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Empowering Latino Parents Through Literacy: A Home-School Partnership

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study challenges the misconception that Latino parents are disengaged from their children's education by examining their participation in a bilingual, school-based literacy program. Findings reveal that when provided with culturally relevant and accessible opportunities, Latino parents actively support their children's academic success and develop stronger family literacy practices. The program fostered a sense of belonging, strengthened home-school connections, and validated parents' linguistic and cultural identities. Results highlight the importance of asset-based approaches to family engagement and demonstrate how literacy initiatives can empower Latino parents and enhance partnerships between schools and families.

KEYWORDS

Latino parents; literacy programs; parental engagement; home-school partnerships; culturally relevant pedagogy; funds of knowledge

Latino¹ families have long been subject to deficit-based narratives that portray them as less interested or involved in their children's education. Such misconceptions persist despite evidence that many Latino parents care deeply about their children's academic success and actively seek ways to participate in their learning. However, systemic barriers – such as limited access to linguistically appropriate communication, unfamiliarity with U.S. school norms, and unwelcoming school climates – often restrict the ways in which these families can engage (Patterson et al., 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009; Leddy, 2018). Consequently, their forms of involvement are frequently undervalued or misinterpreted by schools that rely on mainstream, monolingual definitions of parental participation. These structural and cultural mismatches can contribute to Latino families feeling excluded from the educational process, reinforcing inequities in access and representation (Ali & Herrera, 2021; Martinez & Flores, 2021).

Latino immigrant families constitute one of the fastest-growing populations in U.S. schools, yet their educational experiences are often shaped by linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers that affect how they engage with educators and institutions (Crosnoe & López Turley, 2011; Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Many parents navigate the complexities of adapting to a new educational system while sustaining strong commitments to their children's academic success. However, schools often overlook the forms of involvement that occur within families' home languages and cultural practices, which may not align with traditional or school-defined expectations of participation.

Historically, deficit-based assumptions have shaped how some educators and policymakers view minoritized and immigrant families. There has long been a preconceived belief that these families are less interested in their children's education because they are less visible in school-based activities

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¹We use the term *Latino* because it is the most widely recognized and self-identified term within U.S. Spanish-speaking communities. While we unconditionally agree with gender inclusivity approaches in all domains of life, we chose the identifier *Latino* over *Latine* or *Latinx* to reflect the language choices of these communities (Gallup, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2020).

(Patterson et al., 2007). As a result, families are often labeled as *uncooperative* or *uninvolved* (Lee, 2005), a characterization that fails to acknowledge the structural, linguistic, and cultural barriers that shape their participation (Ali & Herrera, 2021; Leddy, 2018; Turney & Kao, 2009). In contrast, research consistently shows that Latino and other immigrant parents care deeply about their children's success and value the educational opportunities available in the United States (López & Velázquez, 2022; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). However, these families often face obstacles such as unfamiliarity with school expectations, limited access to resources, and language differences that make engagement more complex (DePlanty et al., 2007; Guzmán et al., 2020; Peterson & Heywood, 2007). Recognizing these challenges underscores the need for schools to move beyond deficit perspectives and to cultivate culturally and linguistically responsive partnerships that affirm families' knowledge, agency, and commitment to their children's education.

Addressing these misconceptions requires a shift from traditional notions of *parental involvement*—which often privilege school-centered activities—to more reciprocal and culturally responsive approaches that value families' linguistic, cultural, and social resources. Research grounded in the Funds of Knowledge framework (González et al., 2007; Moll et al., 1992) demonstrates that families hold extensive experiential knowledge that can be leveraged to support student learning and strengthen home–school connections. Within this perspective, Latino parents are not passive recipients of school initiatives but active co-educators who contribute to their children's literacy and language development in meaningful ways.

Family literacy programs exemplify this more inclusive approach. These initiatives create opportunities for parents and children to engage in shared literacy experiences that bridge home and school learning environments. Studies have shown that when parents participate in such programs, students demonstrate improved reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and motivation to learn (Pérez & Zarate, 2021). Beyond academic benefits, family literacy programs promote culturally sustaining practices that affirm bilingualism, strengthen family bonds, and enhance parents' confidence in supporting their children's education (Gallo & Link, 2020; Souto-Manning & Arce-Boardman, 2022). This study contributes to this growing body of research by examining how a bilingual family literacy program empowered Latino parents to view themselves as valued partners in their children's education while fostering stronger connections between home and school. Considering these benefits, the intentional development of meaningful home–school partnerships ought to be a priority.

A five-year project funded by a Title III National Professional Development Program from the United States Department of Education provided the financial support to implement a literacy program for parents of Latino students at a large suburban school district in the American southwest. This program was the product of a partnership between our university and a neighboring school district. The entire program included financial support for pre-service teachers to offset some of their tuition expenses as well as professional development for pre- and in-service teachers focused on emergent bilinguals. In this article, we focus on yet another component of the project, one that aimed at improving the biliteracy skills of emergent bilinguals through the development of reading habits. This literacy component was contracted to the Latino Family Literacy Project, which trained the teachers to improve their instruction for emergent bilinguals and to engage teachers with families and communities (Latino Family Literacy Project, n.d.). The program will be described later in this article.

The participants in the program were Latino parents of students enrolled in elementary schools at the partnering school district (kindergarten through grade 2). The purpose of our study was to explore the perceptions and beliefs of these parents about the usefulness of the program. Our research question was deliberately framed under wide parameters:

What are the perceptions and beliefs of Latino parents regarding the efficacy of the Latino Family Literacy Project?

We focus on the perceptions and beliefs of Latino parents because their voices have historically been underrepresented in research on family engagement and literacy. Examining these perspectives provides valuable insight into how families interpret and experience school-based initiatives intended to support their children's learning. It is our belief that understanding parents' beliefs is essential for

challenging deficit-oriented narratives that frame Latino families as disengaged and for informing culturally and linguistically responsive approaches that recognize them as knowledgeable and active partners in education (Auerbach, 2009; López & Velázquez, 2022).

To help us guide in answering this question, we provide a brief literature review on the topics of school/home partnerships and at-home reading habits. Following this, we present a description of the methodology used for the study, an account of our findings and, finally, a discussion about the meaning and significance of these findings.

Literature review

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a critical factor in student success. Research has shown that increased parent engagement is positively correlated with greater academic achievement for students (DePlanty et al., 2007; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Waanders et al., 2007). Family engagement has been shown to be a vital component of student success, with recent meta-analytic findings reinforcing its positive impact. A global synthesis of 55 studies (2010–2019) confirmed that parental engagement correlates positively with academic outcomes (Erdem & Kaya, 2020). It has also shown to enhance students' emotional well-being, help maintain a better attendance record and improve social behavior (Epstein, 2011). Parental participation in school promotes a positive learning environment by reinforcing communication between teachers and families and creating a supportive network that encourages student success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Other benefits of family engagement in school include the development of higher self-esteem and motivation to learn, both of which are contributors to long-term academic attainment (Fan & Chen, 2001). Recent research continues to affirm that parental involvement yields significant benefits for students across academic, behavioral, and emotional domains. Studies have shown that when families are actively engaged in their children's education, students exhibit higher academic performance, improved motivation, and greater school engagement (Wang & Wei, 2024). Parental involvement also contributes to stronger socio-emotional development, with meta-analyses reporting positive effects on students' emotional adjustment and reductions in behavioral issues (Zhang et al., 2024). In early childhood, collaborative parent-teacher relationships are associated with increased emotional regulation and peer interactions (Zhang et al., 2024). Furthermore, strong school-family partnerships support improved attendance and a more positive attitude toward learning (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022). These findings underscore the importance of fostering inclusive and sustained parental engagement as a cornerstone of effective and equitable schooling.

Literacy development among Latino children is strongly supported by meaningful parental involvement, which plays a critical role in shaping children's early reading habits and long-term academic achievement. Recent research highlights that when Latino parents are engaged in literacy-related activities (e.g. read-alouds, storytelling) children demonstrate improved reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and motivation to learn (Pérez & Zarate, 2021). Family literacy programs that build on parents' cultural knowledge and home language practices have also been shown to strengthen bilingual development and foster a positive reading culture in the household (Souto-Manning & Arce-Boardman, 2022). Moreover, when schools create authentic partnerships with Latino families and recognize their contributions to literacy, students benefit from a more cohesive and culturally responsive learning environment (Gallo & Link, 2020). A consistent body of research has shown that Latino families often engage in rich, culturally embedded literacy practices such as a shared reading in Spanish and oral traditions. These practices occur within intergenerational contexts and reflect strong familial bonds and cultural values (González et al., 2007; Reese & Goldenberg, 2008). When schools acknowledge and build upon these practices, parental involvement is more meaningful and sustained. Family literacy programs that incorporate Latino parents' cultural knowledge and linguistic resources have been shown to improve home-school relationships and enhance children's bilingual development (Curry et al., 2022; López, 2021). Very significantly, affirming Latino parents'

roles as co-educators at home shifts the narrative from a deficit perspective to one that acknowledges their active participation and agency in their children's education (Auerbach, 2009).

Considering these benefits, the intentional development of meaningful school-home partnerships ought to be a priority. Yet, despite the well-documented advantages of family engagement, many schools continue to struggle to create equitable and culturally responsive relationships with Latino families. Structural barriers – including language differences, limited access to translation or interpretation services, and unfamiliarity with school expectations – often hinder parents' ability to participate fully in their children's education (Ali & Herrera, 2021; Turney & Kao, 2009). When schools fail to recognize and draw upon the cultural and linguistic assets that families bring, they risk reinforcing exclusionary practices that alienate the very communities they seek to serve. Thus, prioritizing authentic home – school partnerships is not only beneficial but necessary to dismantle these barriers, affirm families' cultural knowledge, and create more inclusive and effective educational environments for emergent bilingual students.

Schools seeking to strengthen their relationships with the communities they serve strive to design and implement programs that draw parents to school. To address these challenges, schools have increasingly turned to family engagement initiatives designed to bridge cultural, linguistic, and institutional gaps. Some programs primarily focus on keeping parents informed about their children's progress, while others aim to create collaborative learning spaces where students can thrive with the support of their families. The present study focuses on the latter approach—one that centers on literacy as a means of fostering home – school partnerships and affirming the cultural and linguistic identities of Latino families.

The concepts of *home – school partnerships* and *reading* are closely connected in supporting children's academic and linguistic development. Research on home – school partnerships highlights collaboration and shared responsibility between educators and families to extend learning beyond the classroom (Epstein, 2011; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), while studies on reading emphasize the practices that build language, comprehension, and engagement across settings (Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1995; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). These areas converge within *family literacy* frameworks, where reading functions as both an academic skill and a cultural practice that links home and school learning (Auerbach, 2009; Iddings, 2009).

School/home partnerships

Research has shown that partnerships between parents and schools support Latino students' literacy development and academic success later in life (Castro et al., 2012; Jordan et al., 2011; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Surraín, 2021). Family literacy programs are one type of partnership that shows how the relationship between school and home can be strengthened while creating literacy environments that benefit the student (Iddings, 2009). While the terms *parental involvement*, *family engagement*, *parent participation*, and *home – school partnerships* are often used interchangeably in the literature, they represent distinct yet related constructs. *Parental involvement* generally refers to parents' participation in school-centered activities such as attending conferences, volunteering, or maintaining communication with teachers (Epstein, 2011). In contrast, *family engagement* emphasizes reciprocal, relational practices between families and educators that are grounded in trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). *Parent participation* often denotes parents' direct contributions to educational initiatives, while *home – school partnerships* describe sustained, systemic efforts to align learning experiences across home and school contexts (Auerbach, 2009). In this study, we operationalize *family engagement* as parents' active involvement in culturally and linguistically responsive literacy activities that bridge home and school. This operationalization aligns with the *Funds of Knowledge* framework, which positions families as co-educators whose cultural and linguistic experiences serve as valuable educational resources (González et al., 2007; Moll et al., 1992). It is within these types of programs that parents have reported greater success

collaborating with teachers and supporting their children's literacy development (Hindin, Steiner, et al., 2017).

Reading, which is a long-term habit starting at an early age (Baker & Scher, 2002; Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1995; Snow, 2010), is the prominent gateway to academic success (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). It is a practice that assists individuals to gain creativeness and develop their critical thinking skills (Gee, 2008; Gibbons, 2002). In this sense, reading is an important tool for the development of personalities and mental capacities of individuals, an access to social, economic and civic life (Chettri & Rout, 2013).

Consequently, schools have a responsibility to create relationships and lines of communication with parents and communities and involve parents in order to incorporate students' everyday lives and experiences (Iddings, 2009; Protacio & Edwards, 2015). A family literacy program can be a space in which literacy activities come to function with a double purpose: enhance the students' (bi)literacy skills and bring parents and communities to school. It has the potential to create a transformative and nondominant space for Latino immigrant families and Latino teachers inside the school but outside of the rigid constraints of school norms. If families are involved in the design and implementation of literacy activities, their voices, cultures, traditions, languages, and communities can be included and these activities can become praxis in classrooms and homes (Iddings, 2009; Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021). By developing and maintaining an understanding and an openness, be willing to spend voluntary hours developing and/or organizing family literacy programs, as well as having a genuine interest about how families choose and include literacy materials (e.g. different types of texts, technology) in their homes, schools can form strong relationships with the families they serve (Iddings, 2009; Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021).

Family literacy programs have shown to improve the fluidity between school and home literacy environments (Iddings, 2009) and parents have reported greater success with recommended strategies and supporting their child's literacy development (Hindin, Steiner, et al., 2017). Other research shows that discussions between teachers and parents can guide teachers on how to better select culturally sustaining and relevant texts (Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021). In a study conducted by DePlanty et al. (2007), the authors examined the various forms of parental involvement that teachers, parents, and students believed to influence the academic success of adolescents. The results highlighted the key areas that teachers considered most impactful: parents emphasizing the value of education at home, ensuring homework completion, and guaranteeing regular school attendance. Interestingly, teachers noted that while parental presence at school was beneficial, it was the active engagement with children at home that they viewed as more crucial for academic success.

Parent – children's interactions during literacy events at home and in their day-to-day lives strengthen the connection between school- and home-related literacy activities to develop common classroom and home literacy practices. Educational activities involving parents acknowledge the natural ways in which families teach their children in the home. They also contribute to an increased interest in the students' own culture (Protacio & Edwards, 2015) and create common linguistic activities for home and school. Additionally, they have the potential to narrow the gap between home and school literacy practices (Iddings, 2009).

At-home reading habits

A person's reading habits are measured in three ways: The amount of time spent reading, the number of reading materials used and the recurrency of reading (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). In terms of implementing literacy activities and cultivating reading habits in the home, there is variability among families in areas such as the families' culture, family-school relationships, access to family literacy programs, and families' language and literacy beliefs and habits (Coba-Rodríguez & Jarrett, 2022; Davis et al., 2016; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021). The emergent literacy development of Latino students has shown to improve with an environment that includes in-home literacy activities, parent support, and parents' cognizant choice of reading

content for shared book reading. In-home literacy activities such as shared reading that include book talks with guidance and support from an adult can have a positive influence on a child's knowledge construction as well as their cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Adding bilingual texts to the book reading and book talks allows a child to pull from their full linguistic repertoire and increase their reading comprehension. These bilingual texts also extend the linguistic space created by the parent and the child to include the "parents' language abilities and the desire to transmit cultural values" (Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2017, p. 338). Noguerón-Liu and Driscoll (2021) study on immigrant and non-immigrant mothers revealed that reading content that included different aspects of what it means to be Latino in the United States was chosen to hopefully start conversations between parent and child and "to support children's transnational, bilingual, and biliteracy practice" (p. 18). In addition, the mothers with low English proficiency didn't see it as an obstacle, rather it led them to be creative when reading books in English and use other resources such as the books' illustrations, asking questions, highlighting known words to engage in word play, and family members "to make sure their children received support and necessary guidance" (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2017, p. 22). The behavior and beliefs of the mothers were in contrast with earlier conducted research on mothers' engagement in shared book reading. The research reported vast differences between mothers from low-income Latino families and Black families compared with mothers from low-income White families (Keels, 2009). Latino students encounter complex literacy challenges which require targeted interventions to support their success in school (Borman et al., 2019). These challenges have the potential of producing educational disparities compared to their peers and may include limited access to quality educational resources (Rivera-Batiz, 2008).

Engaging parents in literacy development

Schools play a critical role in fostering partnerships with families to promote students' literacy development, particularly among emergent bilinguals and culturally diverse populations. One effective strategy is the implementation of family literacy programs that link home and school learning environments. These programs are designed to improve children's literacy skills and also to empower parents as active participants in their children's education (Casper et al., 2011; Hindin, Steiner, et al., 2017). Research has shown that when schools actively involve parents in structured literacy activities, such as shared reading workshops and literacy nights, students demonstrate improved reading achievement and increased motivation to read (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2019).

Educators have found success when they approach family engagement through culturally responsive frameworks that recognize the diverse linguistic and cultural practices of the families they serve (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). For instance, providing bilingual reading materials, incorporating home languages, and delivering training sessions for parents on how to support literacy at home are common approaches that validate families' knowledge and practices while also enhancing student outcomes (Coady et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2019).

Past research has consistently emphasized the importance of parent engagement in literacy development (Hindin, Steiner, et al., 2017; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Our study aimed at capturing the specific experiences of Latino families in response to a literacy program specifically designed and delivered for them. It was the lived experiences, voices, and agency of Latino parents navigating school systems shaped by linguistic and cultural mismatches (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016) that the study sought to unpack. Our interest was in learning if designing culturally responsive literacy programs create spaces where Latino parents can engage in identity-affirming literacy practices within both home and school settings (Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021). The following section will describe the methodology we used to design a study aimed at capturing the perceptions of parents about the literacy program in which they participated.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the Funds of Knowledge approach, which posits that families, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, possess rich bodies of knowledge developed through their cultural, linguistic, social, and occupational experiences (González et al., 2007). This perspective challenges deficit-based views that often characterize Latino families as lacking the knowledge or skills to support their children's academic success. Instead, the Funds of Knowledge approach recognizes these families as valuable contributors to the educational process.

Applying the Funds of Knowledge framework to the context of Latino family literacy, this study views parents and families not merely as passive recipients of school practices but as co-participants in their children's education. The literacy program described in this research exemplifies the principles of Funds of Knowledge by actively involving parents in the educational process, drawing on their personal narratives, bilingual abilities, and cultural practices to shape and enhance the learning environment. The literacy program created spaces for parents to share their stories and linguistic heritage and in doing so, it affirmed the identities of the families (Moll et al., 1992).

Originally grounded in ethnographic research with Mexican and Mexican American households, the Funds of Knowledge approach challenges deficit-oriented assumptions by documenting the intellectual and cultural resources embedded in families' everyday lives. Over the past three decades, the framework has evolved to address new understandings of identity, mobility, and transnationalism (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Hogg, 2011). The *Funds of Identity* extension (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) emphasizes how individuals actively draw from personal, cultural, and historical experiences to shape self-understanding and learning across multiple contexts. Similarly, scholars have connected Funds of Knowledge to *Community Cultural Wealth* (Yosso, 2005), which highlights the social, navigational, and linguistic assets of marginalized communities as sources of strength and resilience. These developments demonstrate the continued relevance and adaptability of the Funds of Knowledge framework in bilingual and bicultural education. In this study, we draw on this expanded conceptualization to show the dynamic and multilingual ways Latino families use their cultural and linguistic knowledge through literacy practices that bridge home and school spaces.

Methodology

Research approach

This study sought to examine how a literacy program was experienced by a group of Latino parents with the aim of understanding how families engaged with the program. For this, we used an exploratory case study design, which allowed us to understand the complexities and experiences of the participants in connection to their participation in a family literacy program. The case was bounded by the time in which the participants participated in the program (15 weeks), the place where the program took place (an elementary school) and the participants themselves (six Latino parents of elementary-aged children). The case study was exploratory because our intention was to understand how Latino families engaged with a specific literacy program. This understanding would allow us to generate preliminary insights. The intention of this design was to capture the views of the participants, find common patterns and make connections to theory, contributing thus to the development of new theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Setting

Data was collected at an elementary school at a large metropolitan area in the American southwest. The school district serves around 10,500 emergent bilinguals speaking 66 languages in a variety of programs under the ESL and bilingual education umbrellas. Fifty-six percent of the students in the district are

Hispanic, while only 17% of the teachers identified as Hispanic (School District Website, [n.d.](#)). The elementary school where the data was collected enrolls over 500 students. Among these, 15% are Latino and 5% are emergent bilinguals. From a faculty of 39 teachers, only one is Hispanic (Blinded Website, [n.d.](#)).

The program was designed by the Latino Family Literacy Project, a contractor with no previous connection to the research team. This organization provides school programs for parent and family engagement with the aim of supporting emergent bilinguals. The specific program that the contractor provided was one that provided books appropriate for reading levels in grades 1 through 4. The emphasis of the program was in teaching parents about the importance of establishing family reading routines with their children while increasing English vocabulary and overall reading fluency (Latino Family Literacy Project, [n.d.](#)). The contractor trained a group of in-service teachers at the elementary school as well as another group of pre-service teachers at the university funding the program. These two groups, in- and pre-service teachers, then worked together to design and implement a series of weekly sessions -called literacy nights- held for a span of 15 weeks at the elementary school. During these sessions-held at the school's library-, the teachers developed a number of reading strategies aimed at engaging and establishing reading routines between parents and their children. The strategies focused on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, English language development for parents and their children, and techniques for shared or family reading at home. The role of the researchers was to ensure that the logistical aspects of the program were in place, supervise the activities and collect data for the assessment of these activities (for reporting purposes with the U.S. Department of Education). Each of the participating families received a set of bilingual books to keep at home. These books purposely connected with the cultural background of the Latino families.

Participants

The six participants in the study were parents of children enrolled at one elementary school. Their children attended a dual language program (Spanish/English) and were classified as emergent bilingual by the school district. All parents were Latino, speaking Spanish and English at home at varying degrees, with some families only reading in Spanish or English at home. [Table 1](#) summarizes the educational and linguistic characteristics of the participants (all names are pseudonyms).

Instruments of data collection and data analysis

This study's qualitative design made the interviews a key part of the data collection process. Using an interpretive and naturalistic approach, we explored the participants' perceptions of the literacy program, examining their experiences in relation to their social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The third author of this article served as a liaison between the university and the school district and was directly involved in the facilitation of the program. Consequently, she was able to develop a personal connection with the families, which in turn resulted in the parents inviting us to their homes for the interviews. The semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted in Spanish -the language preferred by the participants for this purpose- using an emic style, allowing participants to offer detailed responses and explore topics not directly prompted by the interviewer (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The open-ended questions

Table 1. Participants' educational and linguistic characteristics.

Participant	Children's grade level	Formal education	Languages spoken at home
Miriam	7th, 3rd	8th grade	Spanish, English
Juan	5th, 3rd	9th grade	Spanish, English
Kimberly	3rd	1 sem. in college	Spanish, English
Maite	6th, 3rd	High school and vocational training	Spanish, English
Verónica	3rd, 1st	10th grade	Spanish
Luz	3rd, K	GED	Spanish, English

Table 2. Illustration of the first cycle of coding.

Code	Data excerpt	Participant	Analytical note
Desire to support children	<i>"Porque quiero que estén bien en la escuela, que sepan que tienen apoyo. . ."</i>	Luz	Indicates parental motivation and perceived role in supporting education.
Reading as family bonding	<i>"Estamos más unidos. . . vamos a leer mami. . . nos unió más."</i>	Luz	Suggests the emotional and relational impact of reading activities.
Influence of reading routines	<i>"Leemos antes de dormir ya como para que se acostumbre."</i>	Luz	Reflects efforts to normalize reading as a daily habit.
Value of heritage culture	<i>"Porque es semejante a de dónde viene uno." (on Día de los Muertos story)</i>	Miriam	Shows cultural identification with literacy content.

encouraged further probing and elicited diverse answers (Weis & Fine, 2004). The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by a member of the research team, a native speaker of Spanish. To ensure analytic reliability, participants received the transcriptions of their interviews for review. This member check gave them the opportunity to clarify or expand on their answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the coding process, we used Saldaña (2021) as a guide for best practices. This process started with a first cycle of coding where we applied descriptive codes to topics that we identified in the data (see Table 2 for an illustration of the first cycle of coding). Then, our second cycle coding involved reorganizing and refining the codes to identify broader categories. Pattern coding was used at this stage. The next and final step was to organize the categories into emerging themes. The entire process involved a constant comparison method, where concepts were refined as data were analyzed iteratively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the researchers used Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to support the organization, coding and interpretation of the data (Frieze, 2019). The other researcher coded the data manually. When discrepancies between the two coders arose, the research team discussed and resolved them through consensus.

Positionality

As a research team composed of both Latino and non-Latino bilingual educators (as teachers, school administrators and instructors at a teacher preparation program), we brought diverse cultural, linguistic, and professional experiences to this study. Our personal and professional commitments to equity in education, particularly for emergent bilingual students and their families, guided our interest in examining home – school partnerships within Latino communities. However, we were also aware of the potential biases these commitments could introduce -particularly the risk of over-identifying with participants (for Latino researchers) or unintentionally misinterpreting cultural nuances (for non-Latino researchers).

To attend to these potential biases, we engaged in an ongoing reflexive dialogue throughout the research process. Latino members of the team used their insider knowledge to build relational trust with participants, while also remaining mindful of the need to avoid assumptions based on shared identity. Non-Latino researchers contributed critical distance, helping the team reflect on culturally responsive literacy practices from an alternative lens. Together, we employed member checking, collaborative data analysis, and peer debriefing to ensure that our interpretations were grounded in participants’ voices and not shaped solely by our perspectives. Our bilingualism across the team also allowed for a more authentic engagement with Spanish-language data, reducing the risk of cultural or linguistic misrepresentation.

Trustworthiness of the study

Building on the work of Ahmed (2024) and adhering to the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a range of strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The criteria

included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To enhance credibility, we incorporated reflexivity, consciously acknowledging our personal biases and preconceptions throughout the research process. We employed bracketing techniques (e.g. memo writing, research team discussions) to mitigate these biases, aiming to maintain objectivity during data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Instances of this reflexivity are the inclusion of a positionality statement in our paper, the consistent use of reflexive dialogs during the various stages of the research process, and the use of rich and illustrative participant quotations.

Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed, thick description of the study's context, allowing other researchers to assess the potential applicability of the findings to different settings, populations, and situations. Dependability was strengthened through the use of an audit trail, which documented all research decisions and processes undertaken prior to and during the study, ensuring transparency and allowing for potential replication by other researchers. Finally, to ensure confirmability, we conducted member checks with participants to verify that their perspectives were accurately reflected in the transcriptions. Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were held, involving discussions with colleagues specializing in literacy education, to confirm the interpretation and validity of the findings.

The following section will present the results of the analysis of the data gathered as a consequence of the interviews with the participants.

Findings

The findings of this study provide a broad understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants in relation to their participation in a literacy program at their children's school. The research question was worded as:

What are the perceptions and beliefs of Latino parents regarding the efficacy of the Latino Family Literacy Project?

Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of the data, we were able to identify key themes that emerged, shedding light on the central research question. This section presents the data gathered from participant interviews, illustrating patterns, recurring ideas, and unique perspectives. To ensure authenticity and accuracy, direct quotes from participants are included to support thematic interpretations. The following themes were identified: reading as a life habit; building stronger family bonds in and outside the home; and enhancing heritage culture.

Reading as a life habit

One of the central points of interest of the study was to ascertain the reasons why the parents thought of reading as an important skill for their children. Juan, with children in grades 3 and 5, spent 20 minutes per day reading the news in online media. He was able to read in English to some extent although his preferred language was Spanish, the language that the family used most of the time at home. He saw reading as a tool for problem solving and decision making. In this sense, he was appreciative of the techniques and strategies conveyed at the literacy program because of their direct applicability to the home context. This helped him realize that he could have a role in assisting his children to be successful in school and beyond: “mediante el programa te das cuenta de que uno también puede apoyarlos para que puedan ser más exitosos en lo que quieran ser” (through the program, you realize that you can also help them to be successful in whatever they wish to do, Interview #2). This aligns with research showing that when parents gain confidence in supporting literacy at home, children's academic outcomes improve (Timmons et al., 2020). When prompted to elaborate and give an example of how the program had been valuable to him, he mentioned “una cosa que me marcó mucho de los consejos que ellos daban es que nunca utilicemos la lectura como un castigo (one thing that marked me of the advice they gave was to never use reading as a form of punishment, Interview #2). Juan's emphasis on not using reading as punishment is consistent with

literature that promotes the affective dimension of reading in the home (Anderson et al., 2015). Maite also emphasized avoiding using reading as a punishment and instead using it as an opportunity to foster closer relationships (Interview #4).

Kimberly, a mother of a student in grade 3, also thought of reading as a way of learning, an instrument for reaching broader opportunities. Unlike Juan, whose formal education stopped after middle school, she had a high school diploma and had attended college for one semester. Kimberly's preferred language for reading was English and read two times per week books on the topic of self-care. The literacy program prompted Kimberly to view reading as a reflexive activity: "antes nada más leía el libro y ya este ya no platicábamos del libro. Pero ahora sí hace preguntas sí, está más entusiasmada en leer en los 2 lenguajes, inglés y español" (before, she just read the book and then we did not talk about it. But now she asks questions and is more excited about reading in the two languages, English and Spanish, Interview #3). Her observation that her daughter now asked questions and enjoyed reading in both English and Spanish reflects the benefits of dialogic reading and bilingual literacy practices (González et al., 2007; Reese & Goldenberg, 2008).

Maite, with children in grades 3 and 6, read around 15 minutes per day texts related to self-care. She was of the opinion that reading "los desarrolla porque les abren la mente y aprenden más" (develops them because it opens their mind and they learn more, interview #4). Maite also explained that it had only been after her participation in the program that she had incorporated reading as a daily routine. In the same vein as Kimberly, Maite learned to be more reflexive about the process of reading and more interacting and engaging when shared reading took place between her children and herself. More than anything else, however, she realized that incorporating reading as a daily routine gave her the chance of spending more time with her children: "aunque vivamos una vida de mucho trabajo, tener siempre la rutina de leer y para mí me ayudó bastante. Me abrió los ojos de una manera en dedicarle más tiempo a mi hijo" (although our lives are busy with work, we should always make time for reading. This opened my eyes about ways to spend more time with my children, Interview #4).

The data showed that for participants, the literacy program reinforced the idea that reading is an important part of home life. The program strengthened a consciousness about the importance of providing reading support at home. Reading time was incorporated into the family's routines. The participants were aware of the role of reading in their children's personal and academic growth, intellectual development and emotional well-being.

The following section will describe the second theme identified during the analysis of the data, the program as a catalyst for strengthening family connections.

Building stronger family bonds in and outside the home

A second theme that emerged as a recurring pattern in the data was the realization that the literacy program had served as a conduit for building stronger family bonds between parents and their children. The data analysis grouped under this theme repeated codes related to the desire of the parents to be involved in school and support the academic growth of their children, an aspiration or longing to form stronger bonds with their children, and the desire to collaborate with the teachers. This section provides evidence supporting the presence of this theme in the data.

Luz had two children in elementary school, one in kindergarten and another in grade 3. With a formal education having reached a GED diploma, she used both Spanish and English at home to communicate with her children. She read around two hours per week, mostly children's literature. Luz's motivation to enroll in the literacy program stemmed from a wish to be more present in her children's lives: "quería más que nada estar más presente en la escuela con los niños. Eso es mi meta, estar ahí con ellos y hacer más cosas juntos" (I wanted more than anything else to be more present in school with the children. That is my goal, to be there with them and do more things together, Interview #6). Her intention was to let them know that she was supporting them in school and to connect with the teachers and school administration. For Luz, that she was able to spend time with her children was as important as the potential improvements in literacy skills that they may experience as a consequence of her

participation in the program: “ayudar a mis hijos, para que lean mejor y pasar tiempo con ellos” ([I want to] help my children, so that they read better and spend time with them, Interview #6).

Juan also described his motivation to participate in the program as connected with a desire to be involved with his children:

Me apunté porque una de las cosas que me motivó más es que quería involucrarme más en la escuela de mi hijo. No tan sólo en la escuela, sino que en la vida de mi hijo también para que él vea que también estoy comprometido en la educación de él. (Interview #2)

I signed up because one of the things that motivated me the most is that I wanted to get more involved in my son's school. Not only at school, but in my son's life as well so that he can see that I am also committed to his education. (Interview #2)

Related to the desire to be involved in school and support the academic growth of their children, we found evidence of the aspiration or longing of the parents to emotionally bond with their children. Kimberly mentioned the opportunity that the literacy program provided her to form a stronger connection to her child. Juan reminisced about his child appreciating his presence at the school: “al final de cada actividad en la escuela en la tarde siempre viene y me dice qué bueno que estuviste, me fuiste a ver, estuviste ahí” (at the end of each activity at the school in the evenings he always comes and tells me “I am so glad you were there, you came to see me, you were there,” Interview #2). Vanessa also made a reference to how the literacy program had helped them to spend more time together at home. Luz expressed that the program had helped them to be “más unidos” (more united, Interview #6).

A third and final recurring category within this theme was the desire that the parents had to collaborate with the teachers. In this sense, it was interesting to hear Juan say “yo pienso que es muy, muy, muy importante no tan solo dejarles la carga a los maestros de que tienen que enseñar, sino que nosotros como padres también ayudarlos bastante con la Educación” (I think it is very, very, very important not to place the entire burden of teaching solely on the teachers, but for us as parents to also help significantly with education, Interview #2). This same belief was articulated by Luz when she expressed that:

Uno [un nivel de apoyo para los estudiantes] es el que tiene en la escuela con los maestros. Otro es en la casa donde los tengo que inculcar a que lean y más cuando están chiquitos, acostumbrarlos y ya como que es algo de a diario que tiene que hacer. (Interview #6)

One [level of support for students] is the one they receive at school from their teachers. Another is at home, where I have to instill in them the habit of reading, especially when they are young, so they get used to it and see it as something they need to do daily. (Interview #6)

Maite also explained that the way she supports the teachers is by conveying to her children the importance of dedicating time at home to read and do homework. Also, she explained that the literacy program had taught her how to interact with their children when reading books at home, for example by asking children questions about the cover of the book and making predictions based on the illustrations. Luz saw her interventions at home as a support for the teachers resulting in “para mí es un trabajo mutuo” (for me, it is a mutual effort, Interview #6).

The next section will present the evidence found for the third and final theme, the program as a catalyst for enhancing the heritage culture of the children and their families.

Enhancing heritage culture

The final theme that emerged from the data was the perception that the literacy program had contributed to the reaffirmation of the heritage culture of the participants. Two categories were identified to form this theme, one connected with culture and the other with language.

Several parents made a reference to the connection between the literacy program and their home cultures and were appreciative of the fact that the program included materials and activities linked to their cultures. Miriam appreciated the approach given to the activities stating that many of the books used in the program were “semejante a de donde viene uno” (Similar to

where one comes from, Interview #1). Juan shared this feeling, expressing that he appreciated the stories used in the program “Porque es un pedazo de la historia de uno. Que él pueda leer y pueda ver de dónde vienen sus orígenes” (Because it is a piece of one’s history as a parent. That he can read and see where his origins come from, Interview #2). This is aligned with research on the value of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017). These perceptions are supported by studies advocating for the inclusion of culturally relevant literature in family literacy programs to foster identity and pride (López, 2021; Souto-Manning, 2010). Maite also commented on this aspect of the program, affirming that “nosotros entre padres y madres, ahí pudimos interactuar unas con otras, compartir nuestras historias, nuestro origen, porque casi todas las historias fueron de nuestro origen” (we, as parents, were able to interact with one another, share our stories, our origins, because almost all the stories were about our heritage (Interview #4).

The parents also voiced their perceptions about the linguistic aspect of the literacy program. One of them -Miriam- expressed a concern about the secondary place that Spanish was taking in her child’s language development: “la chiquita sabe mejor el inglés que el español” (The little one knows English better than Spanish, Interview #1). Two other parents conveyed similar concerns and communicated an interest in their children developing not only literacy skills in English but also in Spanish. This was the case of Juan, who explained that “estamos tratando de ayudarlo mucho en eso para que no pierda o no tenga ningún problema con el idioma” (we are trying to help him a lot with that [reading in Spanish] so that he doesn’t lose it or have any issues with the language, Interview #2). Juan also spoke about the balance that is required to develop biliteracy skills: “ese dilema de tratar de no de borrar el español, pero tratar de poner el oído más atento al inglés eso quizás la molesta un poco” (that dilemma of trying not to erase Spanish but rather to be more attentive to English, Interview #2). From the student’s perspective, one of the parents, Kimberly, described that her child after the program was “más entusiasmada en leer de los dos lenguajes, inglés y español” (she is more enthusiastic about reading in both languages, English and Spanish, Interview #3).

The findings suggest that some of the parents were concerned about the preponderant place of the English language in school with the potential to place Spanish as a secondary language. At the same time, they appreciated that the literacy program had disrupted the language dynamics by placing Spanish at the same level as English. This will be further developed in the next section.

The analysis of the data from the interviews pointed to the presence of three distinctive themes: reading as a life habit, building stronger family bonds in and outside the home, and enhancing the heritage culture. These themes emerged as perceptions that the participants formed as a consequence of their taking part in the literacy program. In the next section we will discuss these three themes in connection with the existing academic literature in the area of Latino parent involvement in school in the context of literacy programs.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study highlight how Latino parents actively construct meaningful roles in their children’s education when provided with culturally and linguistically responsive opportunities for engagement. Through participation in the bilingual family literacy program, parents not only strengthened their own literacy practices but also developed a sense of agency and belonging within the school community. These outcomes align with the *Funds of Knowledge* framework, illustrating how families draw upon their cultural and linguistic resources to support children’s academic growth and to navigate school structures more confidently. The program’s emphasis on collaboration, storytelling, and bilingual literacy created translanguaging spaces where parents’ voices and identities were validated, reinforcing the idea that family engagement is most effective when it affirms rather than assimilates cultural and linguistic diversity.

As the data shown in the previous section illustrates, the Latino parents in this study embraced the opportunity provided by the school and the university to participate in a literacy program. This

program allowed them to engage in a dialogue with the teachers that resulted in three fundamentally important outcomes that addressed specific needs of the students: making reading a life habit (academic), building stronger family bonds (emotional) and enhancing the heritage culture (cultural). This study, consequently, offers a counter-narrative and dispels the myth that Latino parents do not wish to be involved in school (Mella & García, 2023).

The participants in this study expressed that the literacy program had prompted them to consider the idea of reading as a lifelong habit essential for personal growth, intellectual development, and continuous learning. The program did in fact stress the impression that regular engagement with texts enhances critical thinking, expands vocabulary, and improves comprehension skills, all of which are fundamental for academic and professional success (Krashen, 2004; Nguyen & Jackson, 2022). The Latino parents, as shown in the data, acknowledged that beyond cognitive benefits, reading also fosters emotional and social development by promoting empathy and broadening perspectives through exposure to diverse cultures, ideas, and experiences (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Ross & Torres, 2020). They came to think of reading as a powerful tool for lifelong education, one that allows individuals to stay informed, adapt to new knowledge, and cultivate curiosity (Alexander, 2012). In sum, the parents decided to foster reading as a daily practice, accepting the idea that reading is crucial for intellectual engagement and personal enrichment across all stages of life. The data from this study shows that parents reported an increased level of interest in reading at their homes for both children and the parents themselves.

The socio-emotional outcome of the program was also an important point in the interviews with the Latino parents. Previous studies had shown that parental involvement in schools plays a crucial role in the socio-emotional development of children, fostering a sense of security, motivation, and emotional well-being (Guerrero & Guerra, 2020). When parents actively engage in their children's education, children tend to develop higher self-esteem, stronger social skills, and a more positive attitude toward learning (Fan & Chen, 2001; Ross & Torres, 2020). Students whose parents participate in school activities and communicate regularly with teachers experience lower levels of stress and anxiety, as they feel supported both academically and emotionally (Epstein, 2011). The Latino parents in this study spoke about the reinforcement of the emotional bond between parents and children as a consequence of the involvement and interest in the literacy program that the parents showed. From the students' perspective, this is important because of the potential to strengthen the children's sense of belonging and overall school experience. From the parents' perspective, the opportunity to connect at an emotional level with their children was invaluable.

Anecdotally, in our present and past roles as educators, we have observed that Latino parents often form strong bonds with other Latino parents in school settings, creating a sense of community that enhances both their engagement in their children's education and their own social support networks. The present study provided the empirical data to show that the literacy program that the school offered to the Latino parents had served as a catalyst for these parents to form connections with each other. Previous research had suggested that Latino parents who participate in school activities develop relationships that provide emotional support, shared experiences, and collective strategies for navigating the educational system (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; López & Velázquez, 2022; Mella & García, 2023). These connections foster a sense of belonging and cultural affirmation, allowing parents to discuss common challenges such as language barriers, immigration concerns, and educational expectations (Olivos, 2006). It is important to note that the connections that we observed during the implementation of the literacy program and that the parents mentioned during the interviews took place in the context of a program specifically designed for Latino parents where the teachers were bilingual and the books selected were either in Spanish or bilingual in English/Spanish. This cultural and linguistic heritage component played a vital role in fostering cultural identity, strengthening family bonds, and enhancing parental engagement in their children's school. This confirms previous research findings that showed that bilingual literacy initiatives provide parents with opportunities to maintain and pass down their linguistic and cultural heritage while actively participating in their children's schooling (López &

Velázquez, 2022; Zhang & Koda, 2013). The parents' sense of belonging within the school community was reinforced (Poza et al., 2014). In essence, the literacy program created a space where parents could connect with teachers and other families, fostering a culturally inclusive school environment that valued multilingualism and diversity (García & Wei, 2014).

This study shows that literacy programs and strong school-home partnerships provide significant benefits for Latino parents, fostering greater parental engagement, improved literacy skills, and stronger academic support for their children. In consonance with previous studies (Auerbach, 1995), and supported by more recent research (Guerrero & Guerra, 2020; Mella & García, 2023), our research suggests that when schools offer literacy programs tailored to Latino families, parents develop greater confidence in supporting their children's learning, particularly in bilingual contexts. These programs also reinforce home – school partnerships by creating collaborative spaces where parents, teachers, and students work together to promote academic success (González et al., 2007). Furthermore, literacy initiatives that integrate culturally relevant materials and instructional strategies empower Latino parents by validating their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and supporting them in becoming involved in school-related activities (López & Velázquez, 2022; Moreno & Valencia, 2011). This study shows that school-home partnerships built through literacy programs have the potential to benefit Latino parents and, even more importantly, students.

The Funds of Knowledge framework gave us the conceptual framework to interpret the findings by providing a lens through which parental involvement is not measured solely by traditional school-defined metrics (e.g., volunteering at PTA events, attending teacher-parent conferences) but by culturally meaningful ways in which families support literacy development at home and in community settings (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). This approach emphasizes the importance of school-home partnerships in the construction of home – school partnerships, offering a more holistic understanding of Latino parental involvement.

By situating the analysis within this framework, the study contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for educational practices rooted in the cultural and linguistic resources of families. It highlights the transformative potential of programs that recognize and integrate the Funds of Knowledge that Latino parents bring to their children's education.

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Disclosure statement

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