meet some of students who will not be able to understand what I am saying, so I will feel very embarrassed. This makes me to think many times before deciding to be volunteer at school. PP1

Because when I talk it is much easier because even if I am not talking properly they can understand me, but when they are answering my question it became very difficult. PP9

Moreover, in order to understand how much difficulty a lack of English fluency causes in various interactions, parents were asked to rate the difficulties that language causes in several situations. The results are presented in Figure 8.

As Figure 8 presents, more parents faced difficulties in three of the four situations. These situations are speaking with children’s teachers, understanding information presented at school meetings, and understanding staff/teachers when they answer their questions. The only situation in which the most parents experienced no difficulty is communicating with school personnel by phone. Many parents did not face difficulty in that situation because the communication by phone was limited to calling to impart an easily understood message, such as parents calling to report the absence of children, or the school calling to report that children were sick and needed
someone to pick them up. This figure still supports the finding that language difficulty is a barrier to immigrant involvement in their children’s education.

![Figure 8. The Rate of Difficulty that English Language Causes for Parents in Different School-Related Situations.](image)

**Distraction**

“I was so busy with my children and with my husband and because we were trying to reach settlement stage, so I was not be able to distract myself in many other things”.

Distraction in this analysis refers to the difficult circumstances that prevent immigrants from being involved in school-related activities. These circumstances include lack of time, low income, the absence of a safe place to keep their children, and busyness in one or more different responsibilities, such as taking care of their children, studying, working, or looking for a job. Ten parents reported that they have been distracted by these circumstances, and, as a result, they were not able to be involved in school-related activities. PP7 gave a detailed example of what she
went through during her first three years that prevented her from being involved in school-related activities. She explained:

I wish that will happen, they always send me notes about such things, like they send me that I can come to volunteer with them, and the parent council, and these kinds of things. But as I told you it has been three years since we came to Canada. Throughout these three years I was studying almost all the time except for the last few months. I was so busy with my children and with my husband and because we were trying to reach settlement stage, so I was not be able to distract myself in many other things. You can tell me that the parent council is only for an hour and it happens once a while and you can go. But my husband needs to study and he needs a calm atmosphere at home, I can’t leave the kids with him, and I don’t have anyone here who can help me by taking care of the kids. PP7

Other parents mentioned that lack of time and the inability to find someone to take care of their children were the main reasons why they did not volunteer at school:

For the council, I agreed, but …I declined at the end, I didn’t go, because it’s actually—it’s time was very late, and no one was staying with the kids at home, so… PP2

I am working with him at home, that is all. I check the website to see the things on it, and I try to get some ideas from the papers they send, and I surf the Internet to get some ideas from it. But it is very hard for me to volunteer at the school as I am working, and for the meeting I am not sure that I can attend it. The main thing I do is that I always study with him at home. PP9

Uh, as a Ph.D. student, most of the time, I don’t have time to this [volunteering at school]. [laughter] So, if it is not mandatory, I, I wouldn’t go, actually. I would like to save some time for my research, or, uh, yeah. PP13

Parents who were not volunteering at school nor attending school council would be willing to do so if their circumstances changed for the better:

Actually if I have time I will participate, as I mentioned I had time so I was attending any kind of meetings [when she was in her country]. But here as I am student so I don’t have enough time, but for sure if I have time I will participate. PP8

I, I would like to do this. I would like to be involved in the school community in, uh, in the council kind of stuff, but, uh, most of the time, I don’t have time. PP13

Parents also prefer to volunteer in tasks that do not require a long-term commitment, such as supervising field trips or attending events at school.
I don't have enough time to go to school to attend meetings and volunteer in the school. If it is a trip or something I can participate in as it is just one day and in a specific time, but it is hard for me to go to the school for twice or more. I don't have enough time, but for trips I went more than once with them. PP16

**Incognizance**

Incognizance in this study refers to the lack of knowledge about the Ontario educational system. For example, parents do not know how to navigate the system; do not know their roles, rights and responsibilities; and do not know different educational concepts and what they refer to. It is clear from parents’ stories that they struggled to advocate on behalf of their children due to the lack of knowledge about the system. Two excerpts from my interview with two different parents that reflect their struggle to advocate for their children are presented.

PP4 reported that her daughter complained that there was a girl in her class who teased her and made fun of her. PP4 talked with the daughter’s teacher to solve this bullying issue, but the teacher did not follow up with her as promised. PP4 was unhappy that her daughter was being bullied at school, but she couldn’t do anything for her, as she did not know the rules. Here is the conversation:

P: And my daughter now—I hate what is going with my daughter in the school this year, but I feel, uh, always is not alw—life is not always easy, and I’m looking for it from a positive point of view, that she is being stronger, but I’m sure that if some can—if some, if other parents, Canadians, going through what is happening, they will not staying, uh, quiet.

I: Why you think so?

P: Because they, they fight for their rights.

I: OK. Why you didn’t do the same?

P: Because you—sometimes, I feel I don’t know all the rules of the games.

I: Hmm.
P: When you—when your kids are raised up in the same society you, you lived in, you know, it’s upside down, but here, you are discovering it day by day.

I: Mm-hmm.

P: I am trying, but, you know, oh, I am trying, but I don’t know—did my understanding for the situation is right, or not? What they mean? Did they mean bad, or, uh, positive? You have feelings, and you have words.

Instead of taking action and advocating for her daughter to help her daughter feel safe in school, she tried to adjust to and accept the situation as it was - even though she was unhappy in her silence. But she did not know what the right action(s) she should have taken in this case would have been.

Parents’ lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities along with the rules of a new system could lead to severe problems. This is what happened to the daughter of PP2: the daughter was bullied for six months and the school personnel did not tell the parents. When the mother learned of the situation from her daughter and went to school, the principal took advantage of her ignorance of the system. Here is the story, as the mother recalled it:

P: For example, if one of my child have a problem at the school, I never know where is—what is my rights, and what’s my—and what’s the rights, you know, if for example, if the same problem happens with my daughter and with other child, and I don’t know exactly what’s my rights about how to solve this problem, uh, and I leave everything to the school, they may not treat, uh, my child with the same aspect as they treat other child with parents that know all the rights and all the rules here in the school. So, actually, we are only here since three or two years, so you never know all the rules and all the regulations of the schools.

I: [clears throat] What about your experience? Um, or can you give me example, if you have any?

P: It’s maybe an, a personal example. I’m not sure if it’s OK, or not.

I: It is OK for sure; it is about your personal experience.

P: For example, my daughter had a problem with a bullying—a problem from a friend of her at the school, and they didn’t contact with me, except my daughter, after six months, my daughter was crying at home, and when I go to the sch—talk to her, she said to me
that there is a girl who are bullying her, and beating her, and when I go to the principal—once he saw me, he said, “OK, yeah, I have just gone—I’m going to call you to not say that I didn’t tell you anything.” I said to him, “OK, I am here. What is going on?” He said, “No, it’s not a huge problem. They are friends, and we can treat it.” I said to him, “But it’s six months. You have to contact me.” If my daughter didn’t tell me—she is only 13 years old. She was in grade seven then, so it’s—you can’t say that she will told her parents, you know, so he didn’t get in contacting me, except after I knew already from my daughter, and I said to him, “OK, I trust you to solve it.” After a while, he didn’t solve anything. Um, when my daughter tried to return back the bullying to these—not return back bullying, but defend herself, he called me and said, “OK, your daughter did that, and that, and that,” and he didn’t call the parents of the other girl, to told them that she has something wrong, and when I said to him, “OK, but she did the same at the other girl,” he said, “OK, but the other parents want to call the police, and want to make it big.” So, now, at the other parents know the rules. Exactly, he was in their side. I didn’t know that I can call the police. I didn’t know that I can—that bullying is a huge problem here, as they are treating, so, at—it ends up that my daughter is a bad girl [laughter], and the other one is not. So, this is only a problem, for example.

The question arises as to how parents can be involved in a school in which their children do not feel safe and in which they are not treated the same way as any other children, not mainly because of discrimination, but because they do not know how to advocate on behalf of their children or how to navigate the system. It is very clear that some parents did not know that they could contact the school superintendent and the equity office if they had any concern related to their children’s safety and believed that the principal did not properly address it or was biased.

Another issue related to Incognizance is that parents were unaware of educational concepts that are related to school, which is revealed in the results of the awareness scale with respect to various categories of parental knowledge of features of their children’s school. The detailed results are presented in Figure 9.

As Figure 9 shows, in only two categories - volunteering opportunities and how to obtain information about their children’s education - parents with some degree of awareness outnumbered those with no awareness. Conversely, parents were unaware of both the role of school trustees and special education programs for gifted children (each at 95% of parents),
special education programs for children with learning difficulties (70%), and school council (60%). This figure indicates that these parents had limited knowledge about the opportunities that may have been available to their children as well as the different ways in which they could have sought help to support their children in terms of contacting a school trustee.

**Disinterest**

Disinterest in this study refers to parental loss of interest in being involved in their children’s education because they did not receive feedback or follow-up from school personnel regarding their concerns and because of the lack of cooperation between home and school. Almost half of parent participants (nine parents) mentioned their dissatisfaction with the feedback they received from school personnel.

*Figure 9. Participants' Awareness of Educational Concepts.*
Parents lost their interest to follow up with their children in home-related activities or to discuss any concern they may have related to their children’s teacher due to the lack of cooperation between home and school. Parents had the following to say:

They are highly relaxed, that’s why also after a while we lose interest to follow up with them because they give you the impression they don’t need your help. But in Egypt they were like asking us to help explicitly. Here they don’t, they say explicitly no, there’s no need to worry and we are okay and there’s no exam, there’s nothing. Everything is fine. PP3

I told her that they used to be in a good school in Egypt and I want them to be good when they return back and you already have a good system and my girl showed great progress but recently I didn’t see any progress. I was talking with her in a good way but she was very rude. As I told you the first thing she did that she showed me my daughter report card to prove to me that my girl is not good. And it was hard for me to keep convincing her that she was good and her previous school was good; I can’t tell all that details. I felt that this way of treating would not help me to talk throughout the rest of the discussion. They didn’t try to ask me about my problem; they tried to convince me that the problem is mine as my daughter is not good….. This year there is nothing to discuss with her as she is not a good teacher, and for (son’s name) as he is in JK so I never felt interested to go to discuss any things. PP8

I always send to ask her about what will happen; if there will be home reading. I examine what type of person she is. If she interacts with me that is good, otherwise I don’t try again if this is her personality type. PP10

No, I know that I can talk with him [the principal], but as I told you I really hated the school to the extent that I didn’t want to talk with them. PP16

In addition, receiving only positive feedback contributed to the disconnection that parents developed toward their children’s education.

To be honest with you, sometimes I feel that it’s some sort of automatically generated feedback and I doubt… I do not know… I’m not sure that there is software to generate these feedback, because I feel some repetitive sentences in a very repetitive way. I don’t feel that it’s humanly generated. And so, that’s why after a while after many reports I lose interest to read carefully the report cards, actually. PP3

Furthermore, parents lose their interest in school-related activities when school personnel do not welcome their ideas:
I never went to the council, actually. I have invited to this, and I said, “OK, I will go,” but I never had the chance to go. [laughter] So, um, but from, you know, from talking to them, and dealing with them, I know that they have their own rules and their own opinion, and whatever you talk, or say, or try to change in the system, they will not accept, so I feel it’s only wasting time, because you can go and hear, and say your opinion, but what is they make, or what the decision they will take, it’s the same decision that they took the last year, and the year before, and the year before, because, I feel that, uh, the system here—they didn’t try—like to try new things, or try to take another opinion different than them. They see only what they are doing. PP2

I strongly believe that they don’t listen … Which is really bad actually when you feel that everything you’re saying [is garbage] and nobody will listen and even nobody will allow you to talk and to give you time and so it’s not easy actually, especially if you are not talkative. Because some people are very, very talkative but at the end they can, they can stay half an hour without saying anything useful. And other people just one or two sentences, they say very useful stuff but nobody will listen… I remember also when I talked to the science and math professor, teacher, I told him that I’m a professor in (the name of specialization)\(^1\) and that I have an interesting course about (the topic name) and I can give it for free. And they [students of his daughter’s class] can come to attend a seminar on (the topic), but he didn’t pay any, any attention to me. And he didn’t comment. Maybe he thinks—I don’t know, but he was not welcoming the idea actually. He didn’t even comment or give me any feedback. I told him that I am a professor in (specialization) and a professor of (specialization) is fun for the kids and they can come here and try out a seminar about (the topic) but he didn’t listen. So, that's why I lost interest to offer any volunteering. PP3

Parents’ voices indicated that they were dissatisfied, as they believed that what they were saying was not that important to school personnel. As a result, they said that they had lost any interest in volunteering at school or attending school council.

**What Parents Need to Be More Involved in their Children’s Education**

Three subthemes have emerged from parents’ voices and stories that reflect what they need if they are to be more involved in their children’s education and to feel comfortable towards the Ontario educational system. These subthemes are the accessibility of educational resources and children’s work at school, providing child care so they can attend different meetings, and enhancing home-school communication. More details are presented below.

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\(^1\) For confidentiality purposes, I have removed all the information (specialization and course name) that may identify PP3, as he is well known in his field and within the Arab community.
The accessibility of educational resources and children’s work at school

Since one concern of parents was that they did not know what their children studied in school, the corresponding needs for parents are to have accessibility to educational resources and their children’s work on a regular basis and to have more collaborative communication with their children’s teacher. All parents said they would find it helpful to receive a clear description of what their children take in school. The provision of the general outline of the topics’ titles that parents said they had received was not sufficiently informative for parents and caused them to think that there was no curriculum. Curriculum in their view meant books that include the topics and the exercise after each lesson, so that they could grasp exactly what was required from students in each grade. Here is how parents expressed their wish for accessible educational resources and what they believe would help them be able to be more involved in their children’s education:

Uh, feeling accepted from the teacher. If I feel the teacher is accepting me, and if there is, uh, book—like high school here, they have the books, so you know what they—what your kids is taking in more details. PP4

We need to have a curriculum, like, guidelines, this is information they [students] need—like, back in our country, we have something called the—like, school book. .. PP20

I just need two things. I need a curriculum, a specific curriculum for grade one for example and it has to be taught to all kids who are in grade one and in any school; and books so I can study with my kids. And I need them not to be racists or practice any discrimination for my kids. PP9

I am not a teacher and I don’t know how to teach my kids; that is why I was trying to get resources. That is why I always say that I need resources as they don’t help them enough at school. I need them to help kids more than that, and let them do more work, kids’ minds can understand more. If they could give them more they will become experts. I am not talking about my kids only, all kids. I feel like they are teaching them how to be stupid, lazy, and indifferent. PP7
Providing childcare for different meetings

One of the challenges for immigrant parents to be involved in school-related activities is that parents often have young children and they do not know where to leave them. Parents in this study suggested that if childcare were provided for them, they would attend school meetings as well as volunteer at school. Here is what parents said:

Maybe it would be a good thing to provide a child care, especially for my situation as my husband was studying and I have to make the atmosphere suitable for him, and to take care of my sons and I cannot leave them to go anywhere, so it would be a good thing. It would be a good opportunity for all of us to go. PP7

I would like to go [attending school council] if they offer child care, it is better for me than sitting with my child at home. He will get benefit so do I and also my other son and the school itself will get benefit. PP12

They can offer a daycare or a room for moms who have young kids so they can leave their kids in that room and the mother can volunteer at the school. I think it will be an optimum solution. PP17

For me, child care for my young kids like a small day care to take care of my kids while I attend the meetings. I can be involved in everything if this is present. PP19

Enhancing home-school communication

Parent participants stated they need to have effective communication between home and school, as they are dissatisfied with not receiving feedback or follow-up from school personnel regarding their concerns and the lack of cooperation between home and school. The parents suggested different ways of increasing this communication. First, they would like to have a regular update of what their children do in school:

In Egypt there is the channel book, it is a kind of a channel between me and the teacher. Every day we have a kind of discussion, it is a written discussion between us. But for here the channel book is just for... you can find just three or four messages in my daughter’s channel book throughout the year so I don’t feel that it is a kind of channel. In Egypt, they used to staple a paper summarize what is given in the day, so I feel that is a channel because I know what is happening during the day. I don’t even need (daughter’s name) to tell me what did she take at school as they give me clearly what they take, so I
felt that it is really a channel book, but that is not the case here. If that happen it will be amazing... PP8

Uh… I would say that, if, if there is, like, better communication between the school and the, the parents, about the progress of the student, because you know, report cards are sent, like, every I don’t know how many months, but, uh, if there is maybe, like, monthly report, or monthly email, email where they send to us, to the parents that, “Your child has been doing this good, and this good, and this bad,” uh, this would be, like, um, uh, helping me to be more involved in my—in my student’s, uh, education—in my child’s education. So basically, sending—having more communication between the school and the parents. PP13

Second, parents of this study wanted teachers to initiate and encourage parent participation in their children’s education. They wanted teachers to start a conversation with them and to open more ways of parental engagement:

If something happens, some teachers send to me but there are some who don’t. When I go to a meeting, I hear that something happened but I didn’t know [about it]. .. There are some teachers who inform me once my son get hurt even a little bit. I have experience this. It depends on teacher’s personality, not the school. They have to try to make teachers more sociable, to know how to engage parents, to train them to be connected with parents at homes, not to be separated. PP10

If I didn’t ask her, she would never tell me anything. That is for my daughter, but also I feel that there is no engagement, like they invite us to school to know more. Like, last year’s teacher used to send us some papers to cut for the crafts so we also used to help and work with her, we feel how important the things they are doing are. PP18

Third, parents suggested that schools should increase the number of parent-teacher meetings. For example, PP11 suggested:

Try to increase the number of parent-teacher meeting. They never do a parent-teacher meeting either in JK or SK except only one time at the beginning of the school year. When they told us about the school and even at this meeting, you have only very limited time to talk with the teacher. Moreover, when I go and pick up (my son) and want to speak with the teacher, she has the time to tell me her bombs but when I start to reply, I found her in hurry and want to leave. She has time only to complain and tell me what my son did, but she has no time to listen to me. She needs to go to pick up her kids. It should be more time for parents to meet with teachers. PP11

Finally, parents suggested that schools should offer some classes to immigrants to educate them about the Ontario educational system. Parents need to understand the new
educational system; therefore, they suggested that schools provide them with some classes for that purpose. They expressed:

Actually, I don’t know if the school has this option or not, to make classes for immigrants parents to help them to know the education system and how things are going on, I don't know if they are doing things like that or not. If each school at the beginning of the year makes a special class for the immigrants parents to help them. I know that they are doing an orientation, but I think that will be different from the orientation as it will focus only on the new immigrants. PP15

They can make a regular meeting for all the parents, like they can invite all the parents at the beginning of the school year to explain for them more what is the council and what are the volunteering opportunities at the school, so all people can understand everything. They can make it more than once per year; they can ask all the parents and they have to explain what they exactly do and what they need from the parents. Now they just held it for themselves but the better way is to held a regular meeting with parents twice a year; for example, one at the beginning of the school year and another one in the mid-year to make sure that all the parents know about the council. And the second meeting is to remind them and to show them what they have accomplished, so they will encourage them to participate in the council. PP16

**Enhancing school cultural sensitivity**

Parents need to feel that the school culture reflects the population of the school. Therefore, they suggested that schools should hire school personnel and have volunteers from different cultures. They expressed:

I think if there is someone like us in the staff itself, someone who speaks the same language or have the same traditions so he can help you while volunteering in the school, he can tell you what to do and what not to do, so I think that would be much easier for me. PP1

And what I don’t like here actually is that the community within the school doesn’t reflect the multicultural community outside the school. Canada is a multicultural country. But when you go you will find that all the teachers are from a certain ethnic group. So, I barely find the image of Canada accurately reflected in the stuff at the school, okay? PP3

If they strongly invite people from different culture to attend the meeting [the school council], not only being satisfied that “we have some Canadians.” I want multicultural representatives. PP10
Parents also would like to have informal cultural gatherings that provide them with a sense of being a part of the community:

There are many other schools that allow such things. They can do activities like baking sale and the activity that serve the community but (son’s name school) doesn’t do anything of that. PP12

The more I know parents that have kids at school, the more I be involved, because we will—parents, when they meet each other, all the time, they speak about the kids. PP14

In addition, parents reported that they would like school personnel to be more culturally competent. They expressed:

The teachers should be more accepting different cultures, and talk with me. You know, when I need her, I can find her. PP4

I just need them not to discriminate people. I can’t say that all people here are treating Muslims in a bad way, but I need to let my kids feel that they are like other kids as that really affected them badly, and that what made me took the decision which I was talking about before we start, that is because there was a great pressure on me, maybe (husband's name) doesn’t feel the same. But I cannot live another year like that. PP9

**Conclusion**

Parent participants of this study had both positive and negative experiences with the Ontario educational system. The positive experiences they mentioned are as follows: first of all, the system enhanced students’ soft skills, such as presentation skills, creativity, and critical thinking. Second, teachers were able to differentiate between students based on their needs and interests. Third, parents felt generally that the school system was a welcoming environment.

However, four types of negative experiences have also been identified. First of all, parents complained that there was a lack of educational resources available to them that would allow them to understand what their children studied in school. Secondly, the inconsistency in the education system in terms of what children learn in the same subjects at the same grade level in different schools and in terms of how teachers communicate with parents is a significant
problem for parents; this inconsistency increases their struggle to understand the system. Thirdly, parents were concerned that their children who were good at school would lose interest in school and learning, as they had come to place only average expectations on themselves, were not challenged enough at school, and the school environment did not stimulate students to do their best. Finally, parents did not like the fact that many school personnel did not welcome their ideas and feedback.

Parents in this study were involved mainly in home-related activities such as studying with their children at home, supporting their children in extracurricular activities, and communicating with their children’s teachers. A few parents had volunteered at school, either in school activities or by attending school events. However, no parents had attended school council.

Barriers to parental involvement that emerged from this study include first and foremost the language barrier. Parents who had been in Canada for more than five years mentioned that language differences were the greatest barrier to their communication with school personnel during their first years in Canada. For parents who had been in Canada for less than five years, the language differences were still their current and major barrier to their involvement in their children’s education. The second major barrier is parents’ lack of knowledge about the educational system here in Ontario, in which parents did not know how to navigate the system; did not know their roles, rights, and responsibilities; and did not know different educational concepts and what they referred to. Third, some parents had lost interest in continued involvement in their children’s education because they did not receive feedback or follow-up communication from school personnel regarding their concerns and because of what they perceived as the lack of cooperation between home and school. Finally, as immigrants, parents faced difficult circumstances that prevented them from being involved in school-related
activities. These circumstances included lack of time, low income, the absence of a safe child care option, and commitment to one or more responsibilities such as taking care of their children, studying, working, or looking for a job.

Accordingly, the findings indicate that what parents need to be more involved in their children’s education are to have access to educational resources and their children’s work on a regular basis and to have more collaborative communication with their children’s teachers. Secondly, it would be helpful if parents had childcare for their young children provided for them when they have a meeting or are volunteering at school. Thirdly, parents want to have more effective communication between home and school, as they are dissatisfied with not receiving feedback or follow-up from school personnel regarding their concerns, and with the lack of cooperation between home and school. Finally, parents want to feel that the school culture is sensitive and reflects the school population.

Based on parents’ voices and stories, it is clear that there are cultural differences that contributed to parents’ and schools’ mutual misunderstanding and miscommunication. Therefore, the next chapter presents these cultural differences and discusses how these differences influence the communication between immigrant parents and school personnel.
Chapter 4-2: Cultural Differences

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter focus on the third question of this study: How do cultural differences influence immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education?

As discussed in the literature review of this study, cultural differences are one of the main barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study (Chapter 2-2) proposes that four main dimensions differentiate countries from each other and could explain, or at least help us better understand, the cultural barriers. These dimensions are collectivism vs. individualism, high power distance vs. low power distance, high uncertainty avoidance vs. low uncertainty avoidance, and high context vs. low context.

Immigrant parents of this study came from a country that is characterized by high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context culture. In order to understand the consequences of these cultural dimensional differences on immigrants’ involvement in children’s education when they live in a country that ranks low in these dimensions, I have developed several hypothetical scenarios. The purpose of these scenarios in the current study was to collect information about the impact of the four cultural dimensions on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. I asked parent participants how they would respond to different hypothetical scenarios that reflect the consequences of the four cultural dimensions. I also proposed the same scenarios to school personnel participants and asked them how they would hope a parent could respond in each scenario. The purpose of this process was to compare parents’ and school personnel’s responses to identify whether any of these cultural dimensions influences parents’ responses.
Assuming these four cultural dimensions exist, I had expected that parent participants from Egypt, a country which ranks high on these dimensions, to respond differently from how school personnel from Canada, a country which ranks low on these dimensions, would like them to respond.

Therefore, this chapter is organized based on the two primary subthemes of cultural differences. These subthemes are the consequences of the four cultural dimensions and the emerging cultural barriers. More details about the findings are presented below.

**The Consequences of the Four Cultural Dimensions**

Figure 10 presents the expected consequences of the four cultural dimensions for both parents’ and school personnel’s responses to the hypothetical scenarios.

As presented in Figure 13, for the power distance dimension I expected participants to see themselves as not equal to school personnel and to place themselves in a subordinate position. I also expected participants to not advocate on behalf of their children and to instead accept the decisions of school personnel without taking part in negotiating. I expected that this pattern could lead to ineffective communication between parents and school personnel. For uncertainty avoidance, I expected my study participants to avoid unknown situations and to indicate a lack of trust with school personnel. As a result, they may not feel comfortable participating in opportunities such as school council, for example. For collectivism dimension, in a conflict situation between parents and school personnel I expected study participants to not voice their actual feelings in order to allow others to save face, meaning that they would avoid causing offence to others. As a result, they may feel unsatisfied or unhappy with the results of conflict situations. This dissatisfaction may lead to miscommunication between immigrants and school personnel, as people from Canada may not understand why immigrants are still unhappy.
Finally, for high context dimension I expected that study participants would not provide detailed answers and that they would expect teachers to understand what they mean without asking detailed questions. As a result, miscommunication between study participants and school personnel could occur.

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<tr>
<th>What was Expected</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High/Low Power Distance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents seeing themselves in subordinate position to school authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerless parents (do not advocate on behalf of their children)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High/Low Collectivism</strong></td>
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<td>Parents allowing teachers to save face in a conflict situation</td>
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<td>Close relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High/Low Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding unknown situations</td>
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<td>Feeling uncomfortable with unusual situations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High/Low Cultural Context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscommunication due to lack of background information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal message is indirect and implicit and is understood based on the context</td>
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*Figure 10.* The Expected Consequences of the Four Cultural Dimensions.
However, the findings of this study do not support the majority of these expectations. The findings of each of the four dimensions are presented below.

**Positive consequences of high power distance cultural differences**

All parent participants advocated for their children and negotiated school decisions. This was clear from two data sources: first, from their responses and stories related to general questions about their involvement in their children’s education, as discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 4-1); and second, from their responses to the power distance hypothetical scenarios. Parents expressed that they were not powerless and that they would communicate with school personnel whenever they had a concern:

I will talk to the teacher…I will ask for a meeting. PP8

I have to exaggerate this problem if the school didn’t take any action with the boy who hit him. PP9

I’ll definitely raise the case to, to—I don’t know, to the highest-level…PP13

I will explain for the teacher…I’ll try to explain for him [the principal], if he doesn’t understand, and if my son has a big problem, I, uh, can go to school board. PP14

So it will be a big deal, I will talk with the teacher and if I didn’t take a specific answer from the teacher, so I will go to the principal and maybe I will go to who’s above the principal, if it is a really serious thing. PP15

I will try to convince her that my daughter is good, and I will advise her to try another way with my daughter. PP17

Parents also voiced that high power distance practices do exist in their home country. For example, parents mentioned different occasions when they were not able to discuss their opinions with their teachers, based on the expectation that they should accept what the teachers had said. Parents reflected that they had not had a chance to learn presentation skills and critical thinking:
…. Here they express their opinions…I couldn’t express my opinion at school. I mean, I couldn’t say that this is right and this is wrong. Impossible, I mean, we were just raised based on that the right is right and the wrong is wrong, that’s it. On the other hand, you have nowadays, we hear children say “my opinion is this, I can do this in right way, this is wrong”. We didn’t have opinion, honesty. PP10

What is really nice here that they focus on how you express yourself, which we don’t have at all in our countries and we really miss it now because we have never been taught to express ourselves. PP12

They really care about kids’ character, which is a very important point that we miss in our educational system - the kids’ character building I mean. PP15

However, the consequences of this dimension on immigrants were unexpectedly positive and not negative as had been anticipated. Immigrants who had first lived in a high power distance country and now lived in a low power distance country were able to distinguish between respect for individuality in Canada's practices and respect for authority in their home country's practices. As a result, parent participants expressed their appreciation of school personnel who conveyed that all people are equal and showed respect in their communication with students and their parents.

I feel that they are just normal people; you can talk with them in an informal way. The principal never looks down upon you, as he is a principal. You just take an appointment to talk with him but when he meets you he talks in a very respectable way. He did not try to underestimate me… they are very normal and very nice. I was really astonished when I came to Canada and I found them easily stand with students in the morning line even before teachers and they talk with them in a very normal way. PP1

I like that they ….listen to them, so if a kid … wants to tell anything, it’s, it’s nice that they respect him, and they …give him time to talk, and they wait completely ‘til he finishes, and then respond to what he’s saying. PP5

Actually I like how they show respect to the kids...PP8

Moreover, parents also indicated that they do not like power to be distributed unequally and mentioned that they could not express their opinions in their home country:

Since we were kids we are brought up knowing that teachers are very respectable images. We cannot be easy with them or even talk with them, but here kids talk with their
teachers like if they are friends. So kids telling them everything without feeling afraid, so they get over that fear. Even the principal himself, he talks with kids and plays with them; unlike in Egypt, the principal is a red line no one is able to talk with him. PP1

In fact, our culture in Egypt, perhaps we do not have rights or we do not practice our rights. Here, when something like that happened, we do not feel that it is a big deal because you already used to not practice your right. Whatever happened will be, for sure, way better than what we face in Egypt. Whatever happened here is not like what is happening in our country. PP1

These findings challenge the notion of Hofstede (2011) that people in high power distance countries accept unequal distribution of power. Hofstede (2011) defines power distance as “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (p. 9). Parents in this study did not demonstrate any rejection of low power distance practices in school such as respect for individuality (rather than authority) and everyone having equal rights. Instead, they showed their appreciation of these practices and critiqued their country of origin’s high power distance practices such as respect for authority and lack of opportunities to challenge decisions. It is difficult for an outsider researcher to make judgments from this surface observation or from what participants said in a survey instrument without an in depth understanding of people's behaviour and the political, economic, and social factors which influence their decisions and behaviours. More research is needed to update our understanding of people’s behaviours in high power distance countries.

“If I know that these are the rules, I will ask”: The consequence of collectivism dimension

The findings of this study demonstrate that almost half of participants (10 parents) mentioned that they would avoid embarrassing school personnel in a conflict situation. For example, in the following scenario parents were asked to express what they would do or say:

“Imagine that when you arrive at a meeting with your child’s teacher to discuss his report card, you realize that another teacher with whom you have worked before as a volunteer is also attending this meeting. No one has told you why this teacher is attending the
meeting. You do not feel comfortable as the meeting was supposed to be attended only by you and your child’s teacher. What would you say or do?”

Parents stated that they would respond by avoiding embarrassing the teacher who had attended the meeting without their permission, even if they felt uncomfortable:

I will feel really embarrassed when -- if I asked the teacher and at the same time I don’t want to embarrass her. Maybe I can ask my daughter’s teacher without let that other teacher hear me not to feel embarrassed and not to let her feel embarrassed too. PP1

I, I may feel uncomfortable, but I will not say anything. I will attend the meeting. I will finish the meeting and go. . .PP2

Maybe I feel uncomfortable but I will not do anything. What I would really do, I wouldn’t do anything. Yeah. Because actually I feel that we are human and I would care more about the psychological effect if I say anything against her more than my rights. I am a human; I am not a machine. But some people here are strictly following the rule in a very inhuman way but I would care more about if I say anything against her it would hurt her. So, this for me, it would not hurt me more if she stays. PP3

It will be a very embarrassing situation. I will not be able to say it in a strong way that I don’t accept that or to tell her “why do you attend the meeting?” Maybe I don’t have this skill to tell her that she is not supposed to attend the meeting. Maybe I will not have the suitable thing to do…. I mean that we didn’t used to refuse anyone’s request. Like when someone comes to ask you for a favour you always say “yes” even if that will affect or bother you. But we don’t like to bother anyone, that is all. PP18

In contrast, when school personnel were asked what they would hope a parent would do or say in this scenario, they all agreed that parents should communicate what they feel:

I would hope that the parent would say, “Why is Mrs. So-and-so attending this meeting? Do you work with my child?” and if the answer is, “No,” and they have nothing to do with that, I think that the parent should feel comfortable saying, um, “I’m not really sure that your attendance at this meeting is appropriate.” SPP1

I would hope the parent would express their feelings about this person being there, and would ask, you know, “Why are we having this person here? I wasn’t expecting them.” Um, certainly there—it, it would be in that parent’s, um, right to, to just say, “I’m, I’m not feeling comfortable about this meeting. Could we reschedule?” and maybe at that point in time, they could talk to a principal and, uh, and explain what the situation was. SPP2

I would say, um, you know, recognize her shock and tell them they didn’t—that you didn’t realize that the other teacher would be there, and if there was a concern. Is there
concern, why she’s here, or is there, uh. . . or, she could make up a reason why it’s not gonna work for her that day, and then make a new appointment and specifically say, “I’d just like to meet with just the teacher about my child, not any additional teachers.” If she’s not happy with the situation, she could do that too. SPP3

The parent doesn’t feel comfortable with it. They could say, “No, I’d like to have a private conversation, with just you and I.” OK? Um, they have that right, um, then the—I would hope that, at that point, then the other teacher leaves. SPP4

Hopefully, the mother feels comfortable to say something, and the mother has a right to know who’s gonna be in the meeting, and all the—also, the mother has a right to speak to whomever, so it’s, it’s fine to just say, um, “I’d really like to have a conversation with you alone.” SPP5

It is clear from school personnel’s responses that they believed that parents have the right to determine who may attend any of their meetings, and that parents should communicate whatever concern they have. Interestingly, if parents know that they have the right to communicate their feelings, and that this type of communication is acceptable, then they may react differently. The following are two examples that illustrate this point:

But, if I feel uncomfortable with her, and I know that it’s my right to say to her, “Why you are here?” I will say it. PP2

If I know that these are the rules, I will ask. Because I don’t know that things have to be like that. PP8

In addition, when parents knew that school personnel would expect them to freely communicate their concerns and that this communication would not be considered offensive, then they would react differently in different situations. For example, in response to the above scenario, PP7 gave a good illustration of this point:

There is something I have learned after living in that country: here no one is feeling shy to tell people whatever he wants to say. If I am not comfortable if she will attend the meeting, or I want to tell the teacher something personal and I don’t want anyone to hear that so sure I will tell the teacher that I want to just talk with her. I will tell her that I like it to be an individual interview, and I don’t want anyone to attend with us. I see that is my own right to say so. PP7
However, before PP7 knew that she could communicate her feelings directly, her response to a similar situation that had occurred with her child was as follows:

We don’t use to hurt people; I can’t tell her directly. The message I tried to deliver this day that my son is a very loving person so try to treat him with love he will obey you. I told her that anyone who treats him in a loving way he will do anything for you… However, they have no mercy upon you, they can tell you anything directly, it is very normal for them, even if it is a good or a bad thing, they can tell anything about you in front of you. But for us we always care about others’ feelings. PP7

In another scenario parents were asked what they would do if their children told them that their teacher had not treated them fairly. Parents’ responses were similar to school personnel’s responses, which is that they would talk with their children first to try and understand the situation, and then they would speak with the teacher if they had concerns. However, parents’ responses indicated that they would not speak directly to the teacher and explain their children’s feelings. Instead, they would tell her in an indirect way to not hurt her feelings. Here are some examples of parents’ responses:

I will go to the school for sure to talk with her and to the principal but I will talk to her first, I will talk with her softly telling her that my boy doesn’t feel well. I will not talk to her directly. I will tell her indirectly that my boy is not feeling okay and he doesn’t accept being in the class. …I don’t want to hurt her, I don’t want to hurt anyone while talking, and I like to speak in a decent way. PP9

I’ll tell her, “My son”—or my daughter—“say for me that you don’t—or maybe by wrong, he feel that you not fair at class, or, or you not good with him,” …in our culture, we don’t speak directly. We aren’t like here Canadians. I, I found here, in Canada, it is more difficult—different than our home country. Like, here in Canada [if they are busy, they would say we are busy and do not come today], if I see you, I say for you, “You can come anytime,” and maybe I’ll be busy, but I say like this. We get used to that, so that maybe I know the teacher is not—my son is right, and she is not fair, but, uh, she treats him unfair, but I want, at the beginning, to be polite. That’s our culture. PP14

Again, when parents understood how teachers perceived parents’ concerns, their responses would be different:

I will talk with the teacher, because I don’t think that here people are sophisticated like Egypt. In Egypt they may say “her mother talked with me” and such things. I think they
don’t think in the same way here. I can clarify things with her. I can ask her about what did my daughter said just to know more about what is going on. PP8

PP15 further explained:

Because here... actually I really sad to say “here” and “there” but that is the truth. Here they focus on the situation, not the person. I will tell you the scenario what if that happened I think he will really feel sad because his student felt that way and he will try to solve this problem, he will try by any mean to solve that problem. If I were in Egypt, that would be a totally different scenario. Sure he will take it personally, indeed. You know in Egypt I will never go to talk with the teacher; I will ask someone who knows the principal to talk with the principal to let him punish this teacher. PP15

PP8’s and PP15’s responses suggest that immigrants who do not know the expected way(s) of communication in the host country would communicate based on their former practices in their home country. This tendency may increase the opportunities of misunderstanding and miscommunication between parents and school personnel. For example, parents mentioned that they would speak indirectly so as to not hurt teachers’ feelings. When parents speak indirectly, it may be more likely that teachers do not receive the message that parents want to deliver and as a result the situation may stay the same without any resolution.

The findings of this study indicate that the collectivism dimension influences parents’ communication with school personnel. Parents tend to avoid causing offence to others and do not voice their concerns directly. This tendency continues until parents realize that it is acceptable to speak directly with school personnel to voice their concerns, and that this expression of concerns would not cause any offence if it is delivered respectfully. It is expected from parents in an individualism society, in which concerns about “face” are weak, to advocate for themselves and their children.

**Uncertainty avoidance**

Parents were asked what they would do or say in two different scenarios. The first scenario asked parents what they would do if the principal of their children’s school invited them
to attend the school council and they did not have much information about it. The second scenario asked parents what they would do if a trip had been planned for their children and they had a concern about their children’s safety due to not being familiar with the location of the trip. I had anticipated that parents who ranked high on uncertainty avoidance would avoid attending the school council and would not send their children on the trip.

Interestingly, the findings of the hypothetical scenarios indicated that the uncertainty avoidance differed among parent participants from the same culture; as well, the same parents responded differently in different situations. For example, PP1 would not allow her child to go on a field trip if she was not familiar with the location:

To be honest, I will not let her to go, I know she will be sad and maybe she will cry but I will try to give her any other thing like a new toy or a present not to let her go to a place I don’t know. PP1

However, this same participant said that she would accept the principal’s invitation even though she did not have much information about the school council:

For sure, I will be happy that they appreciated me and they consider us one of them and want us to be involved in the community and that will be a very nice thing. PP1

PP10 would attend the school council only if the principal invited her. Otherwise, she would avoid attending school council without knowing the other members or whether they would accept her or not.

Yes, if the principal told me to come, and I have experience I would go, but if one of my friends told me something like this I wouldn’t go…I have to know the people who are sitting with me who are sitting in the meeting. Are they going to accept me to be among them? PP10

Some parents suggested different strategies such as volunteering to reduce uncertainty avoidance:

As another solution, I can be a volunteer in that trip to be with her and to see that place for the first time. PP1
If I’m allowed to volunteer, I would, I would go for sure, because I like to volunteer, so that would be a good option, because at that—like, at the same time, I would, um, I would be with my, my child at the same time. PP6

Other parents suggested asking questions to gather more information or to ensure their children’s safety:

I can ask him more about what will happen in that meeting, or I can go to attend the meeting and decide whether it is suitable for me or not and whether I can offer any help. It is just a meeting so it is not a big deal if I go to attend and decide whether I can help or not. PP16

I will ask about the things I feel worry about... as I told you, I went to the principal and I told him that I have some concerns about so and so and he had a solution for every concern I had. But if he doesn't have any solutions, I will refuse to send her to that trip. PP16

Alternatively, other parents would attend the school council upon invitation even without having much prior information about the school council:

I will go there and I will listen to them and if I can do anything I will do it, I will not do anything which I don’t want to do, I will listen and decide. PP8

Probably I will accept because I like to care about anything that is related to (daughter’s name) and what is happening inside the school. I feel that parents can change some decisions that may be useful for their kids. PP18

I’m gonna accept this invitation, and actually, I, uh, I regretted that I was not one of the councillor. I never attend one of these councils in the previous school. PP20

In contrast, PP17 would completely avoid attending school council if she did not have much information about it and she would not send her child on a trip when she was unfamiliar with its location:

If I didn’t get enough information, I don’t think that I will attend. I have to know what am I going to listen to. PP17

That is already happened. She has a trip on the last day of school, they will go to “African Lion Safari”. I don’t know who will go from her class, but I will not send her because I feel that the place is not suitable for her age, as there are animals and I felt worried about that, as it is a new place and I have to go with her. PP17
Other parents’ responses indicated that they may accept the principal’s invitation if they could speak English well and had enough time. Parents had the following to say:

If my life will be better sure I will go; I will talk with the principal in a friendly way and tell him that I really want to attend but I will be afraid that I will not understand... all topics so if I missed anything and if I came to you would you help me in understanding it and help me to be with you? So sure I love to attend something like that. PP7

I would go if my language is good, so I can talk and say my opinion and understand what they are talking about. I do understand everything but talking is a little bit hard for me. So I can go if my language is good, because I want to get benefits from other people’s experiences. PP9

Maybe I will accept. But the problem is my language and that make me sometimes to be dependent on my husband for similar meetings. Therefore, if my husband is free and can attend with me, I will accept, for sure. I prefer for something like that my husband to be with me or he is the one to attend because his speaking is better than mine. So if he wants to suggest something or say something, he will be able to do that better than me. If my language was good and I can express what I want, I would, for sure, attend. PP11

Uh, as a Ph.D. student, most of the time, I don’t have time to this. [laughter] So, if it is not mandatory, I, I wouldn’t go, actually. I would like to save some time for my research, or, uh, yeah. PP13

In spite of uncertainty avoidance differing among parent participants’ responses to hypothetical scenarios, for some parents it could be a possible explanation for avoiding attending school council. In addition, uncertainty avoidance could be a possible explanation of parents’ negative experiences regarding the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system, as discussed in Chapter 4-1. Hofstede (1980, 2001) defines high uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel uncomfortable in unstructured situations including unknown, surprising, and unusual situations. Parent participants of this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system, as they have come from a country in which the educational system is very consistent throughout. However, it is not clear whether their negative experience of the inconsistency in education is due to their avoidance of unstructured situations, or is due to their lack of information about the system so that its
inconsistency increases their confusion and causes difficulty in understanding the system. More research is needed to understand immigrants’ perceptions about the inconsistency in education and whether these perceptions are different from the perceptions of the people of the host country.

**High context**

In high context cultures, there is a high use of nonverbal elements such as voice tone and facial expression; as well, the verbal message is indirect and implicit and the message should be understood from the context. On the other hand, in low context cultures the verbal message is often direct and explicit and the message is delivered more by words than by nonverbal cues. In this study, I had expected that parent participants from a high context country would not provide more details during interactions with school personnel and expect school personnel to understand what they were saying from indirect speech. The findings of this study indicated that not all parent participants communicate with school personnel in a high context way of communication.

High cultural context practices were not clear from parents’ responses to the hypothetical scenarios (see Appendix E). Generally, parents said they would provide teachers with more details about their children’s characteristics and mention both positive and negative characteristics, they would seek clarification about what the teacher had said if they had not understood the word or did not get the message due to language difficulties, and they would ask more questions about their children’s progress if they felt that what the teacher had told them was not enough.

However, the corresponding characteristics of high context appeared from parents’ stories and their responses to general questions; this was clear in two different situations. First, as presented in the collectivism section, when parents attempted to save the face of other people,
they tended to speak indirectly and assume that school personnel would receive their message. For example, PP9 said that she would go to speak with her child’s teacher if her child had told her that his teacher had not treated him fairly:

I will go to the school for sure to talk with her and to the principal but I will talk to her first, I will talk with her softly telling her that my boy doesn’t feel well. I will not talk to her directly. I will tell her indirectly that my boy is not feeling okay and he doesn’t accept being in the class. PP9

When I asked her why she would speak in an indirect way, she responded:

I don’t want to hurt her. I don’t want to hurt anyone while talking, and I like to speak in a decent way. And at the same time I don’t want her to change with my son because I went to talk with her she may say “that boy’s mother came and told me so and so”. And for sure if I told her directly she will tell me that didn’t happen, so I don’t want to put myself in such situation. So I will talk with her in a different way. I will tell her that my son is not okay and he doesn’t accept being in the class and she will understand between the lines if my son came and told me that the teacher doesn’t treat him in a good way. But if that lasts even after I went and talk with her in an indirect way so I will not go to talk to her again, that time I will go to the principal and I will tell her that I talked with the teacher and she didn’t care about what I have said. PP9

What PP9 said indicates possibly a lack of trust in school personnel and an assumption that the teacher would understand the message conveyed between the lines. This assumption would probably lead to misunderstanding if the teacher did not get the message.

Second, some parents expected that teachers would understand what they wanted from the context. To explain this point the following example is provided:

If I am sitting in a Cairo Sugar Cane Juice Store, it may be enough to say, another one, please. The waiter knows that I just drank a glass of sugar cane juice. Because my remark is meaningful only in context, it is an example of high-context communication. (Adapted from Hooker, 2008, p. 2)

For example, PP1 asked her child’s teacher to provide her with worksheets for her daughter to practice at home. Although she had expected him to send these sheets regularly, he sent the
worksheets only one time after her request. Here is how she expressed her feelings about this outcome:

For the teacher I mentioned before (girl’s name) grade three teacher although I feel that he is not good with the kids but at the same time when I was asking him to send me working sheets or homework he easily accept my request and send me the next day some sheets, they try to be cooperative. But when I stop asking him, he will forget to send me any homework. PP1

She elaborated:

As I told you before when I go to the teacher and tell him that I need extra things to help her, he gave me one time and 90 times he did not send anything. I have to tell him many times; I have to be noisy to get some stuff to help my daughter succeed in school. I have to tell I want this, I want this to practice with my daughter. PP1

Similarly, PP8 expected her child’s teacher to send her some sheets on a regular basis. She explained:

That is exactly what happened with me with (daughter’s name) teacher this year; she told me that she is doing very good and I told her that this is not what I am expecting from her in grade three, so I need more documents and I asked her “could you send me the topics covered each week because a week is not a short period so I need more documents.” Actually she gave me for just one week and then stopped to send me anything. PP8

For PP1, asking the same question many times seems annoying: she thinks she is being “noisy” if she asks the same question several times. Yet her child’s teacher may not have received the message that the parent needs to have sheets sent home on a regular basis, as the parent had not requested this explicitly. This could likely lead to dissatisfaction or misunderstanding.

As presented in the findings regarding the four cultural dimensions subthemes, one dimension of high power distance has positive consequences on how parents perceive the new system. The other three dimensions, including collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context, differ among parent participants and could be possible barriers for some parents against
becoming involved in their children’s education or against forming effective communication with school personnel.

As mentioned on page (111), there is no evidence in the findings that parent participants who stay longer in Canada have different perspectives on the hypothetical scenarios than those who are recent immigrants. Perhaps this is because other factors such as how much each parent participated in their children’s education, the expectations each parent had for their children, and the information each parent obtained about the educational system regardless of the time they spent in Canada, or the amount of resources available to parents. Also analyzing the relationships between participant demographics and cultural differences is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is a worthy focus for future research.

**Emerging Cultural Barriers**

Other cultural barriers which emerged from the data may explain the difficulties that parents face in understanding the Ontario educational system as well as in becoming involved in their children’s education. Two subthemes were identified: different systems, and ways of expressions. More details are provided below.

**Different systems**

Figure 11 displays the main identified differences between the two educational systems based on parents’ and school personnel’s voices. Three main differences between the two systems were identified: teaching methods, student evaluation and assessment, and parent roles.

School personnel believed that one of the barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education is that immigrants come from countries with different educational systems. SPP1 indicated that Ontario’s educational system is based on an inquiry learning system in which teachers train students to acquire critical thinking and creativity skills and students learn
by observing, experimenting, and asking questions. Contrastingly, some immigrant families may have been taught by a rote learning system in which teachers provide instructions to students to memorize the subjects. SPP1 believed that these differences prevent immigrants from understanding the new system:

My immigrant parents had their kids in school, perhaps in a different country a year or two, three years ago, and then they’re here, so they expect the school experience will be the same. Um, in some countries, um, there still very much a, um, an idea of, “We’re just going, um, do a lot of rote teaching with worksheets, and grades are a very important thing, and tests, and memorization.” And that’s not always the way that we’re teaching now, where we’re using more of a constructivist approach, or a workshop approach, or getting the kids to think about things as opposed to memorize things. And so, it can be problematic if the school system that your child was in for, say, grades three, four, and five is very different-looking than the school system. All of a sudden your child’s landed in grade six, seven, and eight. SPP1

Similarly, SPP5 observed a difference between teaching in Ontario and teaching in immigrant countries:

I’ve had parents who are not happy with how we teach kids, um, absolutely, and I am not there as a teach you—teacher to argue over which system is better. That’s not my job, to do that. My job is to listen to them, and also describe, and try to show them, um, the way of learning in the classrooms now, in Canada, in Ontario… I can hear things that, “Well, in our home country, um, in grade four, they would be further ahead in math.” And that might very well be true, but when I show the parent the kind of enquiry they’re doing in math, which is very high-level thinking of solving a problem, they wouldn’t be doing that in their home country, and the parent recognizes that, and so I’m not there to say, “I’m right, and you’re wrong.” I’m there to say, “There are other ways of doing this, and this is how we’re doing it.” SPP5

In addition, another point of difference identified by school personnel is the regularity of exams:

What I notice—probably the most apparent cultural difference is just, um, parents’ understanding about report cards, parents’ understanding about, um, how we move from grade to grade, without necessarily having a special examination at the end of the school term, whereas, from where they’re coming from, the education system might look very different, where there are certain rudimentary exams that the students need to do in order to advance to the next grade level. So, there have been some cultural differences around that, and helping to understand that this is what our education system like is in [sic] Ontario. SPP6
Figure 11. The Main Identified Differences Between Educational Systems in Egypt and Ontario.

The concept of homework in Ontario’s educational system may differ from what immigrants have been used to in their home country’s educational system:
I think that, the, often, the, what they expect from the academic piece is very different, so I'll often have parents, um, who expect, depending on the culture, a lot more homework. Um, they might think that it would be normal to have two or three hours of homework every day, where that’s not a Canadian experience, um, where, um, they are more used to a rote method of teaching, as opposed to sort of a critical thinking method of teaching, where, uh, we are going now, but again, I have that problem with my North American parents as well, at times. SPP1

While parents believed the following:

For (daughter’s name) last year, one of the problem I was facing that they didn’t give her extra homework, or extra sheets so I can help her at home and know what she took at school. Unlike Egypt you have all books and you know every day what they took and what they did in the school. PP1

Anywhere else they always try to make children work and study; they always give them homework and assignments to do, in addition to weekly quizzes and monthly exams and there are marks at the end of each exam, you receive a report card for each month. I feel that by this way you make children work and study more, they are kids so sure you have to follow up with them; whether they take homework or not. They give the kids homework which can help you to work with them more; the result is that you have excellent kids. When I came to Canada I found out that here elementary school means fun, alright? PP7

For example, in our country the thing that motivate children to study and do the homework is that schools require homework and teachers follow up with children to ensure everyone done his/her homework, so when you tell your child “study and do your homework, so your teacher will be happy from you and you will be with the good children who finished their homework”, he can listen to you. If you were talking with him all the day to do some activities that are not required from school, he will not do it and listen to you. PP11

Parents also mentioned that in Egypt’s educational system students received the same books that teachers used at school; therefore, parents understood what their children should study on a daily basis. But in Ontario’s educational system no books are provided to students; therefore, parents struggled to understand the system. Parents mentioned the following examples:

I want to follow up with my daughter’s education. I feel it is very hard for me, and I feel it is very hard because, uh, in my experience, in Egypt, we always have the same book—the teacher has a book; parents have the book. Students have the book in the school, and parents have the same book at home, so students and their parents know what they are taking. PP4
In our countries and according to our culture we are not used to search the Internet for everything; we have books and syllabus instead. I always receive my kid’s syllabus and I know what does it contain then I start to help them studying. Here I need to do everything all by myself. PP7

In addition, parents indicated that their home country’s educational system had high expectations for all students. Therefore, competition existed and was expected between all students. Parents expressed the following:

In Egypt there was the spirit of competition. Kids always wanted to improve their marks and grades, for my girls who were brought up in Egypt were really different than the other two who brought up here. My kids who got an education in Egypt always love to be number one. Here teachers always tell them that grade (B) is okay it is good and that is enough but I want them to take (A). Here they say it is too hard to have grade (A); it is for specific students, I can’t remember what they call it. PP1

Also, the competition here—schools don’t consider it, or they don’t give a very big intention to the competition between kids, because usually, the teacher says, “Oh, each kid, each kid has his abilities and his things. Don’t compare yourself with others.” So, this is not good. I believe, when kids feel that they can’t compete with other friends, they try to work and do their best. PP2

I don’t see them motivated to compete and get better marks or better grades. PP3

Like for example, my son wants to be successful in his life and he wants to join a good university to add value in the society he is living in. But if he doesn’t want to be like that he will never be. If he wants to play and waste his time he will never be successful here, because there is no one who is helping students here. We as parents help him, but for the school it doesn’t do anything, although for us all the education has to be at school. Here they never encourage kids to aim high; they always tell students that everything is okay and you are good and awesome and you are doing a great job. I feel that here they care more to build the student’s character as a sociable character, not academically. PP7

In contrast, SPP1 thinks that having high expectations is not feasible to all students:

There are misunderstandings based on language sometimes, um, there are misunderstandings when, um, you know, for example, in the Ontario system, a B mark, a grade of a B or a level 3, um, a grade of 75 in a seven/eight school is considered a good mark. It is the standard, um, in many, many other school systems, um, the only gold standard is an A, and so, sometimes where we think a kid is doing just fine, because they’re receiving a B, or the standard, sometimes immigrant families would be confused or thinking that that’s not a good mark, um, and wanting that A. Um, so, there’s those kinds of misunderstandings, but I don’t think they’re conflicts, necessarily. SPP1
SPP1 elaborated:

In the Ontario system, because the standard is a B, an A is probably much harder to attain. In my experience, some immigrant families, just like some Canadian families, um, do have very high expectations for their children, um, and maybe sometimes overly high expectations, thinking that if there isn’t the A, if they don’t go to the IB program, if they don’t achieve to a very high level, they’re not going to be successful in life, and I’m not sure that that’s true. SPP1

Moreover, the way teachers evaluate students in Ontario’s educational system differed from what parent participants had expected:

I kept asking the teacher about my daughter and she told me that she is good and she was participating in the class then when I received the report it was so different from what she was saying. I went to ask her why you are not writing that in the report, she told me that they are evaluating students in a different way like if she is asking a lot for help so that would affect her marks, the other thing if she is not always focusing in the class that could affect her behaviour marks. But when I go to ask the teacher she has to tell me that she is good, because academically she is good. But she is not just evaluating her academically; there are some marks for behaviour like side talks with friends and when she is for example wants to go to the toilet and the teacher told her to wait if she kept asking for going so that is a bad thing. What I mean that the teacher gives marks for other things than we expect we just expect the teacher to evaluate the kid for her educational level like she can answer questions correctly and things like that. But when I asked the teacher she made things clear for me: she told me “when I told you that she is good, I mean that she is good as all, she is ok I didn't mean that she will take all the perfect marks”. PP1

As a consequence of not knowing the way teachers evaluate students in Ontario’s educational system, PP1 felt the following:

I felt like she was lying on me because she told me something and what I got in the report was extremely different. I was shocked when I saw the report. So I had to act with my girl in a different way. I had to tell her that she has to be good and to concentrate with the teacher and obey her teacher, she had to know that things were important just like being excellent in the class.

Parents considered that their main role was to support their children in studying and practicing academic subjects at home to reach their full potential. For example:

They never give her a specific topic and let me do with her an extra research on the Internet. They never let me work with her at home, they totally putting me aside. That made me work with her in a different resource, like Egypt curriculum or any other things,
as I don’t have a defined plan. In Egypt they totally involve parents in the educational system and definitely I know what (daughter’s name) took at school in details. I know what did they took in every minute at school. So I was cleverer than here….You know the problem is that I was living with a system in which parents were totally involved in the educational system’s details to the extent that I know if the questions in the exam were easy or difficult, then I shifted to live with a system where I am not involved by any means in it, that what puzzled me. PP8

This year they didn’t have any homework to do at home at all. But in SK sometimes they gave him some homework to do. But if I saw (C) in his report card I feel that I am negligent. PP12

She [the teacher] has to give me some things to do with my daughter at home and then corrects it, like the reading homework for example. As my daughter takes language, math, and science but they don’t let me interfere in math and science. They just ask me to help her with language, because she has to memorize some words throughout the week so she will be able to read and write. PP17

At the same time, school personnel did not expect children to study at home and they expected parents to be involved in school-related activities:

They’re basically saying, “I can’t help, so I will pay for a tutor to work with my child, because I want them to do the best that they can in school.” Other parents, they will just encourage their child at home to do homework, and that’s a difficulty in our system right now, because many teachers are not giving homework. Our system is not supporting homework, so when there’s no homework, which has been given by a teacher, parents are actually—immigrant families are very—finding it very difficult, because they don’t know what to do. You know, our system is so different than many, many countries, where we don’t have a book, that on page 67, it’s—that’s what we’re doing today, and then parents can look at it and go, “Oh, yeah, I know what that is,” and help their child. So, without homework, I think a lot of parents are struggling. SPP5

And so, I know not all parents can attend every event, but when we have opportunities to come in and meet the teachers, or have interviews, or we have special events at the school, I think that, um, as many parents as possible I hope should be participating in those events, because it, it shows the students and the teachers and the school that, again, we’re all in this together, and we’re all here—it’s all important, and that it’s not just the work in the classroom that’s important. It’s the, the things—everything that’s happening in the school that helps to, to support students and families through the education system, uh, regardless of their cultural background, regardless of what country they’re from. We’re all—we all need to be approaching it together. SPP10

To summarize, three main differences between the two systems were identified: teaching methods, student evaluation and assessment, and parent roles. These differences between the two
systems function as a barrier for immigrants to fully understand the Ontario educational system. In particular, parents mentioned that they had not received support to understand the new system. As a result, parents had different expectations than school personnel. Parents expectations were as follows:

- Students study at home and receive homework.
- Students in the same grade will learn the same concepts.
- Teachers have high expectations for all students.
- Students’ evaluations reflect their academic achievement.

Ontario’s educational system does not support these expectations. The system is based on the inquiry learning system in which no homework should be provided to students, students’ grades not only reflect academic achievement but also reflect the (body of evidence) of students’ progress, and teachers can use different initiatives for learning. Therefore, inconsistency is acceptable. These differences could lead to misunderstanding.

**Ways of expression**

Another cultural barrier identified from parents’ stories is alternative ways of expression. Ways of expression in this study refers to parent participants not using the common words that have been used and understood to refer to a certain meaning in the education system when they present their concerns. As a result, misunderstandings between parents and school personnel may appear.

**Common words**

Some common words have been used to give a certain meaning in the Ontario educational system. If parents use alternative words, then school personnel will not receive the same message as if parents had used the common words, as presented below.
Feeling unsafe vs. feeling bad

PP2 mentioned that her daughter had been bullied for six months at school and none of the school personnel had told her about her daughter’s issue. When she learned about the problem from her daughter, who was crying and did not want to go to school, PP2 discussed the issue with the principal. She described her daughter’s feelings by saying she “felt bad”. This did not give the same message as it would have if she had said “she felt unsafe”. Here is how she expressed herself:

After all these problems, and I know about it, and I went to the principal, and told him that my daughter was feeling bad at home, and you didn’t tell me—“Yeah, yeah, I was just asking for your phone, to call you”. After six months, OK? So, I said to him, “OK, I trust you. Why didn’t you call the parents of the girl—and told them that she is making problem for another girl?” he replied “Actually, you are neighbours, and I don’t want you to be, you know— they make problem, make it a huge problem. They are neighbours and they are playing together.” I asked him, “Are you afraid? Is this girl is very dangerous like this?” “No, no, no. I know this girl since she was a kid. She is in the school, and—but I don’t want make—to make problems between friends. I will try to solve it.” I said, “OK. I trust you,” because, actually I trusted him at that time. “I trust you to solve this problem, and if you need anything, please let me know, but I don’t want (her daughter) to be—to feel bad, more than this.” He said to me, “OK,” and I left. PP2

The principal did not solve the problem, nor did he contact the bully’s parents. However, when PP2’s daughter defended herself, the principal’s reaction was different:

So, he said, “Yeah, the other parents are insisting in calling the police, and I will not agree that a student in my school feel unsafe.” So I asked him, “Are you talking about (her daughter), or the other girl?” He said “No, the other girl. She feels unsafe.” I told him, “Actually, I feel unsafe here, because my daughter was in this problem six months, and you didn’t feel bad that she is feeling unsafe, and she was crying every day; she was bawling every day. She was—she didn’t—at the end, she didn’t want to come to school, and you didn’t do anything, and now, for only a problem for one day, you feel bad that a girl in your school feels unsafe!”

Even though this situation may include a discriminatory attitude by the principal, as PP2 felt, the way the parent delivered her message could be a factor for the principal’s reaction. “Feeling unsafe” gives a strong sense of fearfulness and danger rather than “feeling bad”: a term which is
ambiguous and unclear. In addition, rather than being related to the language, this confusion is
more related to the common usage of the word within a certain culture. While “feeling bad”
indicates there is a problem, this will not be understood in Canadian culture as “feeling unsafe”.

**I want/need vs. my child’s wants/needs**

Parents tend to represent their children’s needs using the first person narrative instead of
the third person narrative. This could lead to misunderstanding between parents and teachers.
When teachers think a child is doing fine, parents believe their children are capable of doing
more and could lose interest if they are not engaged enough. However, they present this fact
from their point of view, not from their children’s point of view - a stance which could lead the
teacher to communicate defensively. For example, PP8 found that her child had learned nothing
new this year, and had already learned everything from the previous year. She told the teacher
the following:

That is exactly what happened with me with (daughter’s name) teacher this year; she told
me that she is doing very good and I told her that this is not what I am expecting from her
in grade 3. I brought all (daughter’s name)'s portfolio for the previous year to show her
my daughter's work which was more than amazing, to compare it with what I receive for
the last four months. I told her that I didn't talk from the beginning of the year; I waited
since the beginning of the year and I feel that things are not going well but I was waiting
for anything to happen. I told her that my daughter didn’t take any social studies
throughout the four months. I told the vice principal all of these things. But when I went
to them for the second time they were ready, so they attacked me. That is why I didn’t
talk with them again. PP8

I believe that if this mother had expressed what she wanted from her child’s perspective,
the teacher would have understood her message and responded accordingly instead of responding
in a defensive attitude. For example, she could have said: “my child would like to be **challenged**.
How can she be kept **interested in** the materials? She is quite advanced”; or “How can you find
ways to keep my child **engaged** in learning? What resources are available to her?” Words such
as challenged, interested in, and engaged would give teachers the message that a child is capable of doing more work. Accordingly, they would respond to the child’s needs.

Immigrants do not know such technical words. It is the system’s responsibility to teach parents how to advocate for their children and know which appropriate terms are to be used in different situations.

**Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter indicate that cultural differences are a barrier to Egyptian immigrant participants’ involvement in children’s education. The four cultural dimensions examined in this study include high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context. The findings indicated that high power distance dimension has a positive impact on how Egyptian parents perceive school personnel.

This finding does not support Hofstede’s assumption that people in a high power distance country accept an unequal distribution of power, as Egyptian participants in this study did not demonstrate any rejection of low power distance practices such as respect toward individuality, not authority; and everyone having equal rights. Instead, they showed their appreciation of these practices and critiqued their country of origin’s high power distance practices such as respect toward authority and lack of opportunities to challenge authority’s decisions. This finding questions Hofstede’s interpretation of people’s behaviour in high power distance countries without examining political, economic, social, and religious systems. In a study that has extended Hofstede’s work, Wu (2006) has suggested that cultural dimensions in a specific culture are not static and can be changed when the political, societal, and economic environments change, and that many cultural theories should be updated and re-evaluated periodically.

In addition, the findings related to the other three dimensions of collectivism, uncertainty
avoidance, and cultural context indicated that the influence of these dimensions on participants’ involvement in their children’s education differed among Egyptian participants of this study who are from the same culture. This suggests that while studying cultural differences, attention should be paid to individual differences within members of the same culture. Leung and Cohen (2011) reached the same conclusion, reporting that “... those who study cultural differences sometimes do not pay much attention to individual variation or treat it as error” and “within any given culture, individuals can vary widely from each other” (p. 507).

The dimension that appears to have the most significant influence on Egyptian participants’ communication with school personnel is collectivism dimension. Egyptian parents of this study tended to avoid causing offence to others and to not voice their concerns directly. This behaviour continued until parents learned that it is acceptable to voice their concern by speaking with school personnel without causing any offence, as parents in an individualism society in which face consciousness is weak are expected to advocate for themselves and their children.

Understanding this expectation is essential for both Egyptian immigrants as well as school personnel to avoid potential misunderstandings if Egyptian immigrant parents do not voice their concerns. Similarly, Chinese parents also need to understand the impact of this cultural difference dimension, as reported by Zhong (2011): “Chinese immigrant parents are not familiar with the Canadian school system; they are not sure what to say and with whom to talk. They are afraid that they may offend the teachers if they ask or say something inappropriate, so they choose to remain silent” (p. 111).

In spite of uncertainty avoidance differing among the parent participants’ responses to hypothetical scenarios, for some parents this uncertainty avoidance could be a possible
explanation for avoiding attending school council. Baker and Carson (2011) found that people who rated high on uncertainty avoidance used adaptation and attachment techniques to deal with risk. Egyptian parents of this study tended to use some strategies to reduce uncertainty avoidance such as volunteering at their children’s school and asking questions to school personnel to clarify their concerns or worries. This indicates the willingness of Egyptian immigrant parents to adapt to the new environment and that they will make the effort necessary to feel that they are a part of the school system.

In addition, uncertainty avoidance could be a possible explanation for Egyptian immigrants’ negative experiences regarding the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system. Hofstede (1980, 2001) defines high uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel uncomfortable in unstructured situations including unknown, surprising, and unusual situations. Parent participants of this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system, in contrast to their country of origin in which the educational system is very consistent throughout the entire country.

However, it is not clear whether their negative experience of the inconsistency in education is a result of their avoidance of unstructured situations or is instead due to their lack of information about the system with its inconsistency increasing their confusion. More research is needed to understand immigrants’ perceptions about the inconsistency in education and whether these perceptions are different from the perceptions of the people of the host country.

Moreover, the effect of the high context dimension was not very clear from Egyptian immigrants’ responses. However, for a few parents, it is possible that the high context dimension could lead to misunderstandings between parents and school personnel. These corresponding characteristics appeared in two different situations. First, when parents wanted to save other
people’s face, they tended to speak indirectly, assuming that school personnel would receive their message. However, school personnel who are only accustomed to understanding direct speech may not receive their implied message. Second, when parents expected school personnel to understand their requests based upon the context, school personnel tended to understand only explicit requests. Immigrant parents need to understand that their requests and questions to school personnel will not bother or offend school personnel, as it is part of school personnel’s responsibility to answer parents’ questions and to provide them with available resources to support their children.

The differences between Ontario’s educational system and Egyptian immigrants’ country of origin’s educational system in terms of teaching methods, students’ evaluation and assessment, and parents’ roles form barriers to immigrants’ understanding of the Ontario educational system. Furthermore, immigrant participants were not familiar with the technical words that are commonly used in communicating specific concerns. Thus, it is the responsibility of schools and social services that serve immigrants to provide more information about the characteristics of Ontario’s education system and the rationale for the teaching practices to the immigrant population.

While this study demonstrates that cultural differences are barriers to immigrants’ effective involvement in their children’s education, these differences varied between Egyptian parent participants; moreover, these differences were not permanent. Consequently, if parents understand these differences, they will not have difficulty in understanding and communicating with school personnel. Therefore, it is important to bridge these cultural differences. Accordingly, it would be useful for settlement workers, school personnel, community workers, social workers, and other frontline professionals who are helping immigrants to understand their
children’s new educational system to be aware of the cultural differences identified in this study, and adjust their support accordingly. Correspondingly, it is also beneficial for immigrants themselves to acquire knowledge of cultural differences that may help them to navigate the system. This study suggests that schools should provide both immigrant parents and school personnel with workshops that demonstrate the effects of cultural differences that have been identified in this study.
Chapter 4-3: Acculturation Journey

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter answer the fourth question of this study: What is the acculturation process that immigrants go through in their new society, and how does this process influence parents’ participation in their children’s education?

Based on the findings of the previous chapter (Chapter 4-2: Cultural Differences), participants of this study continued to act in the new setting (Canada) as they did in the previous setting (Egypt) until they became aware of the expectations and understood their rights and responsibilities within the new setting. At this point they changed their behaviour accordingly to align with the expectations of citizens in the new setting. However, rather than being simple, this process is complicated as it involves not only immigrants, but also people of the host country and how they perceive and respond to immigrants being in the new country. Acculturation refers to this process that describes how people function in a new society after moving from the society in which they were initially raised.

For any process, there is always a certain desirable outcome(s), which would be called a successful outcome. In terms of the acculturation process of immigrants in a democratic and multicultural society, the desirable outcome is integration in which immigrants participate in their new society and feel that they are part of the new society while at the same time they are able to continue practicing their own culture or beliefs. However, this desirable outcome of integration is affected by the conditions surrounding immigrants, as these conditions influence their acculturation process. Therefore, the contents of this chapter are organized into several subthemes that reflect the conditions, process, and outcomes of participants’ acculturation journey in their new society, Canada.
Figure 12 illustrates the three components of immigrants’ acculturation journey and the corresponding subthemes for each component.

**Acculturation Journey**

- **Acculturation Conditions**
  - Advantages and constraints

- **Acculturation Process**
  - Facing the unknown
  - Struggling to feel settled

- **Acculturation Outcome**
  - Partly involved/integrated

*Figure 12. Acculturation Journey Subthemes.*

**Acculturation conditions**

Acculturation conditions refer to the advantages and constraints that parents face, which either promote or discourage their involvement in their children’s education. As discussed in Chapter 4-1, parents generally reported that their children’s school environment was welcoming and teachers were collaborative. This accepting atmosphere is considered to be advantageous for immigrants in promoting parents’ involvement in their children’s education. However, the findings in Chapter 4-2 indicated that language and cultural differences are barriers to immigrant parental involvement. Participants’ struggles of navigating between two different cultures and two different educational systems are constraints to their acculturation process. In addition, the following subsection outlines other constraints to immigrants’ successful integration outcome.
Discrimination and hidden assumptions

Three-quarters of participants (15 parents) reported situations in which they perceived that they or their children were subjected to discriminatory behaviour and hidden assumptions by school personnel. In response to my question about experiences of discrimination, PP1 felt that her daughter’s teacher behaved in a racist manner to her daughter and spoke with PP1 in an inappropriate way while discussing her daughter’s work:

For example, (daughter’s name) when she was in high school she had a subject named world religion[s], this subject is about all religions. The teacher of this specific subject was really bothering my daughter. When she did any research, he told her that you just copied that from computer even if she tried to prove for him that is her own work. … Even he yelled at me once in the phone telling me “your daughter is cheating and she copies everything from the internet and I will give her bad marks for that, I will not let her pass the course”. I really felt so scared from what he told me, as she was in her last year before college so these marks would affect her…At the end of the year, we went to meet the vice principal and the principal and they called the headmaster who felt sympathy with my girl. And she read all the things that (daughter’s name) wrote. She told them that he is wrong on judging the girl like that. The same situation happened again with one of my friend’s girl so you feel like he is racist with girls who are putting veils. So that is what I see from that teacher and also from the Art teacher; I think she was treating them in a really bad way. PP1

In another report, PP10 was very upset that her son’s teacher had commented on her child’s clothing:

Sometimes my son likes to wear certain clothes, I mean: he loves to wear them, he goes to the school wearing them, especially (the youngest son), he likes to wear the same clothes for a week or ten days in a row. But I wash them, he wears them clean, I mean. Once my son came to me with laughter on his face. He says, “Mama, did you see what happened today?” I said, “What happened?” He said, “The Social Studies teacher told me ‘Oh (son’s name) what is this? You didn’t change your clothes since a month?’” I heard this information as if someone poured water on me [clapping]. This is a shame! I told my son, “You have embarrassed us”, “You brought the bad reputation for us, you didn’t listen to me, and so on?” And my son laughs; he took it as a joke! But, I, honestly, was mad, and intended to go to the teacher but my husband stopped me. He told me, “It doesn't matter; you will make the problem bigger”. I told him, “No, he doesn't have the right to tell this to the child. Suppose that I can’t afford clothes to my child; or I don't have money to buy clothes? Suppose anything, he doesn’t know. My son will wear new suit everyday”. And I wanted to write in his agenda “Thank you for convincing (my child) to wear new clothes everyday”. But again, my husband said, “I don’t like making
troubles, I hate making problems”. For me, it is not making troubles; it is about defending my right. I feel that they call these troubles. But I wanted to go to reply to him that you don’t have the right or to go first to the principal and tell him that the teacher has no right to say that to the boy. Here, there are poor and rich children, as long as his clothes are clean; they don’t have stains on them, he doesn’t have the right to say that. And you see, people here in Canada wear whatever they want. PP10

While the behaviour of this teacher may not have been motivated by racial or religious discrimination what is important is that the parent felt disrespected.

The analysis of the data indicated that the parent participants in this study felt discrimination was more evident in the communication between parents and school administrators than in the communication between parents and their children’s teachers. PP7 described how her child’s school secretary treated her unfairly:

So I told him [her son] “go and I will come for you in the last period of the day.” So I went to the school before the day ends and I asked the office to go to my son and they refused saying “you cannot go inside now as they have an assessment”. So I told her that I will wait for him as it was just half an hour till the day ends, so I asked her in which office shall I wait. So I see that her reaction was not good, she was rude like she wants to say “how you are coming without taking an appointment and you want to go inside?” Although I have told her the entire story; that my boy refused to come to school and I promised him if he went I would come for him at the end of the day in the last period. So she had to understand the situation, it doesn't need an appointment and such things. (…) In that day she gave me the teacher’s extension to make an appointment with her then come to see her, so I take the extension. Another time my older son was having an issue in the class and I needed to ask his teacher about something, so I went again to the office to make an appointment with his teacher, she told me I gave you the teacher’s extension before. I told her that it was for my young son, he had another problem, but I’m talking now about my elder son. So I feel that when you go to ask about anything you feel like they are not nice with you. Their appearances are very deceptive; they are always smiling, but when you start to ask about anything they treat you in a very bad way, which depends on my personal experience with them. PP7

An attempt at communicating with the school secretary led to an even worse outcome with PP8.

She explained:

I changed my address to register for them in that school, so I gave her the contract. I took their forms from the school but I didn’t know that I have to move physically; I thought that if I changed my address so it is okay. But she told me that I am a liar, it was really a big problem. I really felt bad, as she was very rude. I told her that I already signed the
contract since May and I was asking if I could move my daughter as I can commute her. But she got it in a different way, but at the end she told me it is okay. But in general her way in dealing with others is not welcoming; she doesn’t let you feel that things are nice and so I am not the only one who is complaining about her. All my neighbours know that she is not nice… sometimes if I call to tell them I want to talk with (daughter’s name) urgently, they told me “no we cannot get her for you” and after that they call her. But in the other school they let me feel that there is no problem in that and they used to tell me call us again and you can talk to your daughter and sometimes they call me, they let me feel that everything is easy and okay. But here she let me suffer to call my daughter. In that day (daughter’s name) would like me to get her a game and I told her that I will not get you that game until you finish to read that part, so she finished her task but she forgot to take her board game so I was sad, and if I went to school to give it to her, I will miss my university, and my schedule was very tight. That is why I wanted to call her; she [the secretary] let me feel that it is a big thing. I called her first, she told me that we couldn’t reach her and then I called again I found (daughter’s name) answered me. I mean that she makes things seem harder, but in the old school they told me “it is okay, we will call you back, just give us a number to call you in”. PP8

In addition, bitterness and doubt result when a parent does not know the exact rules and feels that a school secretary is being unfair. PP9 expressed:

… They are treated us in a different way, and when I gave the school a notice that we are going to a summer vacation, she told us “the kids are out and when you come back you have to register them again”. I don’t know what she was talking about; it is the first time for me to see such a thing. Have you ever heard about that? What I know is that all people can take their summer vacation whenever they want even if one took it before the year-end. One of my neighbours here left at the beginning of June and she just give the school a notice and that is it. And when her children came back they didn’t tell her to make any new registration. That happened from three or four years, and she called me yesterday to tell me that I have to make a registration for my kids once we come back. For sure, it doesn’t matter, as I have the right to put my kids at the school whenever I come but why she changed her words, I feel that is because we are Muslims. Actually I don’t know. PP9

PP9 added that she felt discriminated against in another situation when school personnel insisted that her son needed an Individual Education Plan (IEP) program:

Maybe it is a discrimination act because we are Muslims and because of my hijab. Maybe if that happened with a Canadian they would never act like that. … even when my son entered grade two they didn’t evaluate him to know whether he still needs the IEP or not. It is a whole year passed so they had to evaluate him to know how he is doing now, they could give him an exam paper or anything to know his level, and they have to send me the papers of both years; this one and the last year’s paper. When he went to the other school they didn’t put him in IEP and that really proved that there was discrimination in
that school. If he really needs the IEP they would put him in the IEP program, as it is not our school, so that really proved that they discriminate Muslims. PP9

Another issue that parent participants suffered from is hidden assumptions. PP11 felt frustrated that the school secretary had called her many times to pick up her son, as they thought “he might be sick or have a fever or virus”:

In regarding to people who work in the office, they did something that made me upset. For example, last year, they contacted me many times and told me that my son is sick, has a problem. When I went to see him and pick him up, I found that he was very well and he was very fine. After picking him up and going home, I found him playing and jumping without any problem. I asked them how you get to know he is sick? They replied, “Because his face is red, we thought he might be sick or has fever or virus.” I told them my son when he go outside in a cold weather, his face becomes red, this is his normal. But they said, “No this is too much, the red colour is so obvious and he is warm”. I told them that when I went home, I measured his temperature, and found it normal. He did not have fever. But they insisted that there was a problem with my child. In addition, they made him feel that he has a problem; they gave him a placebo effect. When they saw his face is red, they put their hand on his forehead and saying “Oh no, you are sick, you have fever, you seem sick”. As a result, my son became to feel he was sick and he used the placebo effect and started to believe he was really sick and started to say “oh I feel tired” and started to act like someone [who] is sick. When the school staff did that several times; calling me to come to pick up my son, and when I picked him and went home and measured his temperature and found that he is ok without any symptoms, I get very frustrated. PP11

PP11 also felt discriminated against when she felt that her son’s teacher was blaming her for her child’s behaviour. She expressed:

When she [the teacher] complained about him, I feel that she blames me of his behaviour, as this is the way we raise our children. I feel that she wants to say that “you are doing something wrong at home that influence him and makes him to say these bad words or behave in this way”. I feel that she is angry from me. When she talked to me she gave me the feeling that it is my mistake. For example, I will show you her way; look at me “today he did that and that. And I told him but he did not care” [glowering face]. She was very angry and I felt she is very angry from me; she gave me a dirty look and blamed me as I raised my child on this behaviour. And I wanted to let her know that all what he learnt is from her class that she did not pay attention to what children did. I feel from her eyes that she blamed me, as I am the one who teach him what he did or this is Arab way of raising children. Perhaps, she sees that there are problems in Arab countries, and then there is something wrong with Arabs and how they raise their children. Therefore, teachers focus on Arab children more than any other one and that is why she sees only my child do these problems; she did not see how other children hurt my child deeply. PP11
Moreover, PP5 was unhappy that her son’s teacher had assumed that she was violent with her son just because she is an Arab person:

They (the school) have a problem that anyone Arab must have some violence at home. She was imagining that we were hitting our kids and violence and so on, but we were not like that at all. PP5

Facing discrimination influences parents’ acculturation process and causes them to feel that they do not belong. PP2 expressed this point in two different situations. First, she recalled a conversation with the principal regarding her daughter’s bullying issue:

I said to him, “actually—I told my daughter one word yesterday, and regret saying it, but now, I am happy that I said it to her,” so he asked me, “What is this word that you said to her?” I told him, “I told her: You will never be one of them, and they will never treat you like one of them.” And I think this is true. PP2

Second, PP2 described her feelings of detachment from the new society while explaining a discriminatory situation that she had experienced:

I feel bad, OK? I am here only for a few years, and I am not sure if I live here for all my life or not, so I can accept it for a period of time, but I feel bad for the people who are living here, and who think that they are Canadian, and they will be treated as a citizen Canadian, but at the end, they will not, because if they will face the same problem, because no one—the principal—didn’t know that I have passport, or not—a Canadian passport or not. He didn’t know that I am a citizen, or not. What only he knows that I am wearing a scarf, and I am Arabic person, or I am Muslim, or I am Egyptian, so—and he treated me [based on that]. I feel very bad, but usually I say, “OK, it’s only a few years, and I will go, because I am here only for work, for a research work for a few years, so I am not actually living here for a long time.” But, I feel more bad when I think that this will be the situation if I will live here all my life, and lying to myself, say, “I am Canadian,” and I am not. PP2

If the conditions surrounding immigrants do not stimulate their motivation to feel that they are members of the new society who are treated equally as other citizens, then immigrants’ acculturation process toward integration is more likely to be derailed. In spite of these frustrating
conditions, immigrants have no choice but to go through the acculturation process as long as they communicate with others and go about their daily lives outside of their own homes.

**Acculturation Process**

Acculturation process is experienced by immigrants when they face their new environment. This includes the psychological and mental processes that immigrants undergo and whether or not they are conscious of these processes.

Two identified subthemes emerged from the data that reflect parent perceptions of the acculturation process: facing the unknown and struggling to feel settled.

**Facing the unknown**

Almost all parents of this study (16 parents) experienced a lack of knowledge about almost everything in the new environment. Most immigrants have no prior experience of their new culture and must learn everything in the context of their new environment from basic tasks such as shopping, finding affordable housing, and accessing health services to more complex tasks such as understanding how Ontario’s educational systems work and what their rights and responsibilities are. Existing in this state of unknown or doubt led some parent participants to suffer from certain culture shock symptoms including depression and loss of self-confidence, and led others to feel that they are in the wrong place. PP7 explained how she and her children experienced culture shock:

The first year I came to Canada we faced the culture shock thing, which happened to me and also to my kids. I have to study to work to improve ourselves, I mean me and my husband, however we came to Canada as skilled workers, which means; they need pharmacists here so they needed us to come. After we came to Canada we found out that the process is very difficult; it is very expensive, I mean the exams, and it is not easy to pass the exam from the first time. So we had the burden of the children’s studying as they don’t have a syllabus and we felt that they are weak in their school, and we were really depressed because of that. They used to come every day to say “Mama we are not good at school, we don't know anything.” They don’t know how to deal with other kids. PP7
PP7 elaborated on her children’s sense of not belonging:

It is a very bad feeling; I can accept anything but the problem was for my children. Once we came here and the kids started to go to school, there was nobody who wanted to talk with them, no one wanted to deal with them by any means. They started to tell me “We are black.” However, we don’t have a black complexion, we are just having wheaten complexion, they kept telling me: “We are black, we are ugly and no one likes to deal or play with us because of that.”…. My kids have some feelings and love that they couldn’t express for the other kids. Other kids don’t have our culture as Egyptians, we care and love and that is why I consider it as a culture shock for my children. They came here to see that all people here are white; their complexion is not that white so it was like a shock for them. They thought that they will see ordinary people like us as we see in our countries, but they found different people who tend to get away from them and like white people more, so it was a culture shock. The other shock was that they couldn’t follow their peers academically, the same for the language, it was a new language for them which they didn’t know so it takes time till they know it, sure they acquired the language by time but throughout this time it was a culture shock for them. All these things reflected on my kids, so they became very depressed. Throughout those days, if you were to look at their faces you would find out how much they were depressed: their faces lack the kids’ excitement look, they didn’t have that look on their faces, and you feel like they were going to school just to torture themselves. Until my husband started to go with them to trips, although we were so busy studying, he came to told me that “the kids were in a great mental and psychological pressure that you cannot imagine, so don’t put any load on them, don’t let them to study or to do anything, what they are seeing there is enough. Kids there are very tough.” We as Arabs are very friendly, right? PP7

Similarly, PP1 mentioned that when her child started school she faced depression, felt isolated, and did not know how to make friends:

Actually since we came Canada, like (younger daughter’s name) for example I gave her birth here in Canada and she entered school like any other normal Canadian student but I feel like she is abandoned maybe because she is from the Middle East background and she is not a Canadian or a Western like them, so they are always with each other like one band. And if she likes to play with them they play together but with limits, they don’t act with her like a friend. PP1

When PP1 was asked how the other children knew that her daughter has a Middle Eastern background, she elaborated:

Really I don’t know, maybe from the way kids are dealing with each other, but I feel that she deals with kids like she is a Canadian just like them she was not speaking Arabic, her first language was English not Arabic as that is what she was hearing in JK and SK till she entered grade one. Every year I tell myself she will make friends this year or maybe the next year but it seems that it is not that easy to have friends here. .. I feel like they
sorted her out as she is from another place. Maybe because the way she looks or maybe from the way I look because they always see me when I drop her to school or when I pick her [up] they noticed that she is not from that country…. when we were in (school name) she started to make some… I will not call them friends but we can say classmates, even these classmates when they see some students who are much like them or their mothers are friends they easily leave (younger daughter’s name) to go to the other girls, even if they are not friends but they have the same traditions and they live in the same environment. For my kids who [were] brought up in Egypt when they came to Canada we lived the very few years in a very bad mood they came crying every day because there is no one wants to play with them and they have no friends at all. But when their classmates knew that they are excellent students, they tried to be close to them more. But (…) if they were normal not excellent students, they will never have friends. PP1

Parent participants have struggled when their children learned some behaviours that are considered inappropriate in their own culture of origin. This has led parents to feel shocked and disconnected with the school and the larger community. PP11 described the following experience:

Last year, my son was just four years old in the JK. And one day he came back from the school and he was singing “fire, fire, …” I do not remember the rest. I asked him …. sometimes I do not want to ask him because I am trying to ignore the bad things…..but this time he told me. He told me “Mom, do you know what does Fire Fire mean?” , I said, “What does it mean?” He said “One of my friend[s] told me this song” and he told me that his friend explained the meaning for him which is “I am a boy, I have the right to hug you, kiss you”. My interpretation is my son’s friend watched this song from the TV without any control from the family, and when he met my son he told him about the song. Other times he told me about things that are not suitable for his age. These things include sex and related topics. We did not speak about that in my home, so all what he has learnt and talked about is from his friends. Another time he came to me and very close and he was laughing and said “I will tickle you with my penis.” I was really shocked; I cannot believe what he said and how he learnt these things. I do not believe a boy only four years can say something like that. But the problem is he just says what his friends is saying without even understanding what does this mean. Another example, he said, “I want to see my butt,” and then he took his pants down. He just imitates other children’s behaviours. He did not understand exactly what these behaviours mean, but he knows that these behaviours include something wrong, as they laugh when they doing that. He imitates them and he does the same behaviours and laugh like them. This year, his teacher told me he took his pants down in front of girls in his class. I told her that he just imitates others, from where he can see that behaviour, and his little brain cannot teach him that when he is just five years old. We never watch anything like that or anything could teach him the concept of sexual behaviour. We are a conservative family. Another friend of mine also have the same complaint, as her child behave in a way that it is not from our culture, they just learn that from their friends. PP11
PP7 experienced the same problem with her youngest child:

In grade one at the school, and after my boy spent a couple of months there, I found that my boy come to home to make a very bad actions which we don’t know in our countries and we never see a little boy who make it and we never do it at our homes, and it didn’t even exist in our culture. He knows how to say very bad words although he is in grade one, can you imagine that. I started to tell him that it is not acceptable and from where you got such words as no one from your brothers say such words. After a period of time, I knew that he has some boys in the class who are saying such bad words and do these actions. PP7

The experience of struggling to know how things work and navigating different systems influences parents’ perspectives and levels of satisfaction in their new lives. PP4 explained:

My story may be a little bit different than others. We came here as international students, not immigrants, so I came here to do my Ph.D., uh, and it was a big struggle, because, uh, my English—I felt that time—at the beginning, that my English is not helping me. Uh, I don’t know how everything around me works, I don’t know. How to go to school? Where is the bus? How can I go to, to school? Uh, everything was very new to me, and I came late too —two weeks late for the term beginning, and for cultural difference, misunderstanding, my supervisor told me, “You don’t have any courses in the first term,” but when he saw me, he told me, “You have two courses.” So, I came late two weeks, start with two courses, and I felt miserable first term. It was very hard at the beginning. Uh, I was pregnant, and I lost my baby. Uh, it was terrible term. It was terrible, again, the worst days in my life… because the beginning was not happy, [laughter] stay with me like this for few terms [laughter] OK? PP4

Because of this stage of doubt, PP4 felt unsuccessful and lost her self-confidence. Through talking with her husband she was able to push herself to feel successful once again. She elaborated:

But, when I saw my husband—My husband was trying to convince me, “Everything is good here. Transportation is very easy. The environment is clean, no pollution. Uh, you go to one of the best schools in the world. Try to be happy.” But, the first experience made me not feeling happy, so—and I have some problems in my research, and I suffered for four terms, until I changed my project with other supervisor, and I felt I have to be, you know, feeling successful to be successful, so I pushed myself to be successful again, and I started to be happy a little by, uh, by doing some success in my life. I start a new project. I like it more. I felt that I understand it well, and I can achieve good goals in it. So, I go with it. I finish my Ph.D. in the new project within two years and a half, so I was so proud of myself, but even during this second stage, I felt I am so busy that I am not enjoying Canada that everyone is enjoying, and during this, I was insisting that, after I
finish my Ph.D., I’ll stay at home to enjoy Canada that everyone is telling me [they are] enjoying... So, after I finish, I said, “Oh, this is the time to like Canada.” [laughter]. PP4

PP4 described her unknown stage as being like the “fish who got out of her sea”:

If you are a princess, and you grow up in a big, big castle… you grow up in this castle. You know every little hole. You know how to go from the shortcut, OK? If you move to another new castle, bigger than the first one, more complicated than the first one…you will not—you won’t know all the ways. You will not know the shortcuts. So, for me, I grew up in another place. Even growing up in another place doesn’t mean I know everything in that place, yeah? But I have to ask older people and I have a big network. When I need something in a certain area, I talk with someone of my friends who works in this area. They will tell me about the shortcut. So, I have the real advice from my network. Here, we are like the fish who got out of her sea. We are not living in the right way. We don’t have the [sighs]—the true advice. PP4

**Struggling to feel settled**

Financial issues, searching for jobs, and pursuing graduate studies are the main obstacles that immigrant parents face. These obstacles influence their settlement stage and hence their integration into their new society. PP7, who came to Canada as a skilled worker, described her struggles in all aspects of her new life from her children’s education, to accreditation of her and her husband’s degrees, to selling all of their possessions in Egypt so that they could survive and ‘make ends meet’ here in Canada:

Then I knew from people here that there is something called Canadian curriculum; it is a book you can find at Costco for the English, there is English smart, math smart, and there is the complete curriculum which includes math, science, and social studies. I bought all those books for my kids; see I came to Canada to spend money for Canada. All these were extra expenses for us; we didn't have work and we didn’t complete our exams. Exams are not for free; you have to pay so much money just to register in the board, and you pay a lot of money for the first exam and then you pay again for the second exam, as every time you fail the exam you have to pay again. Plus, the books’ expenses and the house rent, and you converting money from Egypt and the Egyptian pound is for seven or eight dollars and all what we gain from Egypt is very few. We had to sell some assets we had to keep life goes on. Actually we don’t care about money, all what we cared about was our kids’ mental state; I don’t want them to feel like they are in a lower level than other kids. Actually they were feeling that they are weaker than them academically but nothing more. Not to mention the discrimination thing we started to feel but I was just concentrating on the academic aspect just to put them on the track. PP7
Skilled workers who live under the pressure of losing their jobs are more likely to feel depressed and to lose confidence. PP2 explained:

Um, actually, we came—the first time we came to Canada, in 2009. My husband came here as a post-Doctor, we came here for one year. And we applied for becoming permanent residents. Then, after a while, it was difficult to find jobs here, so we returned to our country, because we are professors in the university there, so we have already jobs, and we have everything in Egypt, so we returned back. And then, in 2013, he got another opportunity to be a research scientist in a company here, and I got an opportunity to have research in the university, so we came for two other years. If we [are] still working, we will stay [laughter]. If we lose our jobs, yeah, we will return to our jobs there [laughter]. But this is not a good feeling, because you, you know, you start to build your life, and once everything gone, you don’t have job, so without job, you can’t be anything, so it’s not easy. PP2

After finishing her PhD, PP4 struggled to find a job. This process led her to feel depressed once again:

I started my struggle to look for a job while, from very inside me, I don’t want a job. So, I start trying to find a job, while I—very inside me, I don’t want, but I start trying. So, I receive a lot of rejection, so I see that—start feeling not happy, and depressed, and it goes like this for a long time, and I am trying to organize myself, and see what I really want, and see what will happen, but until now, I didn’t find myself here in Canada. I feel it’s good for my kids, but not for myself. PP4

Moreover, PP8 expressed feeling unsettled and depressed as her husband could not find a job here in Canada. Based on their culture, a man is responsible for his family’s expenditure and so he cannot stay home without working. As a result of this cultural expectation, PP8’s husband left her and their children to find work in another country. Here is how she expressed her story:

The scholarship came to me, not to my husband; I am the one who will study here and I am the one who will be responsible for everything. In Egypt our life was totally different: my husband was fully occupied in his work and he go from sunrise till sunset and I go to the university and I take care of the kids, so there was balance between his life and my life. His life was all about work and my life is divided between work and kids and when we meet he achieved satisfaction from his job and I feel satisfied from my work and my kids, so our life was somehow balanced. When I got the scholarship all people told us that it will be a great step for all of us and it will be better for my kids and my husband and it is a chance which we can’t miss; we asked a lot before taking such step. It was normal that our expectation was really high and I expected that my life will be better as I will learn, although it is not my first priority: my priority was my kids and their father
then I can think about myself. Maybe if I am like those who put themselves in the first priority I could be happy and I will not care about (husband’s name) or my kids or anything. I know some people who think that way; I have one of my friends who always tells me the most important thing is your PhD but that is not me. My life was all about my kids and my husband then I can think about myself after I finish all the responsibilities I have towards them, that is how God created me. After we came here my study has to be number one and my husband is not working; he stayed without a job for months and after that he stayed for years. Now I feel that the problem is in my children’s education as if I return back, my daughter will be behind according to the old system so I can’t cope with all of these challenges. I face some difficulties with my professor and my husband faces a difficulty in his job [in their country] and he doesn’t have a job now [here in Canada]. He stays at home so there are a lot of problems between us although that could never happen to us. You know when a man is staying at home, and he is not a man who can be responsible for a home. After all of that he can’t buy the things for home by himself; I have to write for him everything. Sometimes because I am very loaded I can’t cope with all of these things, I think about making food before I go to the university and I think about my professor who will be upset because I didn’t finish something. I already face some problems with my professor because he gave me something, which I really hate and I have to do it because I need to finish. So I think it is a very bad experience. I didn’t live any good day here in comparison with our life when we were in Egypt. I was not a kind of a person who can easily feel depressed, but here I had a depression and I had to take medicines as I have all its symptoms. After [husband’s name] left I kept asking myself why did I do that to my life, we were very settled and my kids were in the best schools and my husband was settled in his work and so [was] I. Then I keep asking myself how can I stay for three years here alone to do a PhD in something which I don’t like, and the kids are behind, and I struggle to get money. So I make it harder for me. I didn’t try to take things easy, I also don’t know anyone here; I just know one girl. So I stay for a long period alone and it is not easy to communicate with people from Egypt and I can’t keep depress[ing] people with my calls. I was depressed to the extent that I feel sometimes that I need anyone who can hug me because I really feel bad deep inside; I feel that it is really harsh for me and I can’t resist. That is why I had depression; depression is like a big hole but thanks God that it didn’t take a long time with me as it is normal to take years with some people. But it was so hard that something like that happen[ed] to me as I always adapt[ed] with anything but the problem is that I go out my comfort zone. I always adapt with my life all my problems were easy; like I need to move my daughter to a better school and if her activity teacher is not good so I moved her to another group that was all the problem I faced in Egypt. My husband and I had our salary and both had cars and our family is good. That was a simple life. We were not that wealthy; we were living in a middle class but it was good. It was acceptable for us. We were living in a good place and we were going out to have fun. So the problem here was all about my expectations and how can I live here, up till now I don’t know what I am going to do here. PP8
In addition, “starting from zero” is not a secure feeling for immigrants who have already accomplished a lot in their home country and who have to start over, including building relationships and forming friendships. PP5 expressed:

I didn’t want to come here, and I have more of an issue with change and places and things like that. So of course…. it’s extra homesickness. It’s a far country, the timing is different, it’s cold, I came in January, so you feel that you are really far, that you don’t know anyone. I spent-- the first year was a very hard year. I mean, from the financial issues, to-- everything was bad. So I had a very bad depression. It took time to meet people, communicate, build relationships. So yes I’m upset that I have to start from the beginning, I mean everything that you did-- you left your work, your school, you don’t know anyone, you’re starting over. You have your work, your life, and your home and you leave everything and come here to start from zero. PP5

It is clear from parent participants’ voices that the first stage they experienced was not a honeymoon stage. Instead, for these participants this stage was full of sadness, depression, uncertainty, and struggle. The feeling of not being able to find a job despite being fully capable of working increased their tendency to feel unsettled and contributed to their consequent lack of integration in their new society.

**Acculturation Outcome**

Berry’s model of acculturation (2001, 2010) identifies four possible outcomes of the acculturation process. What he refers to as strategies are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Based on the findings of this study, most of the parent participants were partially involved or integrated into their children’s education and into their larger community as well. The acculturation process of learning a new language and experiencing cultural differences as well as facing other barriers which have been identified regarding involvement in their children’s education prevented parents from being fully involved in their children’s school-related activities and in their wider community. However, parent participants in this study
generally maintained a positive attitude towards integration and involvement in their children’s schools.

“I started to Pass Through the Wall that Separated Both of Us”: Positive Attitude Towards Integration

Parents of this study were reportedly willing to become more involved in their children’s school activities. For example, PP6 hoped to volunteer at her child’s school:

I would say volunteering. This is what I’m hoping for, so if I get to volunteer more at school, uh, I think that way my son would see that, “My mom is here at school and even for some days and weeks, she’s, uh, she’s here with me in school,” and I think it would give him this feeling of comfort that mom is around, and teacher knows her, so, um, I hope I can volunteer. Um, other than that, helping at home, getting to know the teachers, and volunteering, I think that would be great. PP6

Parents expressed willingness to participate in school council and to exchange ideas:

Actually if I have time I will participate, as I mentioned I had time so I was attending any kind of meetings. But here as I am student so I don’t have enough time, but for sure if I have time I will participate. PP8

Actually I like these things. I like to listen to people's opinions and I like to say my own opinions, I like socializing. PP9

In addition, parents expressed an interest in forming relationships with people from other cultures. To achieve this end, they appreciated any opportunities for initiating a conversation:

Perhaps, recently when I go to the school of [youngest daughter’s name] and found that Canadian parents started to talk with me and I started to talk with them, I feel that I am a part of this community. Sure we are not become friends or close friends, but we speak with each other, so I moved a step forward and I feel like I live in the same community they are living in and I started to pass through the wall that separated both of us. PP1

Sometimes, I like to speak with another parents from different countries, maybe he knows more than what I know, and maybe he has more experience, or something, so that I don’t have problem to speak with parents from another country, or Canadian… PP14

Moreover, PP4 valued the partnership between home and school:

The school and the parents should work together to help children. PP4
Conclusion

As discussed in the acculturation chapter (2-3), unlike other acculturation models, the findings of this chapter provide an understanding of the conditions, processes, and outcomes of the acculturation journey that reflect immigrant participants’ experiences in their new society. It is difficult to assign an acculturation outcome to a certain immigrant group without understanding the conditions and circumstances that influence their adjustment into their new society and their consequent choice to be integrated or isolated.

This chapter’s findings indicated that immigrant participants of this study did not start their acculturation process with a honeymoon stage. Instead, they began their acculturation process with confusion at facing the unknown. This unsure state of being led some participants, particularly those who were looking for jobs, to experience a loss of self-confidence, an inability to feel a sense of belonging, and reduced opportunities for involvement in many aspects of their new life.

Overall, the acculturation process seems unpromising for this group of immigrants who felt that they experienced the following constraints: discrimination or prejudice due to their religion or ethnic background, insufficient information about how systems work in their new lives, feelings of being unsettled in their new society, difficulty in practicing the language of the host country, and greater likelihood of not having a permanent job.

The literature indicates that some constraints such as prejudice and discrimination are the most common factors that lead to the marginalization or separation of immigrants from their host country (Tartakovsky, 2012; Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Sakamoto, Jeyapal, Bhuyan, Ku, Fang, Zhang, & Genovese, 2013). Other aspects, such as economic difficulties and unfamiliarity with the available services and resources available in the host country, further prevent
immigrants from being active members in their new society (Canadian CED Network, 2010; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). To prevent this negative outcome, immigrants should be offered various work opportunities in their new society.

The findings also indicated that parents felt that school secretaries and administrators were more likely than teachers to exhibit behaviours perceived as racist towards participants. Participants believed that they had experienced discrimination because of how they look as Muslim women who wear Hijab. It could be concluded from parents’ statements that teachers who communicate more often than school secretaries and administrators with children from different cultures had developed an understanding of cultural differences as well as strategies to communicate and work collaboratively with parents.

Although study participants experienced unpromising acculturation processes, they remained resilient to failure in their avoidance of becoming isolated or separated from the mainstream society, as discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4-4: Resilience

Resilience in this analysis means that, for the most part, the parents of this study who struggled with facing the unknown of their new life, encountered difficulties in understanding their children’s new educational system, felt unsettled, encountered language and cultural differences, and experienced racist situations whether for themselves or for their children did not stop supporting their children to succeed in school, did not surrender to the clutches of isolation, and did not develop hostile attitudes towards their new society. Instead, they were able to overcome some of these challenges and attempt to find solutions to these obstacles.

This meaning of resilience that emerged from this study is consistent with the concept of resilience in the literature. Luther (2006) defines resilience as “a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma” (p.742). Researchers on resilience reported that there are some internal and external characteristics that help individuals cope with adversity. The internal characteristics include “hardiness, coping, self-efficacy, optimism, patience, tolerance, faith, adaptability, self-esteem, and a sense of humor” (Grafton, Gillespie & Henderson, 2010, p.699) and the external characteristics include “positive treatment, responsiveness to others, attachment to others, cultural resources such as traditional activities” (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008. P.12).

In this study, certain personal qualities helped parent participants survive the cultural differences and acculturation difficulties they faced. Having strong personal skills and solid ties with other members of their community are two qualities that emerged from parents’ stories and contributed to their resilience.
**Strong Personal Skills**

Parents of this study demonstrated personal qualities that helped them to survive the challenges they faced as immigrants. These personal skills are growth mindsets and patience, endurance, and tolerance, as presented below.

**Growth mindsets**

All parent participants of this study have university degrees and six of them were either pursuing or had already earned their doctoral degree. Generally, individuals with a high level of education are more likely to have or develop growth or incremental mindsets. It has been reported that growth mindsets can promote resilience (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Incremental mindset is “the idea that ability is malleable. Given that ability is viewed as something that can be changed with effort, challenge is not seen as threatening but rather as an opportunity to develop competence” (Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010, p. 1354). Parents in this study demonstrated growth mindsets with respect to their involvement in their children’s education. They believed that learning is a lifelong process, success is a result of exerting more efforts to learn and acquire new knowledge, and all students should be challenged. They also had high expectations of their children and good judgment, and they provided their children with advice and resources to help them be successful in their lives. From parents’ stories, it was clear that they consistently engaged in conversations with their children and provided them with advice about how to improve themselves and be successful in their lives. A growth mindset is very clear from PP8’s explanation to her children of how they could be successful in their lives:

I always tell them that maybe there are two people: one is too smart and the other one is not that smart. The smart one knows that he is smart but he doesn’t do anything, and the other one learns a lot and everyday he does something, so at the end this one will be better than the smart one. The smart one will not be good as he doesn’t learn anything new, while the other one learn some simple things every day and every day he tries to
improve himself through repetition and training so he will be better, but the one who just knows that he is smart and he can pick anything quickly he will not get anything. PP8

Similarly, PP7 believed that life is all about learning. This mindset has helped her to be resilient to the challenges she experiences:

As a human you are living your whole life to learn. No one can say: “I know everything”. Here, everything is new for us or even when we were in our countries there were some things we don’t know we are still learning. PP7

In addition, parents acknowledged several times that “life is not easy”, and they tried to train their children to face the hardships of life from an early age. PP3 would encourage his children to stay in their assigned class that they did not like to train them for coping with difficult environments in the future:

I can encourage even my kids to stay [in their class]. Because this is a chance for them to work with different environment because life is not that easy, so, after graduation they may be working with some people they don’t like and they [have] to be able to adapt and to survive and to work in different conditions or different environments that they don’t like. PP3

Similarly, PP6 would advise her son to stay in his class that he didn’t like if she could not transfer him to another class:

So, what I would do, I would go to the principal with some solid reasons why I wanna switch my son. Uh, if it was impossible, like, totally, totally impossible, I would talk to my, uh, my son. Like, this is just a year, and it will pass. Like, it will go, and for sure, we gonna come up with some experience from this year that we—would help us in our life. [laughter]. PP6

PP8 wanted her children to learn that life is not easy. She believed that her children should be encouraged to work hard:

They are learning that life is fun but life is not fun. Actually life is hard. I know it is early but we can teach them to do some things and encourage them, but to do nothing is hard. PP8

This striving to support their children academically and emotionally was evident despite the difficulties parent participants faced in understanding the educational system. For example,
parents exerted efforts in attempting to find information related to different concepts in their children’s education. As an example, before deciding whether her child needed an IEP program or not, PP9 conducted some research and based her decision on the available knowledge as well as her own knowledge about her child. She expressed:

The first thing, when I searched about it I found out that the only ones who join these kinds of programs are the kids who have problems. And I felt that it is for those who have some mental deterioration, I don’t exactly know but that is what I felt. In other words, if I see that my son needs something like that I will be the first who will run after it. It is not because I don’t want to put him in that program, it is because I felt that he doesn’t need that program and I felt that it will harm him. The first thing that will happen if you signed and agreed to put him in that program is it is not your choice anymore to let him leave that program; they are the ones who will judge and say when he will leave after feeling that he is good. It is not a program which he enters and leaves when he likes, so if you signed, they will never let him leave until they see that he is good. PP9

PP7 tried to support her children emotionally when they complained about not having friends and explained that their classmates do not like to play with them.

I tried to encourage my kids to be excellent at school. I told them “the more you are excellent and distinct, the more people will be around you.” That is all people’s nature. PP7

Additionally, in contrast to the viewpoint of school personnel, PP11 believed that her child in SK could learn to read and she supported her child as he learned how to read:

They believe that children in this age cannot able to learn how to read. But a child can learn to read and do many things, particularly, when he is young. To prove, when I teach my child at home, he was able to learn and understand. I used to teach him at home. When they sent home reading books, I used to teach him how each letter in a word [is] pronounce[d] and how to join the letters together to read the word. For example, in the word “cat”, I taught him the letter “C” pronounce “/K/” and “A” pronounce “/æ/” the two letter[s] together pronounce “Kæ”. Also I taught him that the “th” pronounce “/ð/” (as in this) and sometimes it[’s] pronounce “/θ/” (as in thing), and “sh” pronounce “/ʃ/” while “ch” pronounce “/ʧ/”. He got these different sounds and eventually he can use them. Of course a child can learn, as his younger brother he is three years old, he go to a preschool. It is a private project in the university called Get Ready for School, it is based on a research that believe children can learn in a younger age (three years) and they want to prove that they are right; therefore, they provide this project for children, and now he can read. If you ask him to read a simple word (three to four letters), he will do it. He can read sat and cat, for example. And until now they did not give his older brother, who is
already in SK, the way of how to pronounce a word. He did not take this in the school, I taught him at home. PP11

Parents strived to help their children despite all of the difficulties that parents face. PP12 expressed:

I am trying to understand as much as I can. If I knew about anything that could help me more to help him so I will try to learn more. PP12

**Patience, endurance, and tolerance**

Patience, endurance, and tolerance are other personal traits that have led parents of this study to overcome their difficulties. Parents’ reaction to different situations with school personnel indicated that they responded in a persevering manner. For example, if his child complained that her teacher had not treated her fairly, PP13 said that he would:

Uh, first of all, I’ll be patient. I will not rush to this, because sometimes, the student—like, young kids especially, they are so emotional, uh, and they could understand stuff, uh, incorrectly. So, I’ll discuss this with her. “What did you do? ….what did she do?” And I’ll try to figure out what are the surrounding environment, before I make my judgement, but if this is something consistent, and, uh, I discover that, yes, she is treating her in a bad way, I will definitely go to the school, uh, discuss this with the teacher first, and if it doesn’t work, I will go to the principal, or even higher level. PP13

In addition, PP11 was tolerant when her child’s teacher misinterpreted her message and instead of reacting in a self-defensive manner, she advised the teacher of how she should communicate with her child based on her experience as a mother:

But this year, the teacher took the words from me against my child. Uhhh.. “You said he is making problems at home, then he has a problem and should see a specialist to communicate with him because we do not know how to communicate with him. Every time I asked him to be on time out, he is laughing and did not care. He supposed to get mad and upset that he is in time out”. …. At the end when I recognized she took my words against my child, I told her “See, this was my experience with him. if you give him a lot of time out or punishment, he feels he is not good and act as [if] he is a bad child. I started to reduce the punishment and [ignore] what he is doing, he stopped what he is doing. But if I comment on his behaviour, he will continue doing it. His personality is different. He may need a special way in communication. This doesn’t mean he is not normal but every child need a certain way in communication. The way you [are] controlling the class may be suitable for his other classmates but [it] is not suitable for him. My experience with him as a mother telling me that, even he told me by himself
that: “If your mom punish me and not giving me sweets, I will do problems all the day”. This is his personality. I was trying to let her understand. PP11

Moreover, PP7 has taught her kids that they should be patient and grateful for their circumstances:

So every day I had to stay to talk with them to tell them that their father is really stressed because after he had finished his studying and he had a job and he was living in a very good level, he is starting to study again. I told them “Your father [has] finished his studying there in the past and he has to study again now just for you so we have to be patient and not to keep asking him for doing so and so, because if we acted like that he will not be able to study to improve our living after that.” I was trying to compensate them with love and kindness, and I was always encouraging them to be patient as they are men and they have to encourage their father not to be a pressure on him. PP7

Similarly, PP8 believed that her children needed to learn how to be patient. She has worried that if they grow up spoiled without adversity, then they will not be able to face life’s challenges:

I can’t let them get shocked when they face everything. I think they are not kids anymore….I am really worried about my kids; that doesn’t mean that I will not be happy if they are having fun or if I am free, as if I want to take my hands off I can do that. I feel that we have to bring them up to be tougher because of the society around us; they will not be able to live that way. Although we are brought up to be tough, sometimes we feel very tired. What about those who do not exert some efforts to do their work? I don't think that those who are living in that way will act nicely in their life, that is my own believing. You have to teach your kids how to be [patient]. PP8

Several parents believed that their Islamic principles promoted their patience and tolerance. They believed that Muslims should be easygoing and tolerant when people make mistakes. Parents had the following to say:

Our religion and our culture, there’s a part that even when you smile when you meet somebody, this for me is a reward. God will reward you even if you give a smile [prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him (PBUH) said “Your smile for your brother is charity”]. That’s why I try to treat everybody in a very proper way and treat them as human but not abuse my rights. PP3

Our religion is Islam. As it is said “religion is the treatment of others” which means the good treatment. Prophet Muhammad PBUH said, “I was only sent to perfect good character”. Good character means…all good manners [and] it includes tolerance, love,
compassionate, respect, respect the old, show kindness to kids, and to understand others’ feelings and not to hurt them. Maybe I can’t remember everything now, but we [were] brought up to be tolerant, loving, and giving… In every culture they have like we say, “a good manner reflects its doer and bad manner reflects everyone”. But for us we deal with people in a different way. For us bad manners only reflect its doer. What is common in our culture is the feelings of love, giving, altruism, caring for others’ feeling, and respect the old and be kind to the young. These are the essential things for us. But note that every rule has its exceptions. There are some different people who are acting in a different way, as you know even your fingers are not alike. Everyone can be different but all of us have the basics, so thanks Allah we still have these basics. PP7

We are acting according to our religion. Tolerance is clear in our religion and my hijab…. I feel that our religion is a missionary activity. Even when I am driving my car I have to let people pass when I am in an intersection; I always stop till people can cross the street. So our hijab says many things, especially that they already have a bad image about us like terrorism and such things. That is why I try to be a good example through actions, as I cannot talk a lot. PP9

In addition, PP8’s expectation that her children should work hard and not have fun all the time may be based on her understanding of Islamic doctrine. She explained:

Maybe that is according to our religion because our prophet was giving the kids even in their earlier years, he gives them tasks, even they give them names or cognomen so the kid can feel that they has weight since they are young. And when they were gathering, he can let kids talk and sometimes he took their opinions. So kids are not just having fun. PP8

Moreover, all parent participants demonstrated a fair judgment regarding the racist situations they had been involved in. Even though they had experienced frustration and unhappiness from being in racist situations, they did not generalize that racism exists in all schools. They were able to distinguish between those who are racist and those who are more culturally sensitive. Parents tried to avoid generalizing that all school personnel are racist by saying:

I did not experience discrimination with teachers and the school personnel; my daughter did. Maybe in the streets I have experienced some situations. PP1

In my son’s school, people there are a little bit frowning, I think that is their nature with everyone not just me. When you tell them “good morning,” they answer you in a normal way. There are other people who answer you in a more welcoming way saying, “How are
you and how you are doing and how is your kid?” and if she knows (younger son's name) she can tell me “how is (younger son’s name)?” But people there are a little bit gloomy. I think that doesn’t have anything to do with my appearance, it is just their nature. PP12

**Strong Ties with Other Members of their Community**

Communicating with others from the same culture was a great source of help for parents to succeed in overcoming the challenges in their new society. Parents of this study depended on each other to obtain information about different topics in their new life, including issues related to their children’s education. For PP1, having some Arab friends helped her begin her adjustment process:

I feel upset because you feel like you left your country to come here and you applied to be a PR and you want to be a part of that community and after all of that you feel rejected so it is really disappointing. First, kids are feeling angry and that is reflected in the home so we feel like we will never merge in that community, if we didn’t have some Arab friends so we would never live in that society [and] we would feel rejected all the time. PP1

In addition, PP8 felt safer when she moved from her building to a new building that had some Arab families. She expressed:

Here [the new building] all people are Muslims and Arabs and they always say peace be upon you so that can comfort me. There [in the previous building] all people were different and there are some people who are drinking alcohol and I afraid of that, I feel bad towards that things. PP8

For immigrants who are unfamiliar with their new society, the first way to obtain information is by asking friends who may have already lived in the country for some years and have that information. Parents reported:

If I didn’t get enough information from my friends or the people I know, so I will ask the teacher. PP7

My son is more important than any other thing, but if that is about rules, which I could not break, so I will never break it. I like to follow rules, if it is rules and they really can’t do anything, so I will keep silent. But if they can do it and I asked and people told me “go
to talk with that specific person” so I will try that, but if it is about rules I will never try to break it even for my son. PP12

My friends—I asked my friends, because when my kids went to school, I, I didn’t have experience. When I came [to Canada]... the first year, I started to speak with other parents, and after that when my daughter started school, at the beginning of the year, there is an interview with the teacher, so that I can go and ask about the information if I want. PP14

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrated that the parent participants have suffered many difficulties ranging from cultural and linguistic differences to the hardship of adapting to and understanding their new life. The adaptation process was not easy for participants of this study and varied from one individual to another in terms of its impact on the individual and the time it took until they started to understand some aspects of their new society.

During this process, at times, immigrant parents felt desperate, ignorant, disabled, displaced, and depressed. Some parents had experienced loss in self-confidence. Seeking help from others of their heritage, being educated, and having qualities such as growth mindsets, patience, and tolerance helped them to not accept failure and to avoid the isolation stage. They instead tried their best to overcome these difficulties and support their children’s learning. Even with this little success, participants continued to suffer from living in a perpetual state of impermanence due to the lack of job opportunities and not fully understanding how to navigate different systems including their children's educational system.

Knowledge of the strategies used by this group of parents to resist the difficulties they have faced could be helpful to other immigrant groups and may be useful to educators, school personnel, settlement workers, or any other frontline workers who could support and encourage these qualities while working with other immigrants. Connecting people with families from their local community may be a strong source of support for newcomers.
However, certain questions remain. If this study’s group of parents did not find support from their network, then how could they obtain information about their children’s education? If immigrants are less educated, then how could they support their children’s learning? Who is responsible for providing immigrants with the information they need? How could immigrants learn about cultural differences? How could school personnel help immigrants to navigate and understand the educational system of their children?

In the following chapter I provide some recommendations that may help to answer the questions above as well as minimize the potential difficulties that immigrants could experience when they encounter their children’s educational system.
Part Five

Chapter 5-1: Discussion and Conclusion

The purposes of this study were: (1) to describe Egyptian immigrant experience and involvement in their children’s education, (2) to comprehend how cultural differences influence Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education, and (3) to gain a better understanding of how the acculturation process of Egyptian immigrants impacts their participation in their children’s education. To achieve these purposes, a focused ethnographic design was employed and a thematic analysis was conducted on data resulting from interviews comprised of hypothetical scenarios and open-ended questions given to Egyptian immigrants and school personnel of the Waterloo Region District School Board. In addition, several close-ended questions were asked of Egyptian participants for the purpose of collecting demographic and language information.

In the previous chapters, I presented findings which show how Egyptian immigrant parents perceived Ontario’s educational system and how they became involved in their children’s education. I also presented findings that show how cultural differences and acculturation process influenced Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. I concluded the findings section by highlighting the characteristics of Egyptian parents that enabled them to resist failure and therefore be resilient despite the cultural and acculturation difficulties they experienced.

In this chapter I discuss the findings in relation to cultural differences theories (Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Hall, 1976) and acculturation theories (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2009). Through a focused ethnographic approach, researchers are able to use their previous knowledge about the studied culture to understand the study phenomena. Therefore, this discussion is based on the voices of
the twenty Egyptian parent participants and the ten school personnel participants of this study along with the literature review, my field notes, my experience of involvement in school-related activities, and my knowledge about Egyptian culture as well as my experience of Canadian culture. The major sections of this chapter summarize the results and discuss their implications. The chapter ends by stating study limitations and future research.

**Egyptian Parental Involvement in their Children’s Education**

Consistent with previous studies on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education (Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005; Zhong, 2011), Egyptian parent participants of this study showed strong involvement in home-related activities, while in school-related activities they were less involved.

In home-related activities, Egyptian parents supported their children emotionally and academically when their children faced challenges in learning the English language and adjusting to their new school.

From an academic perspective, parents purchased various mathematics, English, and science books to study with their children in an effort to help their children succeed in school. They also followed up with their children to ensure successful completion of any worksheets they may have been assigned by their teachers. In addition, parents usually talked with their children about their school days, guided their behaviours, and provided them with advice to be successful in their lives.

However, the combination of being unable to understand the new educational system along with the lack of educational materials received from schools caused Egyptian parents to face challenges and difficulties in supporting their children at home. For example, parents were
not aware of which topics their children were currently studying in school, and so they could not point them toward the relevant information in the books that they had bought.

Furthermore, as parents did not know the teaching methods that were practiced by their children’s teachers, they were unable to teach their children by using methods that were congruent with current modes of teaching pedagogy that are suitable to their children’s age. Finally, they even experienced difficulty in educating their children at home, as their children were taught at school that they should not study at home.

These findings have different implications; knowing that parents have the ability to support their children, educators and school personnel should provide parents with the materials they need. Parents should work collaboratively with educators from their children’s school to support their children’s learning. Pushor (2007) asked the question: “If parents are to ‘fit together’ with teachers, and to be an integral part of the processes connected to teaching and learning, it is important to know what knowledge they bring to this relationship” (p. 9). Parents’ knowledge in this study includes knowledge about their children’s abilities, behaviours, and attitudes; knowledge about the keys to success in life, knowledge of different educational systems and the positive aspects of each system; and expertise in many different areas and specializations. School personnel should view immigrant parents as partners who are capable of helping the school to achieve its vision of achieving student success and well being.

Not only did Egyptian parents of this study face challenges in their involvement at home, but other studies have reported similar findings (Benhard, 2010; Berhard & Freire, 1999; Zhong, 2011). Moreover, Egyptian parents supported their children emotionally when their children faced difficulties in finding friends or facing discriminatory situations. This finding supports previous findings that immigrant students need comparatively more support from their parents,
especially during their first few years after arriving in Canada, as they do not yet have the language skills that are essential for their learning (Dyson, 2001; Worswick, 2001). Therefore, in order for immigrant children to succeed in school, it is important for educators, school personnel, and stakeholders who work with immigrants to support immigrant parents and understand their struggle.

In school-related activities, Egyptian parents were involved in communicating with school personnel by voicing their concerns and/or replying to teachers’ concerns. Similar to the experiences of other immigrant groups, it is clear from the voices of this study’s parent participants that their involvement has been influenced by their English language abilities (Dyson, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005; Richardson, 2010; Zhong, 2011).

All parents mentioned that language difficulties formed the main challenge for them during their first few years of living in Canada. Some mothers mentioned that they had to wait for their husbands or older children to accompany them to meetings with their children’s teachers, so that the husbands or older children could translate what the teachers said and what their wives or mothers wanted to say. School personnel mentioned that they provided parents with interpreters when requested; however, this is not a feasible option in quick conversations or daily casual communication, as the process of hiring a translator requires some time and a predetermined appointment.

Although language difficulties discouraged both parents and school personnel from having effective communication, some teachers tried to develop solutions and support parents in understanding their message. One parent mentioned that a teacher wrote down what she wanted to say for the parents to translate later on. This solution was perceived as being very positive
from the parents’ perspective. Language difficulties are a great challenge for most immigrants, particularly in their first year of living in a new country. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the educational system and the school board to implement solutions to this problem such as translating important materials in different languages, and forming strong partnerships between schools and settlement services so that school personnel could quickly access help in translating when needed.

In addition, like other immigrant groups (Dyson, 2001; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Ma, 2005; Zhong, 2011), Egyptian parents were not regularly involved in school-related activities. A few parents had volunteered at school, either in school activities or by attending school events, yet no parents were involved on a regular basis. Furthermore, no parents had attended school council meetings, participated in making school decisions, or knew about any other available committees for parents at the board level.

Although the lack of school-related activities might reduce parents’ opportunities to obtain information about the school system or to build new relationships with other parents of their children’s school, the important question is what kinds of involvement can immigrant parents offer? Some parents of this study reported that they had approached their children’s teachers and offered to volunteer by helping to collect some materials about certain topics in their field of specialization or to give a lecture about an interesting topic that students were studying. Yet according to the parent participants, teachers did not accept these parents’ offers. Similar to the experience of looking into a broken mirror, there was a distorted reflection of what some parents saw as being their role in school and what school personnel expected from parents.

It is important to emphasize that school personnel should allow some space to understand how parents can be a part of the school community and what they can offer, as this will differ
from one parent to another. Cultural differences and acculturation process have an effect on Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education, as explained in the following two sections.

Cultural Differences and Egyptian Parental Involvement in their Children’s Education

The current study attempted to identify and understand how cultural differences influence Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education. Previous studies reported that cultural differences are one of the main barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education (Dyson, 2001; Fuller, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ma, 2005; McBrien, 2011; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Richardson, 2010; Tahtinen, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhong, 2011). Unlike previous studies, this study found that cultural differences have both positive and negative influences on Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.

The three identified cultural differences in this study are: the consequences of the determined four cultural dimensions (high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context); the differences between Ontario’s educational system and the educational system in participants’ home country; and the differences between the ways in which participants and school personnel expressed their concerns. In the following paragraph I explain how these cultural differences affected Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education.

Unexpectedly, the consequences of high power distance dimension on Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education were positive. Egyptian parents came from a high power distance country. This means that they had lived in a country in which there are significant differences between superiors and subordinates, and where powerful individuals maintain and emphasize their power. As reported by Hofstede (1980), people in high power
distance countries “accept an unequal distribution of power” (p. 122). Therefore, I expected Egyptians who were living in Canada to communicate with school personnel by putting themselves in subordinate positions, by not challenging decisions of school personnel, and by not advocating on behalf of their children.

However, in this study Egyptian parents were able to recognize the differences between high power distance and low power distance practices; moreover, they favoured low power distance practices. It was very clear that parents had made several comparisons between how their children learned in Ontario schools with how their children or parents themselves had learned when they were in their home country. This comparison yielded parents’ appreciation of certain aspects of the Ontario educational system that they had not experienced in their home country’s educational system due to the practices of high power distance. Parents appreciated that school personnel conveyed that all people are equal, all people have the right to express their concerns, and all people have the right to challenge school decisions. Parents also appreciated that the Ontario education system enhanced students’ soft skills, such as presentation skills, creativity, and critical thinking. In general, these practices led parents to feel that the school system is a welcoming environment.

In addition, these findings challenge how Western researcher Hofstede (2011) has studied other countries that are different from his own. He described people in high power distance countries as accepting unequal distribution of power. Yet parents in this study did not demonstrate any rejection of low power distance practices such as respect for individuality and equal rights. Instead, parents showed their appreciation of these practices and critiqued their country of origin’s high power distance practices such as respect to authority and lack of opportunities to challenge any decisions made by people in positions of authority.
This finding suggests that when studying other cultures, researchers should pay attention to the political, economic, and social factors that influence people’s decisions and behaviours. To explain, an outsider researcher might think that people behave in ways of their own choosing; however, in reality people may have been forced to behave in certain ways due to political conditions. For example, if people have an opportunity for freedom, then they are more likely to act differently. Wu (2006) reported a similar concern:

...work-related cultural values in a specific culture are not static and can be changed over time. When the political, societal, and economic environments change, people’s cultural values also change. Thus, many cultural theories should be updated and re-evaluated periodically. (p. 33)

Therefore, there is a need to update the cultural differences theories in connection with each country’s context.

On the other hand, this study was able to identify some cultural differences that negatively influence the communication between Egyptian immigrants and school personnel and how Egyptian immigrants of this study experience the educational system of their children. These cultural differences include different educational systems; different types of expression; and consequences of collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and high context dimensions. Berry (1997) asked the following question: “What happens to individuals, who have developed in one cultural context, when they attempt to live in a new cultural context?” (p. 6). The researcher provided different scenarios for each context, and wondered:

If culture is such a powerful shaper of behaviour, do individuals continue to act in the new setting as they did in the previous one, do they change their behavioural repertoire to be more appropriate in the new setting, or is there some complex pattern of continuity
and change in how people go about their lives in the new society? The answer provided by cross-cultural psychology is very clearly supportive of the last of these three alternatives. (Berry, 1997, p. 6)

The findings of the current study reported a combination of these three scenarios, not only the last one.

When Egyptian immigrant parents arrived in Canada, they did not have knowledge about how the Ontario educational system worked and their rights and responsibilities. In addition, they did not obtain support or explanations from school personnel nor from any other stakeholders, perhaps because they were not aware of all available services, or maybe because the language barrier prevented them from asking questions. Parents acted based on their previous knowledge, expectations, and roles in their previous educational system, which is behaviour that reflects the first scenario that Berry (1997) mentioned.

However, when parents became aware of some rules and information and understood what was expected of them, then they followed the rules and expectations of the host country. These shifts occurred gradually. As well, parents may know some rules in one aspect of life but not be aware of the expectations in other aspects of life. Therefore, they will again act based on their previous knowledge. It is clear from this study that when parents received the correct knowledge and become aware of the expected procedure, they followed these procedures accordingly. This behaviour reflects the second scenario that Berry (1997) provided.

The known and unknown processes in different situations of immigrants’ lives may reflect the third scenario, which indicated that parents follow the host country’s rules and expectations when they are aware of these; otherwise, parents acted based on their previous knowledge. Considering the struggle of immigrants to understand their new life and navigate
different systems, conflict and negative experiences are the normal outcomes of these cultural differences.

Egyptian parents reported four negative experiences with Ontario’s educational system. First of all, all parents complained that there is a lack of educational resources that would allow them to understand what their children study in school. They mentioned that in Egypt’s educational system students received the same books that teachers use at school; therefore, parents understood what their children should study on a daily basis. However, in Ontario’s education system elementary students do not receive textbooks. With these differences between the two educational systems and without an explanation of how parents can help their children at home in the Canadian context, Egyptian parents felt that they were disabled from helping and supporting their children’s learning, even though they were capable of helping them.

Parents also reported that some teachers sent children’s schoolwork home, though not on a regular basis, while other teachers did not. The consistent connection between school and home is missing. Parents found that what they received from school in terms of their children's worksheets that reflect what they have done at school is helpful in giving parents an idea of what their children were learning at school. However, this did not happen on a continuous basis. It is important for school personnel to be more connected with parents and to regularly provide parents with samples of their children’s work in order to reduce parents’ challenges in understanding what their children are learning in school.

In addition, parents indicated that their home country’s educational system has high expectations for all students. Therefore, competition exists and is expected between all students. However, school personnel of this study think that having high expectations is not feasible for all students. These contradictory points of view led to the second negative experience of parent
participants in Ontario’s educational system. Parents were concerned that their children who in the past had been successful at school would lose interest as they learned to place average expectations on themselves, as they were not challenged enough at school, and as the school environment did not stimulate students to do their best.

However, the differences between both educational systems play a role in this negative experience of immigrant parents. From my own experiences as an immigrant mother of school-age children, as a teacher, and as a parent who has volunteered in school-related activities in Ontario schools, I recognize that the system is very dependent on how parents advocate for their children.

For example, if parents believe that their children are capable of doing well in school but that they are not challenged enough at school, then they should talk with their children’s teacher. Parents should tell teachers that their children are not challenged enough at school and ask the teachers to provide their children with enrichment programs. However, immigrant parents may not know how to navigate the system and may not know that these enrichment programs are available to students who are performing well at school. Usually this concern is not raised by teachers unless the child is really gifted and the teacher is doing her job very well. The school expectation is that parents should raise their concerns and advocate for their children in this matter. Advocating for their children is an important skill that immigrant parents should learn. It is the responsibility of school personnel, settlement workers, and any other stakeholders who work with immigrants to educate immigrant parents about this topic.

Thirdly, parent participants of this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system in terms of what children learn in the same subjects at the same grade level in different schools and in terms of how teachers communicate
with parents. This inconsistency was a great challenge for Egyptian parents in this study, as it increased their struggle to understand the system. The study reported two possibly related explanations for negative experiences of inconsistency. The first explanation is that the educational system of parents’ country of origin is very consistent throughout the entire country. Therefore, parents had expected that they would encounter a similar consistent system, but when they encountered a different system, challenges and discomfort arose.

The second explanation is that people who are high in uncertainty avoidance usually tend to feel uncomfortable with unstructured, inconsistent situations (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). As a result, Egyptian parents felt dissatisfied with the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system. However, according to what I have witnessed during my involvement in different school-related events, when parents provided their feedback on educational issues to the board staff, some non-immigrant parents were also concerned with the inconsistency in Ontario’s educational system.

This raises the question of whether Egyptian parents’ negative experience of the inconsistency in education is a result of their avoidance of unstructured situations and their lack of information about the new educational system with its inconsistency increasing their confusion, or whether there is a real shortcoming in Ontario’s educational system that all parents experience regardless of their immigration status. The answer to this question is not known yet. More research is needed to understand immigrants’ perceptions about the inconsistency in education and to determine whether these perceptions are different from the perceptions of parents from the host country.
The Acculturation Journey and Egyptian Parental Involvement in their Children’s Education

The concept of acculturation in this study refers to the process that describes how people function in a new society after moving from their societies in which they were initially raised. Four strategies have been used to describe the way immigrants behave or prefer to behave in their new country.

Berry (2001, 2010) describes these strategies as “integration”, when immigrants are interested in maintaining both their cultural heritage and contact with the host cultural groups; “marginalization”, when immigrants have little interest in cultural maintenance nor in forming contacts with other groups in the host country; “assimilation”, when immigrants wish to form contacts only with the host culture group and have little or no interest in maintaining their own culture; and finally “separation”, when immigrants prefer to maintain their own culture and have little or no interest in interacting with the other cultures in the host country.

However, in this study I preferred to use the word “outcomes” instead of the word “strategies”, as it is important to remember that these strategies can be understood as coping methods that immigrants use to deal with the stress and challenges of migration to a country with a culture very different from the one in which they were raised. In addition, I proposed that acculturation outcomes cannot be understood without understanding the conditions that surround immigrants in their new society and the processes they have gone through in their lives that have led them toward one outcome or another.

Acculturation conditions refer to the advantages and constraints that parents face which either promote or discourage their involvement in their children’s education. This study found that the advantages that promote parents’ involvement include the positive influence of high
power distance culture on immigrants who move to a society where low power distance is the norm. This leads to parents feeling that the school environment is welcoming. Other advantages that promote parent’s involvement include parents’ strong personal skills of having a growth mindset and being patient and tolerant, and parents forming strong ties with members of their community.

These advantages played an important role in preventing immigrants from being isolated while they were facing several constraints and adjusting to their new life. It is important for stakeholders who work with immigrants to keep in mind that a welcoming environment works as an asset for immigrants by helping them to face difficulties. School strategies to welcome immigrants could be enhanced by increasing the number of multicultural events, as parents of this study reported more interest in attending such events.

Furthermore, strategies to welcome immigrants could include efforts to accommodate immigrants’ religious needs such as by providing a place to pray or by accommodating food requirements. In addition, Muslim parents of this study who practiced their faith reported that their Islamic faith was the main source of their patience and tolerance for the difficulties they encountered, as their faith provided them with the strength to face adversities in life.

This finding is important, as it reveals a true aspect of the Islamic faith - a faith which has been commonly portrayed in the media as a faith of violence. The most significant implication of this finding is that educators and school personnel need to listen to how Muslim parents describe their Islamic faith, and consider how their faith provides them with strength to face adversity. Instead of limiting their understanding of Islam to what is proposed by the media, school personnel have a responsibility to provide opportunities for Muslim families to educate the
school community about their faith. The Waterloo Region District School Board regarding Faith and Religious Accommodation policy clearly states:

   It should also be noted that respect for faith diversity is considered to be a shared responsibility. While the Board works to ensure that students and staff are able to observe the tenets of their faith in school environments free from discrimination, it is also the responsibility of the students and community to help the schools by highlighting and providing understanding of the needs of religious and secular communities. (Policy 1012, p. 1)

Yet at present there are very limited opportunities for families to help schools achieve this shared responsibility.

Another important implication of these findings is the knowledge that immigrants’ strong ties with members of their community form a vehicle for immigrant resistance to failure, isolation, and dis-involvement. The study suggests that school personnel should find ways to connect new immigrant families with other families from their communities in order to help them adjust to their new life.

On the other hand, language difficulties, discrimination, hidden assumptions, and the negative aspects of cultural differences that are reported by parents of this study are constraints to their acculturation process and hence their involvement in their children’s education. Parents of this study faced the unknown and felt unsettled; they experienced psychological and mental processes including culture shock, depression, loss of self-confidence, and detachment.

The difficulties that Egyptian immigrants endured in their adaptation do not result from their inability to change their “cultural repertoire” (Berry, 1997, p. 13); instead, these difficulties are due to parents not receiving correct and relevant information, as parents mentioned. In
addition, these difficulties are perhaps a consequence of the host country’s unfamiliarity with immigrants’ cultures. It is the responsibility of school personnel to educate immigrant parents about expectations and system procedures.

I strongly believe that if immigrants receive more detailed descriptions of how to successfully navigate different systems, their rights and responsibilities, and their expected roles within the host country’s educational system, then culture shock will be reduced. The notion that schools can “take it for granted” that immigrant parents know the above information should be challenged. School personnel may expect immigrant parents to know what to do when visiting the school, just as any other parent would know, or they may think it is the responsibility of immigrants to learn this information, but the reality is that immigrants do not know what to do. For example, they may not know that they should sign in at the school office when they first arrive at school, or they may not know which washroom they can use. This simple information should be explicitly offered to any immigrant parent at the onset of their communication with the school.

Parent participants who were studying to complete their degree and trying to navigate the higher educational system for themselves or who were looking for either a study opportunity or a job to improve their lives underwent great difficulties that caused them to suffer from depression, loss of self-confidence, and detachment. Hence, these parents did not have the time nor the ability to follow up with their children, particularly in school-related activities. When “...changes in the cultural context exceed the individual’s capacity to cope, because of the magnitude, speed, or some other aspect of the change,... [this leads to] serious psychological disturbances, such as clinical depression, and incapacitating anxiety” (Berry & Kim, 1988; Jayasuriya et al., 1992 as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 13).
In conclusion, it is clear that cultural differences and acculturation process influence Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education, specifically in school-related activities. The following section provides a precise comprehensive understanding of Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education.

**Comprehensive Understanding of Egyptian Parental Involvement in their Children’s Education**

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of Egyptian parental involvement in their children’s education, Figure 13 illustrates how cultural differences and acculturation process influenced Egyptian immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education.

On both the left and right sides of Figure 13, cultural differences and acculturation process are presented with their identified components. The top and bottom of the figure list the possible outcomes of the influence of cultural difference and acculturation, while the middle of the figure describes immigrants and their involvement in their children’s education.

When cultural differences between immigrants and the host country are high and acculturation difficulties that immigrants go through are high, the outcomes that immigrants experience are negative and may include conflict between immigrants and school personnel as well as immigrants’ feelings of depression, loss of-self confidence, and isolation. As a result, immigrants show a lack of involvement in school-related activities and struggle in their involvement with their children in home-related activities.

On the other hand, when immigrants start to recognize cultural differences and adjust to a new cultural context, then the cultural differences between immigrants and school personnel become low. When immigrants find work and feel settled, their adaptation becomes easier, the
adjustment difficulties are reduced, and then the outcomes that immigrants experience are positive and may include satisfaction, integration, and happiness.

Accordingly, immigrants will become involved in school-related activities and have no difficulty becoming involved in home-related activities. Participants of this study had not yet reached this stage, as indicated in the figure by the dashed line between the outcomes and the immigrants’ circle. During this process, adjustments involve learning and practicing new cultural aspects and forming resilience to failure.
These changes are supported by immigrants’ characteristics that include being highly educated, having growth mindsets, practicing their faith, and having supportive friends from their community. As mentioned previously, this process varies between immigrants and depends on the length of time each immigrant requires to learn the new cultural context, their adjustment to the new country, and whether they receive any support from others.

This complex process should be understood by school personnel, settlement workers, educators, and any stakeholders who work with immigrants in order to provide them with the services that best meet their needs.

**Study Limitations**

This study is limited by several factors. First, it is a qualitative study conducted on twenty Egyptian participants, nineteen of whom were Muslims. All Muslim participants were practicing their Islamic faith to some degree. Only one participant was Egyptian Christian. All women of this study were of visible minority. It is important to emphasize that other Egyptians who may not be practicing their faith or who may be non-Muslim may have different perspectives, challenges, and needs. Second, parents of this study have unique characteristics. For example, some had come to Canada as professionals, while others had come as students. All participants were highly educated. This is typical for an Egyptian in Canada under current immigration policy. However, this study cannot be assumed to represent the experiences of other immigrants.

In addition, school personnel participants of this study were from five different schools at one public school board. Therefore, other school personnel at different school boards in the Ontario

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1 In 1967, Canada added a new class of immigrants to the two previous classes of the family and refugees classes. The “economic class” was created to manage the increasing number of applications and to select immigrants who would improve the economic, social, demographic, and political aspects of Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada, 2013). Applicants in this class are chosen through a points system. This point system consists of six criteria, with different points allocated to each. These criteria are English and/or French skills, education, experiences, age, arranged employment, and adaptability. Immigrants must obtain at least 67 out of 100 points for their application to be accepted. There is no Egyptian refugee in Canada at the time of this study, therefore, Egyptians enter Canada as international students or as professional (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013).
educational system may have different perspectives.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was able to connect three bodies of literature, namely cultural differences, culture shock, and acculturation theories. This information was used to understand a certain phenomenon, namely to understand Egyptian immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. While these three bodies of literature are separate, they are very much related and interconnected. At the beginning of my work in this dissertation, I faced a considerable amount of studies scattered throughout the literature.

However, after reading and trying to understand the study phenomenon, I found that in order to understand immigrant experience, we should understand both their cultural differences and their acculturation process which includes culture shock. These aspects of immigrants’ lives are important and should consequently be understood based on how immigrants themselves describe them.

Another significant feature of this study is its ability to discern that cultural differences have both positive and negative influences on immigrant parental involvement; as such, cultural differences should not only be seen as barriers for immigrants in their new country of settlement. Moreover, the study emphasized that the negative effect of cultural differences on immigrants are only temporary. When immigrants obtain accurate information about different aspects of their new life, then they tend to change their assumptions based on previous knowledge and adjust to new practices accordingly.

A third significant aspect of this study is its challenging of cultural differences theories that have existed for approximately 30 years. These theories should be updated and reviewed based on the unique social, political, and economic context of various countries. Furthermore,
this study contributed to the literature of parental involvement in children’s education by providing information about Egyptian immigrant parents who are underrepresented in the literature in the Canadian context.

**Implications for Practice**

It is important for educators, social workers, ESL teachers, and settlement workers to have an in-depth understanding of the challenges that immigrants face due to cultural differences and the acculturation process.

While this study identifies certain cultural differences such as how the collectivism dimension influences parents’ responses in that they may not ask questions nor voice their concerns in order to save other people’s face, different systems reflect different roles, expectations, procedures, and means of expression. Social workers and school personnel who work with immigrants should pay attention to each immigrant’s unique cultural differences and adaptation challenges. It is important to keep in mind that individual immigrants and families have different characteristics, even those who have come from the same country of origin. They may share similar challenges, but how they persevere through these challenges and the duration of these challenges may vary.

As reported in the findings of this study, school personnel believe that one of the barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education is the fact that immigrants come from countries with different educational systems. This conclusion should not be the end of the story; rather, it should be the beginning. While school personnel have recognized this problem, what solutions to this problem should be in place? This study suggests that principals should create some ways to educate immigrant parents, teachers, and administrators about the expected roles of parents and the expected degree of parental involvement, parents’ rights and
responsibilities, the Ontario curriculum and evaluation system of students, and how this may be
different from other educational systems.

As reported in this study, parents offered to volunteer in ways that may not have been
familiar to school personnel such as by helping teachers to collect information or by presenting a
lecture to students about certain topics. It is important for school personnel to recognize that
every parent can volunteer in a different way based on their background, skills, area of expertise,
and how they believe that they can best contribute to the school community. Therefore, school
personnel should consider allowing parents to decide how they would like to be involved in
school-related activities.

Implications for policy

Parents in this study reported that they want school personnel to be more culturally
competent. Policies at the provincial and board levels should enhance school cultural sensitivity
through a reformed hiring process aimed to provide various opportunities to people of visible
minorities to work within the school system. School cultural sensitivity should be fostered
through continuous education and training of current staff and educators in cultural differences
and in supporting a culturally competent environment. In addition, school boards and schools
should invite students and their families to participate in building awareness and understanding
of diverse cultural aspects within the education environment.

Home-school partnership should be a fundamental theme of policy. Notably, student
success and well-being is the most important goal of education. To achieve this goal,
policymakers should be cognizant of the importance of engaging families in their children’s
education. Policies should emphasize the necessity to provide families with effective resources to
support their children’s learning. However, all parents in this study lacked a clear description of
what their children studied in school. A general outline of the topics’ titles was not sufficiently informative according to the parents of this study.

In addition, parents need effective communication between home and school through receiving regular updates of their children's learning activities, initiatives which encourage parent participation in their children’s education, an increased number of parent-teacher meetings throughout the school year, and receiving information about the Ontario educational system. Overall, it is clear that enhancing home-school communication should be considered in the development of educational policy.

Furthermore, the disconnection between schools and settlement services is a great challenge that school boards must find ways to resolve in order to make good use of available services to immigrant families. For example, by forming positive partnerships with settlement services, school personnel could have quick access to interpreters and child care to support families who are in need of these services to be involved in their children’s education.

**Implications for Research**

Considering the limitations of this qualitative research study conducted on twenty participants with unique characteristics, more research is needed to examine parents from other countries with different levels of collectivism/individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and cultural context to further our understanding of the cultural differences that influence immigrants’ participation in their children’s education.

Given that this study was conducted with one group of immigrants, further research is needed to explore whether other immigrant groups with different profiles have similar experiences, or whether they may experience different challenges and needs.
School personnel who participated in this study understood immigrant needs and created successful relationships between home and school. More research is needed to understand the perceptions of personnel from other schools, especially those that do not offer any support for their immigrant population and to determine whether or not they face any challenges to support their population of newcomers.

Egyptian immigrants of this study complained about not having sufficient educational materials to understand what their children studied and did in school. They also complained about inconsistencies in the educational system in terms of what their children studied in school, the expected outcomes of students in each grade level, and the expected methods of communication between teachers and school personnel. Cultural differences in terms of different systems may explain Egyptian parents’ concerns; however, as discussed previously, some parents of the host country may have similar concerns. It is not clear whether these complaints are due to cultural differences or whether there are shortcomings in the system. Possibly a quantitative study is needed to examine the similarities and differences between immigrants and non-immigrants in their respective opinions on the inconsistency within Ontario’s educational system and the sufficiency of available educational resources for parents.

In conclusion, immigrant parental involvement in children’s education in home, school and community is important for children’s success and well-being. School and home should work collaboratively to ensure that children can reach their full potential. For immigrant families, this could happen by bridging cultural differences, which is a shared responsibility between immigrants, their community and different institutions in and people of the host country.

It is quite hard to ignore cultural differences’ impact on immigrants and their understanding of how to navigate different systems in the host country. However, this study
argues that these differences are temporary and can be bridged. Particularly, If we can identify these cultural differences, it will be easy to create different ways to bridge these differences and promote the adaptation process of immigrants in their new life. This study has identified several cultural differences and pointed out that cultural differences and acculturation processes are related and should be connected when studying immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Definitions of Terms

**Acculturation**

In this dissertation the concept of acculturation refers to the process that describes how people function in a new society after moving from their societies in which they were initially raised.

**Culture:**

I propose the following definition of culture: Culture refers to the practices, whether linguistic or behavioural, and the concepts traded or shared between a group of individuals in a certain place and time. These practices and concepts are derived from the political, economic, social, and/or religious conditions surrounding these individuals, and have unequal impact on their practices and concepts.

How this definition differs from others:

- This definition focuses more on shared “practices” rather than shared “values, norms, customs, etc.” as presented in other definitions described in Chapter 2-2.
- “Practices” means everything people do or say that is considered a characteristic of those people; these include but are not limited to verbal, non verbal, gesture, or action. Practices differ from behaviour, as behaviour does not necessarily indicate the continuousness of action. In addition, practices are different from tradition. “Practices” is a more general word that includes tradition as well as other social norms or customs.
- The focus on practices in understanding a culture is more accurate than the focus on values or norms. For example, let us assume that there are two Muslim women. One is wearing a hijab and the other one is not. Which woman represents their Islamic culture?
They both believe in Islam; however, the one who practices an Islamic role by wearing hijab is representing one aspect of the Islamic culture. For another example, in high power distance countries, people practice the power differential among each other, but that may not mean that they believe in the value of unequal distribution of power. Accordingly, what people value and practice does not necessarily have the same meaning all the time. Therefore, based on the examples above, understanding people’s practices is a more accurate way of understanding their culture.

- This definition of culture emphasizes the importance of political, economic, social, and religious conditions for any culture and even for subcultures within nations, which shape people's practices and concepts.
- Including the concepts of place and time indicates that culture could be changed and may evolve from one place to another and from one time period to another. This indicates that there are different subcultures within each nation.

How this definition is similar to others:

- Like other definitions, this definition observes that these practices are shared and continued between a certain group of people.
- This definition agrees that culture is learned and contested.

High/Low context dimension

Hall (1976) introduces a dimension that distinguishes between different cultures based on communication style. Hall introduced high- and low- context communication. In a high context communication culture, individuals expect that other people will understand the given information in a communicational situation from the context without providing much background information. This means that the meaning of messages is embedded in the context
and is implicit rather than explicit. In a low context communication culture, individuals provide more background information in a communicational situation and they emphasize direct and explicit information.

**High/Low power distance dimension**

Power distance in Hofstede’s (1980, 2011) work refers to inequality in relation to authority within a culture. High PDI countries emphasize the demonstration of authority and depend on hierarchical structure roles. In these countries, the dependence and inequality in society are enforced; therefore, unequal distribution of power is expected and acceptable. Subordinates in high power distance countries don't question the decisions of superiors, and powerful individuals strive to maintain and exercise their power.

On the other hand, low PDI countries encourage equality and interdependence in society, with the belief that people are equal. Powerful individuals in low PDI countries perceive their power as legitimate and based on rules, and as potentially redistributed among others. Therefore, powerful individuals try to hide their power and encourage the powerless to actively participate in decision-making.

**High/low uncertainty avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance refers to “the degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 5). People in countries that were rated high on uncertainty avoidance are more comfortable with structured situations, stability and consistency. While people in countries that were rated low on uncertainty avoidance are more comfortable with ambiguity and less dependent on structured situations.

**Individualism/ Collectivism dimension**
Hofstede (1980) describes individualism as “the relationship between an individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society” (p. 213). People in individualist societies are independent from their in-groups, operate with more focus on their personal goals rather than in-group goals, and behave mainly on the basis of their attitudes rather than the norms of their in-groups (Triandis, 2001). On the other hand, people in a collectivist society tend to do what is best for the group or community, save other people face to maintain and develop relationships.

**Parental involvement in children’s education**

The term “parental involvement” in this study applied Epstein’s definition that indicates the partnership between home, school, and community. This means that parental involvement includes different types, which are parenting, helping children learn at home, communicating with school personnel, volunteering at their children’s school, participating in decision-making related to school issues, and approaching different community resources and services, agencies, or any service providers that strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.
Appendix B: Samples of APA Formatting for Tables and Figures

Tables

I have followed the APA format (American Psychology Association, 2010) for tables as presented in the following example with the associated explanations.

Table 16. Levels of Heading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of heading</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centred, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with a period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table number: Goes above the table. Use plain text, capital for first letter, space, number and a full stop after the number. Table title: Place beneath the table number Italics, maximal capitalisation.

Unfortunately, a technical issue results if the title placed beneath the table number. Therefore, in all tables in this dissertation, the title is placed beside the table number after the full stop, as shown.

The table note: Note. (Capital for first letter, full stop, italics, smaller text size (e.g. 10pt) than the rest of the essay text).

Use the table note for general notes including explanations of definitions and abbreviations, followed by a reference note in the format of Reprinted from or Adapted from title, author, date, publisher details or retrieval URL.
Figures

I have followed the APA (American Psychology Association, 2010) format for figures as presented in the following example with the associated explanations.

Figure 14. Hornby’s Theoretical Model of Parental Involvement.

Figure captions/titles should be typed on the bottom of the figure or if necessary on the facing page, if the figure is too large. The caption is not italicized, in sentence format (only first word and proper nouns capitalized), and ends with a period. Beside the figure title, include any explanations and/or acknowledgements that a figure is reproduced or adapted from another source.
Appendix C: List of Action To Promote Parental Involvement

Ontario Ministry of Education Actions to promote parental engagement in Ontario schools.

The Ministry took the following actions to promote parent engagement in Ontario schools:

- Established a Parent Engagement Office in the Inclusive Education Branch to support parental engagement in all schools of Ontario, six regional offices, and Parent Involvement Committees on every school board.

- Provided funding to support parent inclusion initiatives, including:
  - $500 each year for school council as a part of its budget, to be used mainly for supporting the engagement of parents in school.
  - Up to $1000 for Parent Reaching Out (PRO) Grants were provided to fund school-based projects “to reach parents who may experience barriers to involvement due to language, poverty, immigration status, or other factors (People for Education, 2009, p. 11).
  - Base funding for each school board to support the work of the Parent Involvement Committee, with additional funding based on student population in the board (People for Education, 2009, p. 11).
  - Annual funding for provincial parent organizations including Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, Ontario Federation of Home and School Association, Parents Partenaires en Education, and People for Education in order to support parent involvement.
  - Annual budget for Parent Engagement Office to support parent involvement work.
Followed up in terms of discussing parents’ recommendations and making any changes or modifications to the policy to ensure the inclusion of parents in Ontario's educational system.

As previously mentioned, there are two types of grants (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, Para.3):

- School councils of publicly funded schools in Ontario (only) can apply for Parent Reaching Out Grants for Schools.
- Parent organizations, Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), publicly funded school boards, non-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions operating in Ontario can apply for Parent Reaching Out Grants for Schools for Regional/Provincial Projects. For example, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) received a grant of $10,000 from the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants for Regional/Provincial Projects 2013-2014. In addition, 67 schools have received the Parents Reaching Out Grants (PRO) for School Councils 2013-14, the total of elementary and secondary public school in WRDSB is 118 public school in 2013 (Waterloo Region District School Board, 2013), the grant for each school ranges from $500-$1000, and approximately 57% of the total schools under WRDSB received grants in 2013.
Appendix D: Structured Interviews for Parent Participants

This structured interview includes demographic questions. I will read the questions and the available choices and you may tell me which choice applies to you.

Demographic Information (acculturation conditions)

(1) Please tell me the letter that applies to you for each of the following questions.

1- Are you:
   a. A Father
   b. A Mother
   c. Other (please specify)

2- Are you:
   a. A temporary resident (temporary visa for foreign worker, foreign student, etc.)
   b. A permanent resident (immigrant, refugee, etc.)
   c. A Canadian citizen
   d. Other

3- Are you working?
   a. Yes
   b. No, I am still searching for a job
   c. No, I am a student
   d. No, I am looking after my children
   e. Other

4- What is your highest education or degree?
   a. No degree (cannot read or write in my own language)
   b. No degree (can read and write in my own language)
   c. Elementary school (grade 1-8)
   d. High school (grade 9-12)
   e. College
   f. University (no degree)
   g. University (bachelor, etc.)
h. Master degree (student or graduate)
  i. Doctoral degree (student or graduate)

5- Have you lived elsewhere in Canada before living in Ontario?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. If yes, for how long?

6- How long have you lived in Ontario?
   a. 1 year or less
   b. 2-3 years
   c. 4-5 years
   d. 6-7 years
   e. 8-9 years
   f. 10 years

7- Do you have family members living in Canada?
   a. Yes, in this area
   b. Yes, in another city in Ontario
   c. Yes, in another province of Canada
   d. No, all of my relatives live in other countries
   e. No, all of my relatives live in my country of birth
   f. Other

8- How many children do you have?
   a. 1 child
   b. 2 children
   c. 3 children
   d. 4 children
   e. 5 children
   f. More than 5 children
(II) Please answer the following questions:

9- How old are you?

10- How old are your children and which grades are they in?
Appendix E: Interview Guide for Parent Participants

The interview guide includes three parts. The first part asks you several open-ended questions about your experience with your child’s or children's education. The second part presents several scenarios or situations and asks you to share your thoughts about these. Finally, the third part asks questions related to the barriers you face in your parental involvement in your child’s or children's education.

Part One: General Questions about Parental Involvement in Children’s Education

1. Tell me about your child’s education here in Ontario.
2. Tell me about your communication with the staff members at your children's school. How would you describe this experience?
3. Tell me about aspects you like/dislike about your children’s education.

Part Two: Hypothetical Scenarios with Participants

I will describe some hypothetical scenarios and ask you to tell me your thoughts about each scenario. Each scenario starts with “Imagine” and ends with “What would you say or do?”

Power Distance: Authority (how they see themselves equal/not equal to school personnel) and Advocating (how they practice their rights)

Imagine that your child's teacher tells you that your child needs special education support because he is not participating well in class. You believe that your child is performing well academically but he is shy. What would you say or do?

Imagine that you want your child to be placed in another class, as you believe it is not good for him to stay in his current class because it is a blended class/he does not get along well with some of his classmates/he has had a negative experience with the assigned teacher, etc. You meet with
the principal and he tells you that the class list is final and cannot be changed. What would you say or do?

Imagine that your child is being bullied at school but neither your child nor his teacher nor any other school personnel tells you about this. You find out only by chance from other children that your child is having this problem. What would you say or do?

**Uncertainty Avoidance (avoiding unknown situations, trust)**

Imagine that the school principal invites you to attend school council, but you do not have a lot of information about this council. The principal tells you that the council brings parents together to discuss school issues that affect all children. You have the option to accept or decline this invitation. What would you say or do?

Imagine that a school trip has been planned and your child wants to go to this trip. However, you are not familiar with the location of the trip and you are concerned about your child's safety. What would you say or do?

**Collectivism (maintaining relationships, saving other people's face)**

Imagine that your child comes to you and tells you that his teacher does not treat him fairly. What would you say or do?

Imagine that when you arrive at a meeting with your child's teacher to discuss his report card, you realize that another teacher with whom you have worked before as a volunteer is also attending this meeting. No one has told you why this teacher is attending the meeting. You do not feel comfortable as you had been told that the meeting would only be attended by you and your child's teacher. What would you say or do?

Imagine that there is a conflict between you and your child’s teacher. The principal brings both you and the teacher together to discuss the issue. You believe that sharing all that has happened
and talking about your feelings as a result of this conflict will cause the teacher to be in trouble.

What would you say or do?

**High Context (detailed answers, indirect communication based on expecting that a teacher will understand what I mean)**

Imagine that during the first meeting with your child's teacher she asks you to tell her about your child's characteristics. What would you say or do?

Imagine that in a conversation with your child’s teacher, she says something that you do not understand. What would you say or do?

Imagine that when you ask your child's teacher about how your child is performing in class, she answers that he is performing well. You feel that this is not enough information. What would you say or do?

**Part Three: Barriers to Involvement/Needs/Suggestions**

I am going to ask you some questions related to your participation in your children's education.

In what ways are you involved with your children’s education?

What would make it easier to become more involved in your children's education?

Are you able to support your child’s learning?

What would make it easier to support your child's learning?

Have you encountered any discrimination or negative treatment from your children’s school?

What would help you to become more involved?
(III) In the following questions, please choose the most applicable option.

You will choose one of several options for each situation. These options are too difficult, difficult, some difficulty, no difficulty, or not applicable.

11- How much difficulty does your English cause you in the following situations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>No difficulty</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with your child's teacher to discuss your child’s learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding staff/teachers when they answer your questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with school personnel by phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the information presented at school meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12- Please rate your awareness of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Not aware</th>
<th>Somewhat aware</th>
<th>Usually aware</th>
<th>Very much aware</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering opportunities at your child’s school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to obtain information about your children’s education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of school trustees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education programs for children with learning difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education programs for gifted children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Interview Guide for School Personnel Participants

The interview includes four parts. The first part gathers demographic information. The second part asks general questions about key informants’ experiences of parental involvement in their children’s education. The third part presents hypothetical scenarios. Finally, the fourth part asks questions about the barriers that school personnel face in engaging immigrant parents in their children’s education.

Part One: Demographic Information

1- Gender: ……male……….female

2- Position: ……….teacher………..ESL teacher…………principal………..vice-principal

3- How long have you held your current position in this school?

4- How long have you been involved in the education system?

5- What is the nature of your work? Please describe your role and work responsibilities.

Part Two: General Questions about Parental Involvement in their Children’s Education

6- What does parental involvement in children’s education mean to you?

7- By thinking back over this past school year, please describe the involvement of immigrant parents in their children’s education.

8- To the best of your knowledge, please describe the current involvement of Arab immigrant parents from Egypt in their children’s education.

9- Are you aware of any conflict that has occurred between school personnel and immigrant parents in general and Egyptian immigrant parents in specific? If so, please describe this conflict.
What thoughts do you have about how conflicts or other challenges for immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s education might be reduced? How could these parents be helped to become more involved?

**Part Three: Hypothetical Scenarios**

I will describe some hypothetical scenarios and ask you to tell me your thoughts about each scenario. Each scenario begins with “Imagine” and ends with “What do you hope the parent would say or do?”

**Power Distance**

Imagine that a teacher tells a child’s mother that her child needs special education support because he is not participating well in class. The mother believes that her child is performing well academically but he is shy. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that a father wants his child to be placed in another class at the beginning of a new school year. He believes his child should not stay in the currently assigned class because it is a blended class/his child does not get along with some of her classmates/his child has previously had negative experiences with the teacher of this class, etc. This father tries to talk with the principal about his concern, but the principal tells the father that the class list is final and cannot be changed. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that a child is being bullied at school, but neither the child nor his teacher nor any other school personnel inform the child’s parent about this. The child’s parent finds out only by chance from other children that her child is in trouble. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Imagine that a school principal invites an immigrant parent to attend school council; however, the parent does not have a lot of information about this council. The principal tells the parent that
the council brings parents together to discuss school issues that affect all children. The parent has the option to accept or decline this invitation. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that a school trip has been planned and an immigrant child wants to go on this trip. However, the parents of this child are not familiar with the location of the trip and are concerned about the safety of their child. What do you hope the parents would say or do?

**Collectivism**

Imagine that a child tells his father that his teacher is not treating him fairly. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that a mother has a meeting with her child's teacher to discuss the child’s report card. When the mother arrives at the meeting, she realizes that another teacher with whom the mother has worked before as a volunteer is also attending this meeting. No one has told the mother why this other teacher is attending the meeting. The mother does not feel comfortable because she had been told that the meeting was to be attended only by herself and her child's teacher. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that there is a conflict between a mother and her child’s teacher. The principal brings the mother and the teacher together to discuss the issue. The mother believes that sharing all that has happened and talking about her feelings as a result of this conflict would cause the teacher to be in trouble. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

**High Context**

Imagine that during their first meeting a teacher asks a mother to talk about her child's characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Imagine that during a conversation between a teacher and a father, the teacher says something that the father does not understand. What do you hope the parent would say or do?
Imagine that when a father asks his child's teacher how his child is performing in class, the teacher says that he is performing well. The father feels that this is not enough information. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

**Part Four: Obstacles Faced by School Personnel**

From your perspective, what are the barriers to immigrant parental involvement in school-related activities?

What actions do you think schools should take to promote parents’ participation in their children’s education at home, at school, and in the community?
Appendix G: Informed Consent Statement for Parent Participants

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Statement for Parent Participants

Uncovering the processes and consequences of Arab immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation study entitled Uncovering the processes and consequences of Arab immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences. The study will be conducted by Hend Shalan, a doctoral student at Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. The main purposes of this study are to understand how immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education and to explore ways to improve relations between home and school. As you are an Arab immigrant from Egypt, the researcher would like to understand your experience with your child’s education and to explore the difficulties that you might face during your communication with your child’s school personnel. This dissertation study is part of the PhD degree in Social Work requirements. The dissertation supervisor is Dr. Gary Cameron, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University.

INFORMATION

You will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately one-and-a-half-hours in length. This interview will be conducted face-to-face with researcher Hend Shalan. During this time you will have the opportunity to share your experiences about your involvement in your children’s education in Ontario schools. This study will address the following overarching research question: What are the cultural barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education?
The interview will include four parts. In the first part of the interview, the researcher will ask you some demographic questions. In the second part of the interview, the researcher will ask you some general questions about your experiences in your child's education and in your communication with your child’s school personnel. The third part of the interview will present you with 11 different scenarios and ask you to share your thoughts and responses to these scenarios. Each scenario will begin with the word “imagine” and end with the question “What would you say or do?” An example of these scenarios is presented below.

Imagine that your child's teacher tells you that your child needs special education because he is not participating well in class. You believe that your child is performing well academically but he is shy. What would you say or do?

In the fourth part of the interview the researcher will ask questions with the intention of gathering information about the barriers to your parental involvement and your need to be more involved in your children’s education.

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. YOU WILL BE SPEAKING ABOUT YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES IN RELATION TO ALL OF THE QUESTIONS AND SCENARIOS.

Interviews will be conducted by Hend Shalan, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Social Work. Your interview will be recorded by using an audio recording device, transcribed by the interviewer, and returned to you to be vetted for accuracy if you agree. At this point you will be asked to make any deletions or additions you feel are necessary. There will be no deception of any kind used in this research.
**RISKS**

There are no physical risks as a result of participating in this study. It is possible that you may feel upset as you recall upsetting experiences; however, please be aware that you may refuse to answer any question and you may stop the interview at any time if you wish.

**BENEFITS**

There is no monetary benefit to participating in this study. However, the potential benefits of participating in this research are as follows:

You may have an opportunity to discuss your experience in your involvement in your child's education.

You may have an opportunity to contribute to advancing the knowledge on the influence of cultural differences within immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.

You may have an opportunity to contribute to the improvement of school-home relationships by providing your thoughts and experiences in bridging cultural differences between school personnel and immigrant families.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured in that only Hend Shalan will have access to the audio recordings and the transcribed interviews. Upon your consent, the dissertation supervisor, Dr. Gary Cameron, may listen to some of the interviews for consultation purposes. He will not be able to recognize your identity as your name or any personal information will not be recorded.

All identifying information will be removed at the time the recorded interview is transcribed. The transcribed interviews will be kept for seven years on a password-locked computer in Hend Shalan's locked office. In addition, all completed consent forms, audio recordings, and one
master list of participants will be kept in a locked cabinet in Hend Shalan’s locked office.

Transcriptions will be identified by ID numbers. Once the study has been completed, the link between participant names and their ID numbers will be terminated. As this data is part of the researcher's dissertation study and there is a possibility of publication, the data will be kept for up to two years after which time they will be destroyed.

Research results will be used and submitted for the dissertation. Results may be used in further research, published in academic journals, or presented at conferences to further the understanding of the educational needs of immigrant parents in Canada.

The researcher would like be able to utilize quotations of study participants in reports and publications after removing all identifying information such as the names of schools or individuals. Your permission concerning the use of quotation is requested. If, however, you do not wish quotations from your transcript to be used in publications, please indicate this preference at the bottom of this form. In addition, if you do not wish to provide consent for the dissertation supervisor to listen to your interview, please indicate this preference at the bottom of this form.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact researcher Hend Shalan at 519-208-5492 or hend_edu@yahoo.com.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board with tracking number REB4465 and Waterloo Region District School Board Ethics Committee. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a
participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 (19) or rbasso@wlu.ca.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, upon your request your data will be removed from the study and destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

**FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION**

The results of this research will be presented as a part of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. Results may also be included in further work in the researcher's dissertation. Results of the research will be presented in a two-page summary and mailed or emailed to you. As a participant in this study, you have the right to alter, change, or remove any content from your transcript before your transcript is used in any research output. This research is to be completed by June 30, 2017.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _______________________________ Date ________________

Investigator's signature ______________________________ Date ________________
USE OF QUOTATIONS

Please check one of the following options:

_____ The researchers may quote me under the condition that these quotations will not identify me and that the quotations that are used have been vetted through me.

_____ I wish to participate in an interview, but please do not quote any of my words.

Listening to the interview by the research supervisor:

Please check one of the following options:

_____ I give my consent for the supervisor to listen to my recorded interview under the condition that the interview will not identify me and has been vetted through me.

_____ I wish to participate in an interview, but I do not give my consent for the supervisor of this study to listen to my recorded interview.

PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR EMAIL OR MAILING ADDRESS TO RECEIVE A COPY OF YOUR FULL TRANSCRIPT. THIS WILL PROVIDE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENSURE THAT YOUR TRANSCRIPT IS ACCURATE.

________________________________________

_______________________________________________

_______________________________________________
Appendix H: Informed Consent Statement for School Personnel Participants

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Statement for School Personnel Participants

Uncovering the processes and consequences of Arab immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation study entitled Uncovering the processes and consequences of Arab immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences. The study will be conducted by Hend Shalan, a doctoral student at Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. The main purposes of this study is to understand how immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education and to explore ways to improve relationships between home and school. This dissertation study is part of the PhD degree in Social Work requirements. The dissertation supervisor is Dr. Gary Cameron, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University.

INFORMATION

You will be asked to participate in an interview that will be approximately one-hour in length. This interview will be conducted face-to-face with researcher Hend Shalan. During this time you will have the opportunity to share your experiences of immigrants’ involvement in their children’s education in Ontario schools. This study will address the following overarching research question: What are the cultural barriers to immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education?
The interview will include four parts. In the first part, you will be asked demographic questions. In the second part, you will be asked questions about immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education. This second part of the interview aims to collect data on the expectation of school personnel regarding immigrants' roles in participating in their children’s education, and to identify any potential conflict situations that exist between immigrant parents and school personnel. The third part of the interview will provide you with a total of 11 scenarios and ask you to share your thoughts and responses to these scenarios. Each scenario begins with the word “Imagine” and ends with the question “What do you hope the parent would say or do?” An example of a scenario is provided below. The fourth part of the interview asks you questions about obstacles faced by school personnel regarding the involvement of immigrant parents and asks you to share your suggestions of ways to enhance immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education.

Imagine that a teacher tells a child’s mother that her child needs special educational support because he is not participating well in class. The mother believes that her child is performing well academically but he is shy. What do you hope the parent would say or do?

Interviews will be conducted by Hend Shalan, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Social Work. Your interview will be recorded by using an audio recording device, transcribed by the interviewer, and returned to you to be vetted for accuracy if you agree. At this point you will be invited to make any deletions or additions you feel are necessary. There will be no deception of any kind used in this research.

**RISKS**

There are no physical risks as a result of participating in this study. However, you may refuse to answer any question and you may stop the interview at any time if you wish.
BENEFITS

There is no monetary benefit in participating in this study. However, the non-monetary benefits of participating in this research are as follows:

You may have an opportunity to discuss your experience about immigrant involvement in their children’s education.

You may have an opportunity to contribute to advancing the knowledge on the influence of cultural differences within immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education by sharing your experiences.

You may have an opportunity to contribute to the improvement of school-home relationships by providing your thoughts and experiences in bridging cultural differences between school personnel and immigrant families.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured in that only Hend Shalan will have access to the audio recordings and the transcribed interviews. In addition, the thesis supervisor, Dr. Gary Cameron, may listen to some of the interviews for consultation following your consent. He will not be able to recognize your identity, as the researcher will not record your name or any personal identifying information. All identifying information will be removed at the time the recorded interview is transcribed. All transcripts will be kept in a password-locked computer in Hend Shalan's locked office. In addition, all completed consent forms, audio recordings, and one master list of participants will be kept in a locked cabinet in Hend Shalan’s locked office. All transcriptions will be identified by ID numbers. Once the study is completed, the link between
participant names and their ID numbers will be terminated. As this data is a part of the researcher's dissertation study and there is a possibility of publication, the researcher will keep the data for up to two years after which time they will be destroyed.

Research results will be used and submitted for the dissertation. Results may be used in further research, published in academic journals, or presented at conferences to further awareness and understanding of immigrant parents' educational needs in Canada.

The researcher would like to obtain your permission concerning the use of quotation in reports and publications following removal of all identifying information such as the names of schools or individuals. If, however, you do not wish quotations from your transcript to be used in publications, please indicate your preference at the bottom of this form. In addition, if you do not wish the thesis supervisor to listen to your interview, please indicate your preference at the bottom of this form as well.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact researcher Hend Shalan at 226-339-3998 or hend_edu@yahoo.com.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board and the Waterloo Region District School Board Ethics Committee. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you feel that your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca
PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, upon your request your data will be removed from the study and destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION
The results of this research will be presented as part of the researcher's doctoral dissertation. Results may also be included in further work on the researcher's dissertation. Results of the research will be summarized in a two-page summary and mailed or emailed to you. As a participant in this study, you have the right to alter, change or remove any content from your transcript before your transcript is used in any research outputs. This research is to be completed by June 30, 2017.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature____________________________________ Date _________________

Investigator's signature __________________________________ Date _________________

USE OF QUOTATIONS
Please check one of the following options:

______The researcher may utilize my quotations under the condition that these quotations will not identify me and that the quotations which are used have been vetted through me.
______ I wish to participate in an interview, but please do not quote any of my words.

**Listening to the interview by the research supervisor:**

Please check one of the following choices:

______ The supervisor has my consent to listen to my recorded interview under the condition that the interview will not identify me and the interview has been vetted through me.

______ I wish to participate in an interview, but I do not give my consent for the supervisor of this study to listen to my recorded interview.

**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR EMAIL OR MAILING ADDRESS TO RECEIVE A COPY OF YOUR FULL TRANSCRIPT. THIS WILL PROVIDE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENSURE THAT YOUR TRANSCRIPT IS ACCURATE.**

________________________________________________

________________________________________________
Hello (school principal Name and Title),

I am (Hend Shalan). After contacting you on December 15, 2014 regarding my study on immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education, you expressed interest in participating in my study upon the approval of my study's ethical proposal. I am pleased to inform you that my study's ethical proposal has been approved by Wilfrid Laurier University Ethics Board with tracking number REB 4465 and Waterloo Region District School Board's Ethics Committee. Are you still interested in participating in my study? If so, please let me know a suitable time when we can meet. I would like to provide you with more information about the study and your school's role in this research. Please be aware that you maintain the right to decide not to take part in the study at any time.

**Please confirm your interest in participating in this study by replying to my email.** You are welcome to contact me by email or phone with any questions you may have and to set up a meeting. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Hend Shalan
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University
Shal8310@mylaurier.ca
Confidentiality Agreement:

Uncovering the processes and consequences of Arab immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education: Bridging cultural differences, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

This research is being undertaken by Hend Shalan, PhD candidate in the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. The purpose of the research is to understand how immigrant parents are involved in their children’s education and to explore ways to improve relations between home and school.

As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidentially agreement.

I agree not to share any information on these recordings, about any party, with anyone except the Researcher of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I, ________________________________________________________ agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) with anyone other than the Researcher.

2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g. WAV files, CDs, transcripts) to the Researcher when I have completed the transcription tasks.

4. After consulting with the Researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher (e.g. CDs, information stored on my computer hard drive).

Transcriber:
_________________________ ______________________ ___________________ (print name)
(signature) (date)

Researcher:
_________________________ ______________________ ___________________ (print name)
(signature) (date)

This study has been reviewed and ethically approved by the Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier

University and the Ethics Committee at Waterloo Region District School Board.
Appendix K: List of Topics that Presented to Parents in School Related Activities

During committee meetings, many useful topics were presented. The following are some examples:

- The new School Day program that would apply to all schools and parents who register
- Safe, caring, and inclusive school team
- Full Day Kindergarten
- High School/Credit Cap
- New curriculum for Health and Physical education
- Top ten ways to support your children's learning of mathematics
- Math night
- Dealing with conflict
- Prevention strategies for cyber bullying
- Making the grade (student evaluation)
- Students' expulsion process and alternate programming

In addition, at these meetings parents were asked questions such as:

- How can the Waterloo Region District School Board connect with parents who are facing barriers against becoming involved?
- How can the Waterloo Region District School Board engage parents in their children’s education?

Unfortunately, since most of the attendees were non-immigrants, they may have been unaware of the barrier that immigrants face regarding their children’s education.
## Appendix L: Linking Unique Study Identifiers/Codes with some Demographic Information for Parents and School Personnel Participants

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<th>Number of participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
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<table>
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<td>PP3</td>
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<td>46-50</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Position of school personnel</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Vice-principal</td>
<td>SPP4, SPP10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL teachers</td>
<td>SPP3, SPP5, SPP6, SPP8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom teachers</td>
<td>SPP7</td>
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</table>