Exploring the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse caregivers of students in virtual learning environments

by

Laura Loya Thiess

B.S., Oklahoma Panhandle State University, 1995
M.S., Kansas State University, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) caregivers of general education students enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade virtual school settings in Texas. The purpose of the study was to understand how caregivers navigated communication systems, instructional expectations, and technology demands in online learning environments. Data were gathered through a demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, voluntary focus group discussion, and document review with six CLD Latinx, Spanish-speaking caregivers whose experiences reflected diverse educational and family contexts.

Guided by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT), data were analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach to uncover recurring patterns of meaning. Five major themes emerged: virtual learning as a source of safety and empowerment; language functioning as both a challenge and a tool; parents as learning coaches, translators, co-teachers, and advocates; school disorganization and inconsistent communication; and the need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support.

Across themes, the findings revealed tensions between the intended design of virtual schooling and the lived realities of families. Caregivers responded with advocacy, cultural knowledge, and technological problem-solving to bridge systemic gaps and sustain their children's learning. These adaptations reflected both resilience and the need for greater institutional empathy. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of culturally responsive, linguistically accessible, and emotionally attuned virtual education practices that promote equity and authentic collaboration for CLD families.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Socorro Herrera

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my son, Robby, who left this world far too soon and never had the chance to fulfill the dreams he had for his life. Thirteen years have passed, yet I think of you every day and miss you every minute. Everything I have accomplished, every page, every late night, every step of this journey, carries your memory with it. I hope I make you proud, my sweet boy.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Recent technological advances and expanded familiarity with virtual "online" learning platforms, particularly following the shutdown of brick-and-mortar schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, have greatly expanded virtual learning environments for students. Full-time virtual schools are now the fastest growing form of school choice (Molnar, 2023). Enrollment in full-time virtual schools has nearly doubled from pre-pandemic levels, with a total of 726 full-time virtual schools serving 649,930 students in the 2020-2021 school year (Molnar, 2023). All parents, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) caregivers, have been confronted with the challenge of assisting their children with the rigors of scholastic achievements in virtual classroom environments. Caregivers of CLD children were noted as having distinct difficulties in helping their children navigate the virtual learning systems, and many failed to ensure their child was continuing their education while at home during the pandemic's stay-at-home mandate (Devkota, 2021). According to Molnar et al. (2023), students from CLD families represented the highest percentage of those with low academic performance after returning to traditional learning environments. The research shows that there is a gap in the successful education of children in virtual education environments with CLD caregivers. The current study plans to investigate this gap by delving into the lived experiences of CLD caregivers whose children attend school virtually, with a focus on identifying barriers to positive caregiver engagement and the successful virtual education of their children, as seen through the eyes of the CLD caregivers themselves.

Chapter 1 presents the background of the study and introduces the problem and purpose statements that frame the research. The chapter also outlines the central research questions and provides an overview of the research design, including a brief explanation of why this approach was appropriate for examining the selected phenomenon. In addition, the significance of the

study is discussed, followed by definitions of key terms and phrases relevant to the research. The chapter further identifies the study's delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, each of which establishes the boundaries and context of the investigation. Chapter 1 concludes with a brief summary that connects these foundational elements and provides a preview of Chapter 2.

Background

Education has been transformed by the increased availability of virtual learning environments, with both students and caregivers facing success and failure adapting to these new learning platforms (Cioè-Peña, 2021). The shutdown of brick-and-mortar schools during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rapid expansion and integration of virtual learning in K-12 education. Educators recognized the need to reimagine instructional delivery and developed systems for teaching large student populations from home settings (Ukrayinska, 2020). The infrastructure was often modeled after the online courses traditionally offered at universities and colleges. Since then, virtual learning has continued to expand, reflecting the growing success and acceptance of these systems among school-age learners (Cioè-Peña, 2021). Along with that success, however, have come significant challenges. Researchers have noted that CLD students and caregivers have experienced disproportionate difficulties adapting to virtual learning environments (Devkota, 2021). Furthermore, limited research is available on the efforts educators have made to help CLD caregivers navigate online learning systems (Cioè-Peña, 2021).

Researchers have examined the impact digital learning has had on teachers, such as discomfort with teaching structures or processes (Calkins & Wiens, 2022; Herrera et al., 2020). Calkins and Wiens (2022), along with Herrera et al. (2020) also explored the challenges students have had understanding instruction and learning key concepts through an online environment. In

addition, numerous studies conducted during and after the pandemic examined how shifts in teaching and learning practices affected educational outcomes, with particular focus on the pedagogical practices that supported successful online learning (Choi & Chiu, 2021; Feeney et al., 2023). However, this research mainly examined the experiences of native English-speaking student, teacher, and parent populations, while the population of students and parents who were considered CLD was relatively ignored (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021). Research findings also revealed a lag in innovations and theoretical developments aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity (Alkhushayban, 2020; Macaulay et al., 2023; Munthe & Westgård, 2023; Philominraj et al., 2022).

Analysis of existing research revealed persistent challenges for students of CLD caregivers, who continue to face systemic and structural barriers to equitable access in virtual education (Molnar et al., 2023). Educators also encounter difficulties developing and implementing adaptive pedagogical practices that effectively meet the needs of CLD families (Devkota, 2021). Moreover, research suggests that lower academic performance among students in CLD households may be connected to the barriers their caregivers experience within virtual learning environments (Molnar et al., 2023). Although these gaps have been identified, limited research has examined the cultural and linguistic factors that shape or constrain CLD caregivers' engagement in their children's online education (Borup et al., 2019).

This study aims to partially fill this gap by offering insight into the shared experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual learning environments. This research study focused on identifying barriers to successful engagement and areas for improvement in the CLD caregiver and educator experience as seen through the eyes of the CLD caregivers themselves.

Problem Statement

School learning environments have undergone a significant and relatively recent transformation with the widespread shift to virtual instruction. This transition fundamentally altered the roles and interactions of students, parents, and educators as they adapted to new digital platforms and modes of communication. Research has noted that parents of CLD children face challenges in supporting their children's learning in these virtual settings, and national data shows that students from CLD household experience disproportionately lower academic outcomes upon returning to traditional classrooms (Molnar et al., 2023). These patterns highlighted a persistent equity gap affecting children of CLD caregivers in virtual schooling contexts, underscoring the need to better understand the factors that influence their educational engagement and success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual "online" learning environments, with an aim of identifying the specific challenges, barriers to success, and areas for improvement in all aspects of the caregiver interaction with educators, administrative systems, and the virtual learning platforms, through the perspective of the CLD caregivers themselves.

Research Question

The following question guided this research:

RQ: In what ways do CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to facilitate the virtual learning of their children?

Research Design

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was appropriate for the study, as the focus of the investigation was gaining understanding and insight into the specific lived experiences of CLD caregivers of children in virtual learning environments. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meaning and interpretation, allowing the researcher to study phenomena as experienced by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach centers on rich, non-numeric data to uncover the essence of not only human experiences but also perceptions (Moustakas, 1995). A deep, rich understanding of data related to the problem is developed through qualitative research as it involves the researcher becoming immersed in the data (Moustakas, 1995). This allows the researcher to identify patterns and themes in the shared meaning among participants. A qualitative design was suitable for this study because the research question sought to explore how CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with virtual education systems, rather than measuring or predicting their experiences numerically. Given the study's emphasis on capturing the depth and meaning of these lived experiences, a phenomenological design was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach to guide the research.

Design

A phenomenological research design was selected for the study. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research design that focuses on investigating the lived experiences of individuals concerning a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009), in this case the experiences of CLD caregivers as they navigate and engage with virtual education systems. Qualitative researchers emphasize the depth and complexity of human experiences in phenomenological

research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenological research is distinguished from other forms of qualitative research by its focus on the lived realities of participants, in hopes of uncovering the essence of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological research supports a deeper look into the subjective and personal perspectives of individuals. The researcher is thus provided with rich, detailed insights into the phenomena under study. Phenomenological research is particularly suited to exploring complex, nuanced areas of human life, such as the interactions between CLD caregivers, educators, and students in virtual learning environments. It offers a window into the emotional and cognitive processes underlying human experience (Moustakas, 2019).

Population and Sampling

The population for the study included Spanish-speaking CLD caregivers of second language learners in virtual learning environments. CLD caregivers of students are individuals who come from backgrounds that differ significantly from the dominant culture and language of their environment. These caregivers may face unique challenges and experiences when navigating educational systems, particularly in contexts such as virtual education where direct, culturally sensitive communication and support are crucial for effective engagement (Borup et al., 2019).

A purposive sampling strategy was applied in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique used by researchers to select participants with specific knowledge, experiences, or characteristics relevant to the research questions of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach ensures that the research focuses on individuals who are most likely to provide rich, valuable insights into the phenomenon being studied. The criteria for caregiver selection were based on students currently identified as second language learners and whose

parents selected Spanish as the language spoken at home on the Home Language Survey (HLS). The HLS is a short form families complete when they enroll their child. It helps schools identify whether a student speaks a language other than English at home. It is the first step in determining whether a student should be assessed for English language proficiency.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection entailed a demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, and a voluntary group discussion to support triangulation within the study and provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. While the demographic and technology survey offered contextual background, the primary method of data collection involved semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible method that incorporates both pre-determined questions and opportunities for interviewers to explore topics in greater depth based on participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach supports researchers in gathering detailed information while adapting to the natural flow of the conversation. The voluntary focus group discussion further enriched the data by allowing participants to share and reflect collectively, helping highlight shared patterns across experiences. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data analysis for the study involved interpretive phenomenological analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis emphasizes the interpretation of how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It involves a detailed, systematic examination of personal narratives to understand the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, often focusing on the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of those experiences. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is particularly suited to studies aiming to understand complex, subjective phenomena from the perspective of those who live them. Additional interpretive

analysis through the lens of the guiding theoretical frameworks of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT) provided a deeper understanding of how cultural, linguistic, and systemic influences shaped participants' meaning-making within virtual environments.

Significance of the Study

This research focused on investigating the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual learning environments. The findings hold potential to be theoretically and practically significant for understanding and improving the relationships among CLD caregivers, educators in virtual learning environments, and the virtual education platforms. The objective of this study was to offer fresh insights into the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual learning environments, insights that hold the potential to enrich the field's understanding of challenges faced by this demographic. This research was also designed to provide educators with insight concerning how to interpret the complex dynamics of virtual education interactions from a culturally responsive lens.

The study also has benefits for practitioners. Specifically, the findings hold the potential to inform targeted improvements in virtual education practices and to guide the development of more responsive and equitable programs and systems. The development of culturally and linguistically inclusive strategies for virtual educators could further improve engagement and outcomes for students with caregivers from CLD backgrounds.

The researcher's own journey as an immigrant and educator have shaped this work. The researcher's experiences, once perceived as barriers, are now recognized as sources of strength that guide a commitment to supporting CLD families. This perspective underscores the

importance of ensuring that the voices of CLD caregivers are included in conversations about virtual education.

Definitions of Terms

Below are definitions of terms relevant to the study. These definitions are based on the descriptions of these terms in prior research and scholarly texts.

Active Listening: Contributing to clear communication by reinforcing shared ideas and presenting opportunities for clarification and validation (Singh & Pallai, 2023).

Caregiver: A parent or other adult serving as the main support for the student participating in brick-and-mortar schools or virtual schools.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD): Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) individuals are defined as individuals who identify with a culture, language, religion, or other background that is not predominantly represented in the society where they are located (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Mitchell & Herrera, 2020), and who have cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from the dominant or majority culture and language (Mitchell & Herrera, 2020; Terry & Irving, 2010). CLD is non-pejorative and typically relates to any population living outside their original racial or ethnic culture and/or speaking a native language other than the prevalent cultural language. For example, in the U.S. many individuals who come across the border from Mexico are considered CLD persons as they are entering communities with cultural aspects that differ from their Mexican cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

English Language learner (ELL) or English Learner (EL): A student whose first language is not English and who is in the process of acquiring English proficiency. They typically require support to acquire the English language and to access the academic content to be successful in school.

Educators: In this study, educators is used to identify and interchangeably refer to a teacher or a school administrator.

General Education Students: Students who are enrolled in a standard curriculum that is not modified for special education needs (O'Donoghue et al., 2001).

Inclusive language: Involves respecting the identity preferences of individuals as well as their diverse backgrounds, avoiding gender-specific or racially specific language, or language that may be exclusionary (Kalenda et al., 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023).

"Online" or "Digital" Platforms: Online tools and technologies used for educational purposes, including learning management systems (LMS), virtual classrooms, and other educational software that facilitate remote teaching and learning (O'Donoghue et al., 2001).

Virtual Education or Schooling: Education that is delivered via digital platforms where teachers and students interact in an online environment rather than face-to-face (O'Donoghue et al., 2001).

Delimitations

Three overarching delimitations existed for this study. First, the research was delimited to CLD caregivers of general education students in kindergarten through 8th grade who were enrolled full-time in virtual learning environments. Second, the study focused exclusively on students who were identified as ELLs and actively participating in their school's language support program. Third, the research was delimited to caregivers who were Spanish-speaking and identified as native to, and having strong cultural and linguistic affinity with, a Latin-American country outside of the United States. This determination was based on the families' responses indicating Spanish as the primary language spoken in the home on the Home

Language Survey, which served as the initial screening document for the identification of ELLs upon enrollment.

Limitations

Several limitations existed for this study. A primary limitation concerned the transferability of the findings. Because qualitative research seeks depth of understanding rather than breadth of generalization, the results of this study are not intended to be generalized beyond the specific context and participants involved. Transferability is further by the study's focus on Spanish-speaking, Latinx caregivers within the broader population of CLD parents. As such, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of caregivers from other cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

Second, this study relied on the perceptions of participants concerning their recollection of lived experiences. CLD caregivers' recollections during semi-structured interviews might have been influenced by memory bias or personal interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Such limiting factors could have influenced the accuracy of the data collected.

A third limitation was associated with the confirmability of the study. Although steps were taken to enhance integrity through reflexive journaling, member checking, and adherence to phenomenological analysis procedures, qualitative research inherently involves researcher interpretation during data collection and analysis. The potential for subjective influence cannot be fully eliminated, which may have shaped the interpretation of participants' narratives and development of thematic findings.

Assumptions

There were multiple assumptions inherent to this study. One critical assumption involved the truthfulness and honesty of the responses from the CLD caregivers. The assumption of truth

and honesty is supported as confidentiality and privacy were characteristics of the plan for the protection of human subjects. Another assumption involved the consistency of virtual education as a context for the study. The study assumed that virtual education environments and policies were consistent across schools and across different departments and different curricula within schools, and would remain relatively stable, providing a consistent context for examining participant experiences. Another assumption involved cultural and linguistic diversity as significant characteristics of the experiences of caregivers. The researcher presupposed that culture and language held significant influence on the lived experiences of CLD caregivers, particularly as they related to the virtual education of their children. This assumption was critical, as it underpinned the rationale for the study.

Summary

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual "online" learning environments. The study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research approach, offering the potential for a deep dive into the perspectives of participants when engaging with education systems and educators in virtual education settings. The study uncovered nuanced insights into how CLD caregivers perceived and navigated their children's online education by drawing on multiple data sources including a demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, and a voluntary focus group discussion and by analyzing these data through interpretive phenomenological analysis. This research sought to contribute to and inform educational practices and policies by providing an understanding of how CLD caregivers facilitate and navigate the virtual schooling of their children. The findings may support the development of more inclusive policies and strategies that address the unique needs of CLD caregivers in creating optimal conditions for virtual "online" schooling for their children.

Chapter two, the Literature Review, will summarize the available research and guiding theoretical frameworks for the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 contextualizes the research questions by exploring existing empirical literature as it relates to caregiver engagement, the role of educators, and equity within virtual education. The chapter begins by exploring the importance of parental engagement in virtual schooling and how caregiver involvement influences student success in online learning settings. It then reviews best practices for fostering meaningful caregiver-school partnerships, with particular attention to strategies that support engagement in virtual contexts. Following this, the chapter addresses barriers that CLD caregivers encounter when engaging with virtual education systems and consideres the challenges educators face in cultivating inclusive communication in virtual education settings. The chapter then transitions to a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that ground the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary that synthesizes key insights from the reviewed literature and connects them to the focus of the study. Together, these sections establish a foundation for understanding the experiences of CLD caregivers in virtual learning environments.

Today's classrooms are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (Mitchell & Herrera, 2020; Rossetti & Burke, 2018). Additionally, the expansion of digital learning technologies and the shift to virtual classroom settings during the pandemic have shifted the context of where teaching and learning happen (Feeney et al., 2023). The impact of school closures on students' mental and physical health highlighted pre-existing educational, socioeconomic, and intersectional disparities faced by marginalized populations (Herrera, 2022) and the increased attention that is needed to develop more equitable virtual education environments (Crenshaw, 1989; Herrera, 2022). Considering persistent sociological gaps in

educational equity (Feeney et al., 2023), such dramatic shifts in today's education contexts necessitate consideration of how equitable and inclusive education can be fostered in virtual contexts (Choi & Chiu, 2021; Feeney et al., 2023). For the purposes of this study, inclusive education is defined as the ability of teachers to include diverse voices and perspectives within teaching, pedagogical practices, and the classroom environment (Choi & Chiu, 2021; Feeney et al., 2023).

Planning for equitable education requires consideration of parental and family engagement in children's education. For instance, some states offer Parent Training and Information Centers (PTICs) that are federally funded and designed to support the caregivers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Rossetti & Burke, 2018). However, Rossetti and Burke (2018) found that many of these interventions fail to address systemic, institutional barriers CLD caregivers face and are underinformed by an understanding of the experiences of CLD families. Some of the factors that influence the experiences of CLD families include language barriers, cultural differences, educational background, and immigration status (Herrera et al., 2020). Furthermore, research findings indicate that equity gaps exist between CLD families' technological literacy and the literacy of their white counterparts, a gap that can detrimentally impact educational engagement and outcomes for CLD families (Feeney et al., 2023). Choi and Chiu's (2021) research findings suggest that parental engagement is critical to optimizing and supporting students' academic outcomes.

The increase in virtual education environments is considered a challenge in the modern educational landscape (Cioè-Peña, 2021). Although technology devices are being made more accessible and widely distributed to families with children engaged in remote education, little consideration is given to the technological literacy gaps these families face once devices are

distributed (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Ukrayinska, 2020). For CLD caregivers and students, the most challenging problem may be navigating technology and learning platforms in virtual learning contexts (Devkota, 2021).

Educational equity gaps concerning digital literacy and parental engagement persist globally (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Devkota, 2021). Such gaps refer to disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes among different groups of students, often based on factors such as race, ethnicity, native language, socioeconomic status, gender, or geographic location. Mehta and Aguilera (2020) assert the need to address such inequities through the evolution of pedagogy that considers the experiences of caregivers, educators, and students. However, the experiences of CLD caregivers of general education students in virtual education settings remain unknown (Devkota, 2021). Challenges may encompass a lack of culturally competent educational planning and the need for improved technological access (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Ukrayinska, 2020).

The Importance of Parental Engagement in Virtual Education

Most research reviewed concerning the role of parental engagement in virtual education indicated that such engagement is a critical component of student success (Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; Ishimaru, 2017; Johnson et al., 2022; Rossetti & Burke, 2018). Parental engagement, for the purpose of this study, refers to active engagement, support, and participation of caregivers in their children's education. Some researchers suggest that the role of parental engagement is even more critical in virtual education settings to help students remain engaged and supported amidst the lack of in-person interaction with other students and teachers (Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). The ways in which researchers describe the role and importance of parental engagement in virtual education most frequently include parent communication with educators, maintaining and supporting a conducive at-home learning environment, helping

students with technological support, maintaining a regular and supportive schedule, offering encouragement and supervision, providing emotional support to students, and advocating for supportive resources (Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Resource advocacy was specifically described as crucial in culturally diverse contexts, such that caregivers play an important role in communicating with educators about their children's potential learning needs, language barriers, or other factors (Johnson et al., 2022).

A gap was found to exist between theoretical approaches and actual administrative-based approaches to fostering inclusive communication and collaboration (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021). An increased need for practical skills in cultural competence, emotional intelligence, trust building, and intercultural communication between caregivers and educators was demonstrated (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021). The following section builds upon these findings by examining best practices in parental engagement, emphasizing effective strategies and approaches that foster strong, equitable partnerships between caregivers and schools.

Best Practices in Parental Engagement

Similar to how existing empirical literature includes discussions of strategies for fostering effective engagement between educators and caregivers, literature concerning inclusive communication and collaboration conceptualizes theory-informed implementation and evidence-based practice recommendations. Various strategies and recommendations for fostering inclusive communication and collaboration were found that leveraged inclusive and culturally responsive approaches (Crenshaw, 1989; Herrera, 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023). The most commonly described culturally responsive approaches included active listening, practicing clear communication, cultivating emotional intelligence, respecting diversity, encouraging feedback

from diverse audiences, and understanding equitable participation (Singh & Pallai, 2023). For instance, active listening is described as making eye contact, maintaining open body language, paraphrasing to confirm understanding, nodding, and using other positive reinforcement-based gestures that let the recipient know their sharing in an in-person environment is heard (Singh & Pallai, 2023). In virtual environments, active listening also requires intentional digital communication practices, such as maintaining on-camera presence, when possible, using verbal acknowledgments, incorporating chat-based affirmations, and providing timely follow-up messages that signal attention and care in the absence of physical cues (Borup et al., 2019).

A variety of theory and practice-based literature and research was found concerning facilitators and best practices that may be used to encourage parental engagement in brick-and-mortar settings (Kartel et al., 2022; Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020; Ishimaru, 2017; Raguindin et al., 2021). While many of these recommendations may appear practical and logical, reflection on the previously described challenges commonly characterizing parent-teacher communication suggests that some recommendations may be based on theoretically sound and useful suggestions but lack evidence-based practical insight. For instance, fostering open communication channels is a sound recommendation (Raguindin et al., 2021). However, the recommendation falls short in illustrating how to break down cultural, linguistic, and trust-based barriers between caregivers and educators so that communication channels are open (Antony-Newman, 2019).

Many of the current evidence-based practice recommendations for fostering improved parental engagement align with Hererra's (2022) Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT) framework (discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter) in terms of recognizing the importance of inclusivity as a foundation for making formalized interventions more effective (Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020; Ishimaru, 2017). These recommendations included

fostering cultural sensitivity through cultural competence training for teachers, including practical communication training. Additionally, these recommendations included celebrating achievements to reinforce progress and actively collaborating with caregivers to set reasonable student goals (Ishimaru, 2017). When caregivers feel their concerns and input are more frequently valued and recognized, parental engagement is more likely to be encouraged and activated (Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020). Additionally, the following best practices emerged in the literature as being effective and worth incorporating in the educational setting: flexible meeting times, active listening, formal training for educators, technology integration, optimizing trust and engagement, and personalized learning. Each is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

Flexible Meeting Times

Flexible meeting times address the socioeconomic challenges and barriers faced by many CLD caregivers, particularly those who work multiple jobs, have irregular schedules, or lack paid time off (Raguindin et al., 2021). Research on virtual schooling emphasizes the importance of offering varied scheduling options such as evening or weekend virtual meetings, staggered conference times, and the ability to reschedule without consequence to reduce logistical barriers and increase accessibility for underrepresented families (Borup et al., 2019). Acknowledging CLD caregivers' realities highlights the complex nature of individual identity contexts and the hurdles that often arise. Providing multiple modes of participation, including phone calls, video conferencing, text-based communication, and asynchronous message exchanges, support caregivers who may have limited time, unreliable internet access, or language constraints. Flexible scheduling and multimodal communication ensure that caregivers can engage in ways

that align with their realities, thereby promoting more equitable opportunities for participation in their children's education (Bang et al., 2021; Raguindin et al., 2021).

Active Listening

Researchers describe active listening as contributing to clear communication by reinforcing shared ideas and presenting opportunities for clarification and validation (Singh & Pallai, 2023). Respect for diversity is a theoretically plausible concept. However, in practice, it requires systemic and critical recognition of potential personal biases and how they may arise through verbal communication, thought patterns, actions, or other subconscious behaviors (Wehmeyer & Kurth, 2021). Reflexive recognition of personal biases can contribute to creating inclusive spaces. Additionally, if dominant or majority groups actively ask for feedback, marginalized voices can become amplified and more appreciated, thus fostering increased participation.

Formal Training for Educators

Training and education were recommended as formal means by which to increase educators' levels of cultural competence and to foster educational environments that are more inclusive and welcoming to caregivers of diverse backgrounds (Singh & Pallai, 2023). Researchers suggest that if caregivers of diverse backgrounds feel more welcomed, understood, and accepted into a host country's educational context, they will be more likely to become involved in education, and more likely to communicate effectively with educators (Wehmeyer & Kurth, 2021). However, current research indicates that while formal training is influential, it requires further evidence to support efficacy (Kalenda et al., 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023). A synthesis of research findings indicates that a variety of factors particularly the use of both formal communication structures (such as scheduled conferences, orientation sessions, and

translated materials) and informal communication approaches (such as check-ins, text messages, and casual relationship building interactions) are needed to effectively encourage communication between caregivers and teachers, foster equitable environments, and bridge trust, culture, and language divides (Dario Ianes & Leonardo Venturoso, 2021; Kalenda et al., 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023).

Technology Integration

Some researchers describe technology integration as a means to foster parental engagement (Kartel et al., 2022; Raguindin et al., 2021). However, in the context of research reviewed in the previous section, it is worth noting that some caregivers may see technology as a barrier, fear cybersecurity or confidentiality issues, or lack the skills otherwise needed to navigate communication successfully and confidently with teachers through virtual platforms (Macaulay et al., 2023). Therefore, a more nuanced inquiry into how technology may be effectively implemented seems necessary to leverage technology as an asset rather than introduce a barrier. For instance, with appropriate digital competence training and a means to address parental digital literacy gaps or privacy concerns, technology may be used as a tool to bridge logistic or schedule barriers otherwise prohibiting caregivers from actively engaging in parent-teacher meetings or other school activities (Macaulay et al., 2023).

Technology was a theme interlaced within the research explored, commonly mentioned as a facilitator for implementing cultural competence training and providing more logistically accessible means of communication between caregivers and educators (Dario Ianes & Leonardo Venturoso, 2021; Kalenda et al., 2022). However, as mentioned previously, it is useful to recognize that the implementation of technology itself may not necessarily foster inclusive collaboration and communication but may require the provision of technology training and

support resources to caregivers and educators who otherwise may lack digital literacy skills (Dario Ianes & Leonardo Venturoso, 2021). Other researchers described the use of inclusive language as essential to fostering inclusive collaboration and communication, to help caregivers of diverse backgrounds feel less stigmatized or marginalized, more understood, and thus, more open and receptive to communication and collaboration (Crenshaw, 1989; Kalenda et al., 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023). Inclusive language involves respecting the identity preferences of individuals as well as their diverse backgrounds, avoiding gender-specific or racially specific language, or language that may be exclusionary (Kalenda et al., 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023).

Research findings concerning the role of technology in facilitating equitable educational environments, specifically inclusive communication and collaboration between caregivers and educators, indicated that technology can be both a facilitator and a barrier (Kalenda et al., 2022; Wehmeyer & Kurth, 2021). For instance, technology can facilitate communication and collaboration when communication is carried out completely virtually. Translation applications and the option for communicating in one's preferred style, such as through writing or audio, can facilitate more ease of communication (Cioè-Peña 2021; Kalenda et al., 2022). Additionally, caregivers facing the fear of stigmatization or discrimination may feel more comfortable communicating across virtual digital platforms than in face-to-face settings. However, if digital platforms lack translation services and eye contact and body language cannot be observed, barriers to technology use may be present (Kalenda et al., 2022). Moreover, if caregivers are not provided with appropriate training tools to communicate over digital platforms and lack digital literacy or confidence, technology becomes a barrier to effective communication and collaboration (Kalenda et al., 2022). Finally, socioeconomically compromised populations may lack resources and access to sufficient technology (Kalenda et al., 2022; Wehmeyer & Kurth,

2021). In the virtual learning environment, effective technology integration is key to successful and productive interactions between CLD caregivers and the school.

Optimizing Trust and Engagement

Theoretical inquiry and descriptions of best practice recommendations for fostering increased and optimized parental engagement recognize the importance of cultivating more trusting, equitable communication between caregivers and teachers at an institutional and individual level (Borup et al., 2019; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; March et al., 2022). A systematic review of barriers versus facilitators to communication between educators and caregivers found that most existing literature and primary research failed to describe or define sustainability at a school level (Kalenda et al., 2022). Sustainability in school parent engagement initiatives refers to implementing practices that ensure the continued engagement and support of caregivers over the long term. The researchers concluded that school leadership, increased cultural competence resources, improved staff engagement and cultural competence training, as well as improved external support from board members, federal funding, and other community resources were the most described facilitators of improved communication and parental engagement (March et al., 2022). Researchers also suggested that when students are the focus of teacher interactions and student goals are prioritized as the agenda of communication, caregivers were more likely to be engaged in student learning and communication with teachers (Borup et al., 2019). Additionally, research suggested the benefits of educators taking initiative to implement culturally inclusive family participation opportunities and encourage parental engagement by helping to overcome the fear of stigma and bias CLD caregivers may feel (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020) such as offering multilingual communication, creating nonjudgmental spaces for questions, and normalizing diverse family experiences.

Personalized Learning

The need for personalized learning approaches is increasingly recognized, especially following the pandemic, as a necessary component of fostering inclusivity. As virtual education contexts become increasingly diverse, this implies that learners' needs in those contexts are also increasingly varied because geographic barriers no longer separate students of diverse cultural backgrounds from learning in the same environment (Crescenza et al., 2021; Singh & Pallai, 2023). Consequently, individualized learning approaches are increasingly needed to tailor content delivery to students' individualized learning preferences and developmental levels (Crescenza et al., 2021; Singh & Pallai, 2023). Researchers suggest that individualized learning approaches can lead to more advantageous collaboration and communication because students and their families may feel more supported and valued rather than isolated, excluded, or marginalized (Crescenza et al., 2021; Herrera, 2022).

Barriers to Effective CLD Caregiver Engagement

Language and culture remain central barriers in U.S. schools, where differences between caregivers and educators discourage communication and sometimes reinforce mistrust (Anthony-Newman, 2019; Herrera, 2022; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Research also noted that educators may lack cultural competence training or language skills to fully support CLD families (Philominraj et al., 2022). These issues can be compounded by socioeconomic pressures, as many caregivers work multiple jobs or long hours, leaving little time to engage with schools (Viner et al., 2021). In some cases, caregivers may be hesitant to contact educators due to fear of stigmatization or prior negative experiences (Alkhushayban, 2020). Researchers recommend leveraging culturally responsive approaches for overcoming these barriers to effective collaboration and communication (Herrera, 2022; Singh & Pallai, 2023). The literature reviewed

included findings that overwhelmingly indicated cultural and linguistic barriers were most often barriers to effective collaboration and communication but that other factors, such as socioeconomic status and existing support resources, can influence their impact.

Logistical Constraints

Various barriers CLD families face in an educational setting arising from parent-teacher interactions were identified through review of the literature. Many researchers agreed that common challenges caregivers face include limited time, communication gaps, language barriers, cultural differences, the influence of bias or negative past experiences, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, technology barriers, and/or socioeconomic disparities (Alkhushayban, 2020; Macaulay et al., 2023; Munthe & Westgård, 2023; Philominraj et al., 2022). These challenges can contribute to infrequent or disconnected communication and, consequently, feelings of unmet needs, lack of support, or lack of understanding (Munthe & Westergård, 2023).

Additionally, differences in language and culture between CLD caregivers, families, and educators can further discourage communication and present challenges when communication does occur (Antony-Newman, 2019; Herrera, 2022). Compounded with negative past experiences and personal biases, educators and caregivers' communication barriers can become complex, multifaceted, and difficult to overcome with existing resources (Philominraj et al., 2022). Research findings suggest that cultural differences play significant roles in how caregivers become involved in their children's education and the level of collaboration or communication they perceive or engage in with educators, and that there is a persistent gap between theoretical approaches to fostering cultural and linguistic diversity and practice-based interventions (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021).

Caregivers may hesitate to engage in many cases due to fear of stigmatization and lack of support for language and cultural diversity (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Many CLD families may fear stigmatization or be influenced by the perception of a negative experience characterized by stigmatization, such as being regarded with disapproval and marginalization (Alkhushayban, 2020). Consequently, CLD caregivers may hesitate to contact educators for support. Additionally, educators may lack cultural competence training, language skills, or other skills required for confidence in reaching out to and supporting CLD families (Philominraj et al., 2022). Furthermore, educators may hold biases toward CLD students and their families, which further serve as substantial barriers (Alkhushayban, 2020).

Logistical constraints highlight the systemic conditions that influence CLD caregivers' engagement in virtual education, informing how schools might better support working families and reduce inequities in access.

Technology Access and Digital Literacy

Concerns with privacy and confidentiality, socioeconomic disparities, and technological barriers were frequently mentioned by researchers as challenges to caregiver and educator interactions (Alkhushayban, 2020; Philominraj et al., 2022). Following the rapid growth of virtual learning and the need for greater inclusion of technology in learning environments, digital devices were frequently and widely distributed to students, with little support or training resources on using those devices (Macaulay et al., 2023). Caregivers may not be comfortable or proficient with the technologies, which can inhibit the support students receive from their caregivers at home and further inhibit caregivers' likelihood of reaching out to administrators or teachers to communicate using digital platforms (Macaulay et al., 2023). Furthermore, caregivers unfamiliar with technology may experience privacy concerns regarding the use of digital

interfaces in sharing information online, which can lead caregivers to withhold information from teachers or wait for the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting, making communication more infrequent. Also, socioeconomically underprivileged caregivers may be working multiple jobs and, therefore, face logistic challenges with attending school activities that would otherwise serve as opportunities for caregivers to interact and communicate with educators (Munthe & Westergård, 2023).

According to Viner et al. (2021), future research should explore the potential lack of access to technology and other supportive resources that make it more feasible for families to navigate virtual education settings (Viner et al., 2021).

Expectations, Time, and Trust

Another prominent theme arising from the literature review related to differing expectations, time-bound challenges, and trust between the caregivers and educators (Gilmore et al., 2022; Munthe & Westergård, 2023). The assumed barriers included caregiver-educator collaboration and communication. Gilmore et al. (2022) reported that caregiver-educator collaboration can sometimes be more difficult to achieve in secondary school settings due to the differences in developmental expectations placed on older students versus younger students and the increasing complexity of school structures as grade levels progress. Most notably, Gilmore et al. (2022) found caregivers to be inhibited from communicating with teachers because they perceived a lack of trust in teachers and poor communication on their behalf. Essentially, the findings indicated that the caregivers felt undervalued by educators and educators in turn faced other logistical challenges, time pressure, demands, and schedule conflicts that inhibited them from communicating more frequently with caregivers (Gilmore et al., 2022).

While Gilmore et al. (2022) concluded that caregivers were primarily frustrated with educators' lack of communication, Butler et al. (2019) found that educators interviewed were most frustrated with caregivers' limited engagement and communication efforts. These contrasting perspectives highlight a persistent disconnect between caregivers and educators regarding communication expectations and responsibilities. These discrepancies suggest a need for future research examining how communication challenges manifest across the families of different student populations, particularly among CLD families and other marginalized groups. For instance, Munthe and Westergård (2023) noted that socioeconomically marginalized caregivers in both brick-and-mortar and virtual settings often faced challenges related to time and logistic constraints, which without proper understanding, could lead educators to perceive them as unengaged or disinterested. These findings illustrate the relational and perceptual barriers that shape the lived experiences of CLD caregivers as they navigate communication with educators.

Intersection of Multiple Barriers

Researchers also suggested that sufficiently improving and increasing parental engagement is not attributable to one or even a few factors alone but is attributable to a complex intersection of dynamics that include the provision of supportive logistic resources, the bridging of cultural and language gaps, and the fostering of trust and reducing of stigma (Kartel et al., 2022; Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020; Norheim & Moser, 2020). For example, one study's findings indicated that caregivers might be more inclined to engage in their student's education when they feel supported, autonomous, confident of the academic assistance provided, and connected with other caregivers and staff members (Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020). Additional aspects mentioned

throughout the literature but less frequently described included ensuring strong internet signals (Kartel et al., 2022) and implementing language translators (Norheim & Moser, 2020).

Recognizing the numerous barriers that affect effective caregiver-educator interactions include those related to language, culture, technology, socioeconomic status, and trust creates a foundation for understanding the broader communication challenges that occur in virtual schooling contexts (Antony-Newman, 2019; Herrera, 2022; Smtih & Sheridan, 2019). These barriers not only influence the frequency and quality of interactions between CLD caregivers and educators but also reveal the complexity of establishing equitable and inclusive communication systems in digital environments (Bromham et al.,2021; Philominraj et al., 2022; Scanlan et at., 2021). The following section, therefore, examines the challenges educators and caregivers face in cultivating inclusive communication practices within education settings and explores how these challenges intersect with cultural and linguistic diversity.

Challenges in Cultivating Inclusive Communication

Cultural differences play a significant role in parental engagement in education (Antony-Newman, 2019; Herrera, 2022; Ishimaru, 2017). In many cases, caregivers felt hesitant to engage in formal aspects of education, such as parent-teacher administration meetings, children's extracurricular activities, or other opportunities to engage with other caregivers, teachers, and staff, due to fear of stigmatization, cultural barriers, or language gaps (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Several prominent findings were underscored through synthesizing the literature reviewed on this topic. These included language and cultural barriers, differences in cultural norms and expectations, differences in perceived parental roles and authorities, socioeconomic and educational background and disparities, and different communication styles (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). These

factors all intersect in various ways. For instance, caregivers of marginalized cultural identities may fear being misunderstood or stigmatized in broader school contexts where teachers represent a dominant cultural majority (Antony-Newman, 2019).

Additionally, caregivers may feel inhibited from attending such activities or communicating due to language barriers (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Researchers also suggest that cultural barriers can characterize and create different expectations on behalf of educators versus caregivers, and conflicts can be found in instances in which caregivers and teachers believe authority and responsibility should be delegated differently due to different cultural preconceptions and beliefs (Barger, 2019). These factors can create conflict arising from cultural and language differences between caregivers, school administrators, and teachers (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). This insight circles back to the importance of gaining awareness from CLD caregivers about what they need from the virtual school setting to have effective parent engagement.

Time-based priorities, a lack of translation services, and culturally based observations of holidays can also create challenges for parental engagement in school events (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). For instance, families may observe different celebrations or holidays based on cultural backgrounds, which may not align with a public-school system's days off for observations. Consequently, this can inhibit caregivers of certain cultural backgrounds from engaging in school activities scheduled on those days (Barger, 2019). Furthermore, challenges concerning immigration status, logistical and economic pressures placed on families, and limited time can constrain marginalized caregivers from engaging in school activities (Antony-Newman, 2019). Finally, school districts that fail to implement translation services or provide appropriate cultural competence training for teachers may see decreased

levels of parental engagement due to language barriers and a lack of supportive resources bridging those barriers (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Exploring how virtual school settings can set up systems to meet the needs of caregivers is imperative to successful home and school interactions.

Empirical evidence overwhelmingly suggests that cultural and linguistic barriers present significant challenges to parental engagement with students' education and school activities due in large part to fear of stigmatization, systemic discrimination, and a lack of culturally competent resources otherwise facilitating communication (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger, 2019; Tan et al., 2019). For instance, one systematic literature review evaluated over 40 studies in four different nations, finding that immigrant caregivers faced the most significant, prevalent, and unique challenges concerning engagement with school activities as a result of language barriers, a lack of translation and communication services or supports, and a lack of familiarity with the education system and structure of with the respective host country (Antony-Newman, 2019). As a result, the researcher found that these challenges encouraged immigrant caregivers to assume greater responsibility for their children's educational performance and academic outcomes. The researcher concluded that this increased pressure amidst a lack of linguistic and cultural support may exacerbate educational inequalities (Antony-Newman, 2019).

In contrast, the findings of a meta-analysis of research examining the relationship between parental engagement and children's academic outcomes and adjustment revealed little statistical significance between parental engagement and cultural and linguistic differences, suggesting that other factors, aside from cultural and linguistic differences, are at play in influencing parental engagement in children's education (Barger, 2019). These factors may include or be related to support systems, the cultural competence of teachers, the host country

and surrounding community cultural context, and the socioeconomic status of caregivers (Kartel et al., 2022; Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020; Ishimaru, 2017; Raguindin et al., 2021). For instance, Tan et al. (2019) present evidence indicating that improved communication skills fostered between teachers and caregivers, despite cultural gaps, are correlated with increased parental engagement in education and that increased parental socioeconomic status is positively correlated with increased parental engagement. These findings suggest that parental engagement is facilitated by higher income brackets, potentially as a result of increased access to resources or logistic flexibility (Alkhushayban, 2020; Philominraj et al., 2022).

Some researchers suggest that the disparities and cultural or linguistic gaps characterizing parental engagement in schools may be more pronounced in rural settings since many rural settings lack resources and access to diverse populations, perspectives, and support networks (Devkota, 2021). Consequently, when cultural gaps exist between local communities and caregivers already facing language and culture differences, families may be more hesitant to engage or participate in school activities (Antony-Newman 2019). Tlali and Matee (2022) underscore the need to increase cultural and linguistic support in rural and urban education contexts. The researchers highlight that recognizing cultural and linguistic differences is not simply an issue of translation but rather identifying and characterizing cultural and value-based differences (Tlali & Matee, 2022). Languages can be spoken and used in differing ways, and literal translations may not be sufficient to bridge gaps in understanding. Consequently, more nuanced training and support are needed (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Tlali & Matee, 2022). Together, these findings suggest that educators must move beyond surface-level communication efforts and develop deeper cultural awareness to effectively support CLD caregivers. Without intentional efforts to bridge these gaps, meaningful engagement and partnership between families and

schools remain limited. These challenges are likely to be similar, and in some cases amplified, in virtual school settings, where caregivers often face additional barriers such as limited access to reliable technology, reduced opportunities for informal relationship-building, and communication practices that rely heavily on English-dominant platforms (Borup et. al., 2019). Although growing research points to these obstacles, fewer studies have specifically examined how CLD caregivers navigate inclusive communication within virtual environments, highlighting an important gap in the literature.

Guiding Theoretical Frameworks

Two guiding theoretical frameworks were chosen for this study and deemed most appropriate for contextualizing the study's problem and purpose and for guiding data analysis and interpreting the study's findings. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was selected due to its focus on interpersonal interactions as well as broader activity systems, such as tools, rules, roles, and community structures, that shape how those interactions unfold. Additionally, the Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT) framework was selected to help describe how caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage in supporting their children within virtual education environments. These frameworks are explored in the following sections.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory

The CHAT, third generation (Engeström, 2001), was chosen as an appropriate guiding theoretical framework in the study precisely because the CHAT focuses on interpersonal interactions (in this case, caregiver-educator) rather than pedagogy. Engeström & Glăveanu (2012) expanded Lev Vygotsky's prior CHAT and modernized the theory by building on the framework's foundational concepts of complex human behavior as socially driven. Because the CHAT originated in Vygotsky's theoretical framework, the theory assumes that human behavior

and interactions are socially rooted and stimulated (Sannino et al., 2018; Sannino & Engeström, 2018). Additionally, the theory assumes that transformative potential lies in activities, a concept known as expansive learning, which is thought to occur when individuals or groups face contradictions within their standard or default activity system, incentivizing a restructuring to re-align with goals.

Engeström began developing modernizations of the CHAT in the early 2000s, and the modernized theory began to be applied across institutional domains in recent years (Engeström & Glăveanu, 2012). Similar to Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Engeström & Glăveanu (2012) proposed that multiple and interconnected ZPDs exist in social groups, which cohesively reflect the developmental and collaborative nature of activities the group engages in. Consequently, a strong emphasis is placed on the historical development of activity systems and the dynamics that characterizes how activities evolve in response to contradictions and external influences (Sannino et al., 2018; Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

CHAT continues to be an influential framework influencing human resource development studies, workplace learning, organizational development, and sociology in education contexts. The theory explains how learning happens in socially mediated, complex, and dynamic environments (Sannino et al., 2018; Sannino & Engeström, 2018). The CHAT is appropriate and helpful in explaining potential factors that may influence the nature and evolution of CLD caregiver engagement in the social construct of their children's virtual learning.

Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching

The Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT) framework (Herrera, 2022) was also chosen as a supporting theoretical framework. The BDCRT framework

recognizes the diverse cultural backgrounds, contexts, and experiences of all families/caregivers and students as essential to creating a more inclusive environment in which all students feel heard, supported, engaged, and valued.

The BDCRT framework offers a context for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy, thus explaining that successful learning environments must implement approaches to teaching and instruction that recognize and value cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms (Herrera, 2022), which requires implementing cultural awareness and sensitivity training, inclusive curriculums, student-centered learning, community engagement, social justice, and critical reflection. Using the BDCRT framework, educators may work to implement cultural awareness and sensitivity by becoming increasingly aware of their own biases towards students and families of various cultural backgrounds and recognizing the strengths that lie in the diversity of identities in today's classrooms (Herrera, 2022, Herrera et al., 2020). Implementing inclusive pedagogy and curriculum content may include incorporating literature, stories, and perspectives of culturally diverse authors and figures. Additionally, focusing on students' individual assets, needs, and backgrounds requires recognizing the value and influence of students' prior knowledge and experiences (Herrera, 2022). Finally, engaging community and family members in learning is essential for recognizing the broader social influence of the community on student learning (Herrera, 2022). Meaningful interactions with caregivers that are based on trust and respect will yield the best results (Herrera et al., 2020).

Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of general education students in virtual education settings. Chapter 2 provided a synthesis of the literature on CLD caregivers' engagement in virtual learning environments as a basis to contextualize the study's

findings and to demonstrate the need for research. The literature review was organized to explore the importance of parental engagement in virtual schooling and how caregiver involvement influences student success in online learning environments. It then reviewed best practices for fostering meaningful caregiver-school partnerships followed by addressing barriers that CLD caregivers encounter when engaging with virtual education systems and the challenges educators face in cultivating inclusive communication in education settings. The chapter then transitioned to a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that ground the study.

This literature review synthesized knowledge concerning parental engagement in mostly traditional school settings. A gap exists regarding parental engagement in virtual settings. Various practices and recommendations for fostering more inclusive, culturally responsive, and equitable education settings were discussed (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021). Researchers indicate that education policy and practice struggle to keep pace with the progressive advancements of forward-thinking leaders, theoretical developments, and the needs of CLD caregivers and students (Alkhushayban, 2020; Macaulay et al., 2023; Munthe & Westgård, 2023; Philominraj et al., 2022).

Barriers and challenges facing parent-educator interactions were most described as language barriers, cultural differences, negative past experiences, systemic biases, logistic gaps, technology barriers, and socioeconomic disparities (Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Rossetti & Burke, 2018). Facilitators and best practices for fostering engagement included the provision of support, translation services, extracurricular programs, digital competency training, and cultural competency training to be used to foster understanding and trust (Kartel et al., 2022; Levinthal & Kuusisto, 2020; Ishimaru, 2017; Raguindin et al., 2021). Synthesis of the literature also revealed persistent gaps between the theoretical approaches and recommendations

for fostering inclusive educational environments and the practices used in today's virtual educational settings (Bromham et al., 2021; Paetsch et al., 2023; Scanlan et al., 2021). Thus, the study intended to fill the gap in the literature and thereby make important contributions to increase understanding of the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of general education students in virtual education settings.

The theoretical frameworks chosen to guide and contextualize the study were CHAT, 3rd Generation (Engeström, 2001) and BDCRT (Herrera, 2022). Together, these frameworks provided a foundation for understanding the importance of cultural inclusivity in today's education settings and the need for cultural responsiveness in the social interactions between caregivers and educators, and the ways in which broader school systems and activity structures shape those interactions. Chapter 3 will describe this study's methodological approach, design, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to explore the lived experiences of CLD caregivers in virtual education settings. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to examine how caregivers made sense of, navigated, and engaged with educators and school systems to support their children's online learning. The chapter begins by describing the research design and the role of the researcher, followed by an overview of the participants, ethical considerations, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used in the study. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness are also detailed. The chapter concludes with a summary that links these methodological components to the purpose and scope of the research.

A qualitative research methodology was appropriate for the study, as the focus of the investigation was gaining understanding and insight into the specific lived experiences of CLD caregivers of children in virtual learning environments. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meaning and interpretation, allowing the researcher to study phenomena as experienced by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach centers on rich, non-numeric data to uncover the essence of not only human experiences but also perceptions (Moustakas, 1995). A deep, rich understanding of data related to the problem is developed through qualitative research as it involves the researcher becoming immersed in the data (Moustakas, 1995). This allows the researcher to identify patterns and themes in the shared meaning among participants. A qualitative design was suitable for this study because the research question sought to explore how CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with virtual education systems, rather than measuring or predicting their experiences numerically. Given the study's emphasis on capturing the depth and meaning of these lived

experiences, a phenomenological design was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach to guide the research.

This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of CLD caregivers in virtual education settings, aiming to uncover how cultural and linguistic differences impact their interactions with educators (Moustakas, 1994). Through a demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, a voluntary group discussion, and interpretive phenomenological analysis, the study informs more inclusive educational practices and communication strategies (Smith et al., 2009).

This chapter explains how a qualitative, phenomenological methodology was used to answer the research question: In what ways did CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to facilitate the virtual learning of their children? The subsequent sections describe the research design, role of the researcher, the participants, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness, and closes with a summary.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research design that involves investigation of how individuals experience and interpret the world. Phenomenological research is aimed at capturing the essence of the lived experiences of participants by exploring the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of participants concerning a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This research design often involves in-depth interviews to gain insight concerning narratives from research participants to identify common themes in data (Moustakas, 1994). The application of phenomenological research design was justified in the study because the purpose was to investigate the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of general education students in their interactions with virtual education educators. A phenomenological research design was most

appropriate because it supports the researcher in gaining a deep understanding of unique perspectives and challenges (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research can support exploration of the nuanced ways in which cultural and linguistic differences impact caregivers' engagement with virtual education by focusing on their personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This research design can enable the identification of the specific needs and barriers faced by CLD caregivers, while also facilitating the development of more inclusive and effective communication strategies and educational practices in virtual learning environments.

Research Question

The following question guided this study:

RQ: In what ways do CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to facilitate the virtual learning of their children?

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in the study was that of an instrument for data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument through which data are collected and interpreted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Even though the researcher used an interview protocol as a guide for asking questions, as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) emphasized, the researcher's positionality, background, and perspectives can influence both data collection and analysis. The researcher's background and lived experiences shaped both the interpretative lens and the approach to this study. The researcher's journey as a once undocumented Hispanic female teacher and administrator has not always been a straight path. Early professional experiences revealed the deep needs of immigrant families navigating U.S. schools. For example, the researcher translated newsletters, created Spanish-language workshops for parents, and advocated for greater inclusion of families who were often overlooked. These experiences

reinforced the researcher's understanding that cultural diversity is not a barrier but a strength, and that schools must actively create spaces where families feel valued. Over time, this commitment expanded beyond the classroom and into school leadership.

Today, in the role of district administrator, the researcher continues working to dismantle barriers for CLD families and to build systems that honor their voices. This positionality as an immigrant, Hispanic female and lifelong advocate informs every stage of the study, from the framing of the research question to the interpretation of findings. Acknowledging this context provides important grounding for how data will be collected and analyzed, while maintaining reflexivity to ensure that the voices of participants remain central throughout the study. To support the credibility and confirmability of the study, a reflexive journal was maintained to account for potential bias and to engage in bracketing practices that support phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

The study participants were drawn from a voluntary group of CLD caregivers whose children attended two different virtual schools in two different districts in Texas. Additionally, participants had to be from Latin American Spanish-speaking backgrounds. The sampling strategy applied in the study was a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive sampling strategy is one that delimits the sampling frame for a study to individuals that meet specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A purposive sampling strategy was preferred for the study because the research involved CLD caregivers who had a child learning in a virtual education environment. The sample size for the study was predefined as six to nine caregivers, consistent with typical phenomenological research, which often includes a small group of participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The

total number of final participants was determined when data saturation was achieved. The point of data saturation is the point where the collection of further data would be redundant (Taylor et al., 2016). Data saturation was assessed by examining the initial informal codes generated from the demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, and voluntary focus group discussion, and determining when no new themes were emerging. The researcher began applying informal codes after data was collected from the first four participants and continued coding additional cases until no new themes emerged. Data saturation was reached after the researcher interviewed six participants.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of human subjects involved multiple ethical considerations for the study. As part of the planning process, a timeline of study activities was established to guide the sequence of recruitment, data collection, and analysis (see Appendix A).The protection of human subjects entailed institutional review board (IRB) approval (see Appendix B), informed consent, addressing the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report pertaining to respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, confidentiality, privacy, and the handling of participant data. The protection of human subjects began with the design of protocols for recruitment. Recruiting materials were free of deception and offered enough information that advertisements for the study would result in well-informed recruits (see Appendix C). The advertising materials were included in the application for IRB approval to ensure that potential human subjects had enough information concerning the study before volunteering themselves as potential participants.

Specifically, the recruitment emails included details of the research including the purpose of the study, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study, the rights and responsibilities of participants, and the contact details of the researcher. The researcher also included a copy of the

informed consent form in the IRB application. The informed consent form included a description of the purpose of the study, procedures involved, risks and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, contact information, and consent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The purpose of the phenomenological study was to investigate the ways CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems for facilitating the virtual learning of their children.

The study procedures entailed completion of a demographic and technology survey (see Appendix D), participation in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix E), and participation in a voluntary focus group discussion (See Appendix F). The initial interview required an hour of the participant's time. Follow-up conversations for clarification and expansion were scheduled as needed. There was a negligible risk that semi-structured interview questions could have a negative emotional impact on the participants. However, the findings hold a benefit for educational practices. The data was held confidential as it was stored on an encrypted USB drive. There was no compensation for the participants. Contact information, including the name, phone number, and email address of the researcher, was shared with participants. The informed consent form included a space for a digital signature and was distributed using the Docusign electronic signature platform. Following approval of the IRB application and informed consent document, protection of human subjects involved adhering to the procedures outlined in the approved protocol.

The ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report were followed in the execution of data collection, data analysis, and the storage of data. Respect for people emphasizes the autonomy of all participants and the need to protect those with diminished autonomy (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). Autonomy was respected by informing

potential participants through informed consent and emphasizing to participants that they could leave the study at any time. Beneficence requires that research maximize benefits and minimize risk to participants (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). Beneficence was achieved by designing the plan for data collection to make participation easy using computer-mediated communication, reviewing questions to ensure that they would be unlikely to have a negative impact on the mental health of participants, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality of data. Justice ensures that the benefits and burdens of research are distributed fairly among all participants (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). The potential for improved virtual education experiences in the future served as a possible benefit to all participants. Each participant had the same responsibilities as one another, as each was required to complete the survey, participate in an hour-long semi-structured interview, and was given the opportunity to participate in a voluntary focus group discussion.

Protection of human subjects also entails planning for anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, and the handling of data. Anonymity is not possible in this study. Anonymity is difficult to achieve in research because it requires that participants' identities be completely unknown to the researcher and cannot be linked to the information provided. The researcher interacted with the participants prior to meeting for the semi-structured interview. The email used by potential participants contained personally identifiable information. The participants disclosed some details through the demographic survey. The semi-structured interview occurred using Zoom. The participants may have included their real name in their Zoom identification and used their video camera for the meeting. Three participants also decided to volunteer for the focus group discussion. The voluntary focus group discussion was held through Zoom, and the participants saw each other and their names on camera. The researcher also collected contact information

from the participants for the purpose of member checking. Each of these characteristics of data collection limited the capacity to achieve anonymity. The confidentiality and privacy of participants was protected to the extent possible. Confidentiality is the obligation of researcher to protect personally identifiable information from unauthorized access (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Privacy involves the right of participants to control the extent, timing, and circumstances of sharing their personal information with researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Privacy was achieved by the researcher obscuring any personally identifiable information concerning the participants in the reporting of the study. Confidentiality was protected in the study through the protocol for the storage of data.

The data storage protocol in this study was crucial because it entailed the plans for protecting human subjects while also supporting the existence of an audit trail for the university. The researcher stored audio data, transcriptions of audio data, software files from data analysis, notes, the reflexive journal, and drafts of the write-up of the study on an encrypted USB drive. The encrypted USB drive was stored in the home of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. The USB drive will be stored for a period of five years. Following the five-year period, the researcher will destroy the USB drive.

Data Collection

Once a potential participant for the study contacted the researcher, the researcher responded to confirm that they fit the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. If the individual did not fit the inclusion and exclusion criteria, an email was sent to inform them that the research would continue without their participation. If they did meet the criteria for the study, they were sent a link to the informed consent form. The form was located on the digital contract

site Docusign. A digital signature needed to be attached to the document before proceeding with an interview.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method that combines pre-determined questions with the flexibility to explore topics in depth based on the participant's responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Semi-structured interviews support the interviewer to maintain focus on specific areas of interest while also adapting to the conversation flow, encouraging a comprehensive understanding of the participant's perspectives and experiences.

A total of six semi-structured interviews were scheduled at agreed upon time with participants. Prior to the interviews, the researcher required participants to complete a demographic survey (Appendix E), which also included items designed to measure participants' comfort and use of technology. Following the first four interviews, the researcher read and coded the interview transcripts. Initial codes were applied to determine whether new themes were emerging and to assess when the point of data saturation had been reached. Data saturation is the point where further data collection would not result in new findings (Taylor et al., 2016). To confirm saturation, two additional interviews were conducted, and coding continued; once no new themes appeared after the sixth interview, data saturation was determined to have been achieved. At that point, data collection concluded, and full data analysis began.

In addition to the individual interviews, a voluntary focus group discussion was conducted to further support the data collection process. All six participants were invited to join a voluntary focus group discussion. Although only three caregivers elected to participate, the discussion served as an important opportunity for member checking. During the session, participants confirmed the accuracy and relevance of the themes that had emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Additionally, this process reinforced interpretations through individual

data collection. No new information or unique themes surfaced during the focus group, indicating strong consistency across the data sources. While the group discussion provided additional depth and nuance, its primary value was in validating the findings and strengthening the credibility of the study.

Data Analysis

The study included the application of interpretive phenomenological analysis. Following transcription and translation of interviews, the transcripts were read and re-read. Immersion in the data is crucial toward becoming familiar with the depth and nuances of the experiences of participants (Smith et al., 2009). Immersion also supports initial impressions from the data and natural emergence of areas of interest. The next step involved initial noting. Initial noting occurs when the researcher annotates the transcripts with descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009). The process involved highlighting significant phrases, noting the use of language that conveys emotion or emphasis; it also initiated interpretation of the meanings behind the participants' words, laying the groundwork for thematic development (Smith et al., 2009). Moving to the next case with a fresh perspective, the researcher repeated the analysis process for each participant's data (Smith et al., 2009). This iterative approach ensured that each participant's narrative was given full attention, allowing for a deep and nuanced understanding of each unique experience before looking for broader patterns (Smith et al., 2009). The development of emergent themes followed. When developing emergent themes, the researcher sifts through initial notes to identify patterns and connections (see Appendix G). The development of emergent themes involved identifying meaning beyond the explicit content to recognize the underlying themes that capture the essence of the participant’s experiences (Smith

et al., 2009). The development of emergent themes marked a shift from mere description to interpretation.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis continued with the search for connections across themes. This stage involved organizing the emergent themes into a coherent narrative structure and examining how they interrelated to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The process was analytical and interpretive, requiring the researcher to explore the relationships among themes and identify the deeper meanings embedded within participants' accounts. After connections were established within individual cases, the researcher extended the analysis across cases, looking for patterns that revealed both commonalities and differences in participants lived experiences. This cross-case exploration functioned as a form of comparative analysis supported further refinement of themes to ensure they accurately reflected the shared and different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation (Smith et al., 2009). Through this iterative process, the researcher wove together the individual narratives into a collective account that captures the essence of CLD caregivers' experiences in virtual learning environments.

In addition to the interpretative phenomenological analysis, the data were further examined through the guiding theoretical frameworks of CHAT and BDCRT. These frameworks offered complementary lenses that enriched the interpretive process by situating caregivers' narratives within the broader cultural, historical, and systemic contexts. CHAT supported the analysis by highlighting the activity systems in which caregivers interacted and revealing the tensions and contradictions that shaped their engagement in the virtual learning environment. BDCRT further guided the interpretation by centering cultural, linguistic and experience background of caregivers, emphasizing how their biographies and identities influenced their

interactions with educators and school systems. Together, CHAT and BDCRT deepened the analytic process by connecting individual meaning making to the systemic and relational forces that informed caregivers' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is critical for qualitative research. Trustworthiness in qualitative research includes four key characteristics: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these characteristics are important to highlight because they are often viewed as the qualitative counterparts to validity, reliability, and objectivity in quantitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Credibility corresponds to internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility involves the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings and ensuring that they are a believable representation of the phenomena under investigation (Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability involves the degree to which the results of the study can be generalized or applied to other contexts or groups (Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability is analogous to reliability in quantitative research. Dependability involves the stability of data over time and under similar conditions. Dependability involves emphasis on the need for the researcher to account for changing conditions that may affect the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Finally, confirmability is the counterpart to objectivity in quantitative research. Confirmability involves the extent to which findings are shaped by respondents and not researcher bias, motives, or interests, ensuring integrity in the research outcomes (Stahl & King, 2020).

There are characteristics of the study that support each of the four facets of trustworthiness. Credibility was supported by the use of triangulation, member checking, data saturation, reflexivity, and peer review. Member checking was applied after the completion of data analysis, where the researcher contacted participants for the purpose of reviewing transcripts

from audio recordings of semi-structured interviews and to be assured that the interpretation of what was said by the participant was correct (Stahl & King, 2020). Data saturation was achieved by coding through the sixth interview wherein a point of redundancy was determined (Stahl & King, 2020). Once data saturation occurred, the researcher concluded data collection. Reflexivity involves acknowledgement of the role as the researcher in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The dissertation committee filled the role of peer-reviewers in the study.

Transferability was supported by a thick description of participants. Thick description was advanced through the researcher's use of a demographic survey prior to interviews (Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability was supported by the existence of an audit trial (Stahl & King, 2020). Specifically, the researcher maintained all records from the research and stored them on an encrypted USB drive. Records from the research included the audio files and transcriptions from semi-structured interviews, notes taken during interviews, a reflexive journal, the results from the demographic survey, notes from the voluntary focus group discussion, and drafts of the dissertation were stored on the encrypted USB drive. The encrypted USB drive was stored in a locked file cabinet for a period of five years to satisfy any potential interest that the dissertation committee may have in auditing the project. A reflexive journal was used to reach confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020).

Summary

This study was designed to explore the lived experiences of CLD caregivers in their interactions with virtual education educators. A phenomenological research design was employed to support delving into the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of participants. This chapter included justification of the use of a phenomenological research design by highlighting the suitability of the design for capturing the nuanced ways in which cultural and linguistic

differences influence caregivers of children in virtual education. Through purposive sampling, the researcher identified six participants, with the goal of exploring the specific needs and barriers faced by the CLD caregivers to advance development of more inclusive communication strategies and educational practices in virtual learning environments. The data sources encompassed a demographic and technology survey, semi-structured interviews, and a voluntary focus group with attention to maintaining ethical standards through informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality measures. The analysis employed interpretive phenomenological analysis to uncover themes and patterns in the data as well as interpretive analysis drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of the CHAT and BDCRT. The study's methods ensured trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability practices. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) caregivers of students in virtual learning environments. The aim was to identify the specific challenges, barriers to success, and areas for improvement in their interactions with educators, school systems, and digital learning platforms. This exploration is grounded in the perspectives of the caregivers themselves. The central research question guiding the study was: In what ways do CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to facilitate the virtual learning of their children?

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative interviews with six CLD Latinx parents whose children attend virtual K–12 school systems in Texas. Additional insights were gathered through a demographic and technology background survey and an optional focus group. This chapter illustrates how participants understood and experienced virtual schooling, particularly in relation to educator engagement and systemic support in the virtual education setting.

Data analysis followed an iterative two-stage process that combined both inductive and deductive approaches. Initially, transcripts and focus group discussion notes were coded inductively to allow key patterns and categories to emerge directly from participants' narratives. Subsequently, the study's two theoretical frameworks, CHAT (Engeström & Young 2021), and BDCRT (Herrera, 2021), were applied to guide deductive interpretation. CHAT provided a lens for examining caregivers' experiences as part of an interconnected activity system, emphasizing how subjects, tools, community, rules, and division of labor mediated participation in virtual

schooling. BDCRT, in turn, showed how participants' cultural and linguistic biographies shaped their engagement, advocacy, and perceptions of responsiveness within the virtual learning environment. Together, these frameworks deepened the analysis by situating the emergent themes within broader theoretical conversations.

The findings are organized thematically grounded in participants' experiences and personal perspectives. After transcribing and reviewing each interview, the researcher engaged in a detailed process of open coding, using color-coded highlighting to identify recurring ideas, emotions, and experiences across participants (see Appendix G). Initial codes focused on why caregivers chose virtual education, with additional emphasis placed on comments related to language barriers, parental roles in instruction and advocacy, challenges with communication, and the need for greater cultural responsiveness. Through repeated reading and constant comparison, these codes were grouped in broad categories that reflected the shared patterns of meaning and lived experience. The process led to the emergence of five key themes that encapsulate how participants made sense of, navigated, and engaged with virtual schooling.

This chapter begins with an overview of participant demographics and context, followed by an explanation of each of the five key themes. Each theme is supported with narrative examples and direct quotations from the interviews and focus group. The interpretation of these themes was further informed by the study's guiding theoretical frameworks, CHAT)(Engeström & Young, 2021) and BDCRT (Herrera,2022), which provided lenses for examining how caregivers' actions, interactions, and cultural experiences shaped their engagement in virtual learning.

Participant Overview

A total of six CLD mothers participated in this study. All were primary caregivers of students enrolled in two different virtual public-schools in Texas. Collectively, the participants had 11 children ranging in grade level from kindergarten to eighth grade. The participants represented three counties of origin: Mexico, Ecuador, and Honduras, and all spoke Spanish as the primary language in the home. Participants completed a demographic and technology background survey (see Appendix D) prior to engaging in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix E) and voluntary focus group (see Appendix F). The six individual interviews were conducted via Zoom, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Additionally, all six participants were invited to take part in the voluntary focus group, only three elected to participate. The session was conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 60 minutes. All names used in the findings are pseudonyms to protect the identity of each participant. The participant demographic Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' country of origin, grade levels of children, primary language at home, preferred language, and participant education level. Table 2 outlines self-reported technology comfort levels, technology use examples, parent work schedule, and family structure.

Table 4.1 – Participant Demographics

Participant	Country of Origin	Grade Level(s) of Child(ren)	Primary Language at Home	Preferred Language	Parent Education Level
Mayra	Mexico	4th Grade	Spanish	Spanish	High School
Lorena	Mexico	Kindergarten 4th Grade 8th Grade	Spanish & English	Spanish	College
Josefina	Mexico	Kindergarten 6th Grade	Spanish	Spanish	College

Isabel	Honduras	Kindergarten 1st Grade	Spanish	Spanish	Middle School
Alicia	Ecuador	6th Grade	Spanish	Spanish	College
Samantha	Mexico	Kindergarten 8th Grade	Spanish & English	Spanish & English	High School

Table 4.2 – Technology Use, Work Schedule, and Family Structure

Participant	Tech Comfort Level (1 low–5 high)	Preferred Communication Method(s)	Work Schedule of Primary Caregiver/Learning Coach	Family Structure
Mayra	4	Social media, Internet Search, Email, Texting	Stay-at-home	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach
Lorena	4	Social media, Internet Search, Email, Texting, Completing Electronic Forms	Flexible hours	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach
Josefina	5	Internet Search, Email, Texting, Completing Electronic Forms	Stay-at-home	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach
Isabel	5	Email, Texting	Part Time	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach
Alicia	5	Texting	Flexible Hours	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach
Samantha	4	Social media, Email, Texting, Completing Electronic Forms	Part Time	Two-parent Mother acted as the Learning Coach

The demographic and technology background survey provided valuable insights into the families participating in virtual schooling. Two participants had one child enrolled, three had two children enrolled, and one participant had three children enrolled in virtual school. The students'

grade level ranged from kindergarten to eighth grade. While one participant reported not attending high school, two earned a high school diploma, and three attended or completed college. Notably, all participants expressed moderate to high levels of comfort with technology, citing regular use of tools such as email, internet searching, texting, and completing online forms. In terms of household structure, all families reported living in two-parent households with mothers serving as the learning coach. All the mothers were either stay-at-home caregivers or had flexible or part time work schedules that accommodated their children's needs to complete online assignments and remain engaged in virtual learning. This family structure reflects what emerged from the interviews: mothers consistently described the need for a dedicated caregiver to provide daily support, noting that their children could not manage virtual learning independently.

Emerging Themes

The interview process yielded rich and thoughtful narratives from participants, each of whom shared deeply personal insights about their experiences navigating virtual education. While all participants were forthcoming, several expressed initial hesitations to speak negatively about their child's teachers or school systems, often emphasizing appreciation and respect before acknowledging frustrations or barriers. This pattern reflected a sense of cultural respect toward educators, particularly among participants from collectivist backgrounds (Valenzuela, 1999). As rapport developed during the interviews and focus group, participants became increasingly open and reflective, offering nuanced accounts that revealed both the challenges and rewards of supporting their children in a virtual learning environment.

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) guided this process, ensuring consistency while allowing for flexibility and depth. The core interview questions focused on

participants' experiences communicating with educators and schools, supporting their child's learning at home, navigating technology, and understanding how their language and cultural background influenced those experiences. Follow-up questions encouraged elaboration and reflection, particularly around moments of success, struggle, or misunderstanding. In addition, a voluntary focus group discussion (see Appendix F) was conducted using prompts that emerged from the semi-structured-interview protocol, allowing participants to revisit and elaborate on themes raised in their individual interviews. This approach provided an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of earlier interpretations and explore shared experiences in a collective setting.

As participants shared their stories and responded to interview questions, the analysis revealed both commonalties and notable distinctions in their lived experiences. From the individual interviews and one voluntary focus group discussion, five overarching themes emerged that capture how CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to support their children's virtual learning. The five recurring themes identified across participants' narratives were: (1) virtual learning as a source of safety and empowerment; (2) language functioning as both a challenge and a tool; (3) parents as learning coaches, translators, co-teachers and advocates; (4) school disorganization and inconsistent communication; and (5) the need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support.

To illustrate the prevalence and alignment of these themes across the participant group, Table 3 shows which themes were reflected in each caregiver's narrative. A check mark indicates that a participant's experiences are directly aligned with a given theme, based on coded data from the individual interviews and voluntary focus group. While some themes were expressed more explicitly or intensely by certain participants, all themes recurred with enough

frequency and depth to warrant inclusion as a major finding. The sections that follow provide detailed descriptions of each theme with supporting examples from the interviews and voluntary focus group. They also demonstrate how the findings align with and extend the concepts embedded within the study's guiding theoretical frameworks, CHAT and BDCRT.

Table 4.3 – Emerging Themes and Participant Alignment

Theme	Lorena	Josefina	Mayra	Alicia	Isabel	Samantha
Virtual learning as a source of safety and empowerment	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Language functioning as both a challenge and a tool	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Parents as learning coaches, translators, co-teachers, and advocates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School disorganization and inconsistent communication	✓	✓		✓		✓
The need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme 1 – Virtual Leaning as a Source of Safety and Empowerment

One of the most salient themes to emerge across the interviews was the way virtual learning environments offered participants a sense of protection, emotional stability, and empowerment, particularly in contrast to traditional school settings that were perceived as sources of stress, trauma, or risk. Parents frequently described virtual schools not only as an educational alternative but as a safe environment that supported their children's emotional well-being, family unity, and cultural safety.

For many participants, the virtual model helped mitigate emotional distress. Alicia, a mother from Ecuador, shared how virtual school profoundly improved her son's quality of life

after years of anxiety in traditional school settings. “When the pandemic hit,” she reflected, “it was the best time in his life… he started eating, he was more emotionally stable, he wasn’t getting sick as much.” Similarly, Mayra described her son’s intense panic attacks and emotional breakdowns prior to transitioning to virtual education. “His anxiety has gone down significantly,” she said. “The learning environment has been very flexible.”

Samantha offered a more politicized lens on the protective aspect of virtual school, explicitly connecting her decision to enroll in online learning with concerns about immigration enforcement. “I have heard of cases where mothers are taken with their children, and I don’t want that to happen to me, I don’t know how my kids would react.” She further shared, “I have my permission to work through DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) however these days they can take anyone, and it may not matter what permits you have.” She started her children in virtual school at the beginning of February 2025. For Samantha, keeping her children at home was both an emotional safeguard and a strategic choice amid ongoing sociopolitical uncertainty.

This protective function extended beyond physical safety and emotional regulation. Several parents emphasized the empowerment that came with being more directly involved in their children’s education. Isabel noted, “With the girls at home, I don’t have to wonder what they are eating or what they are doing.” The virtual setting allowed her to provide personalized care while monitoring academic engagement. Lorena echoed this sentiment, describing how virtual school enabled her to teach her children Spanish, math, and life skills at home—creating an environment in which she could both supervise and instruct.

In the voluntary focus group discussion, three participants, Alicia, Josefina, and Isabel agreed that virtual learning worked well for their families, especially due to flexibility and safety.

Alicia emphasized, “The flexibility for my son has been the best part.” Isabel stated, “I can have the girls in school and still take care of the baby.”

Interpreted through the lens of CHAT, the virtual schooling model functioned as a mediating tool that restructured the traditional activity system of learning (Engeström & Young, 2001). By bringing the learning environment into the home, parents gained agency over tools, rules, and roles. This created new pathways for participation that aligned with family and cultural priorities. From the perspective of BDCRT (Herrera, 2022), this sense of empowerment also reflected the activation of caregivers’ cultural and linguistic biographies as assets in supporting their children’s education journey. Parents drew upon their lived experiences, values, and languages to design a learning space that felt emotionally safe and culturally affirming.

Across participants, virtual schooling was seen not as a fallback, but as an intentional and empowering educational choice. Despite the demands it placed on caregivers, the model offered unique benefits, flexibility, family cohesion, emotional safety, and protection from broader systemic risks. For caregivers in the study, this reflects the potential of virtual education to operate as a culturally and contextually responsive option for CLD families navigating complex personal and political realities.

Theme 2 – Language Functioning as Both a Challenge and a Tool

For many of the participants, language emerged as both a persistent barrier and a critical bridge in navigating virtual schooling. Parents, particularly those who self-identified as having limited English proficiency, described feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, or excluded during the initial stages of enrollment, communication, or academic support. Yet, when meaningful bilingual support was in place, the virtual setting became more accessible, affirming, and even empowering.

Several parents expressed early difficulties understanding school communications or assisting with assignments. Josefina explained that while she could manage her daughter's Kindergarten content, her son's middle school work posed a challenge: "With my daughter, I understand because it is at a Kindergarten level. With my son, it's harder… the content is harder." Lorena emphasized the disconnect between student language use and adult interpretation, stating, "Kids get into little trends… They have unique ways of saying things that adults sometimes don't understand. Teachers need to take time to ask what they really mean." Alicia, who recently immigrated from Ecuador, was among those most impacted by the language barrier. "Sometimes I feel discouraged from trying to communicate," she admitted. "It's easier to send an email and translate it… I feel the pressure to learn English." Isabel shared a similar experience: "The most challenging thing for me personally has been the language barrier… At first, it was frustrating."

Despite these barriers, participants also identified language-related support systems as essential bridges to success. Several noted the importance of translated emails, Spanish-speaking teachers, or bilingual coordinators. Some caregivers described using built-in translation tools within their email platforms, while others appreciated that certain school messages included a button to automatically translate content if needed. A few participants mentioned teachers who consistently sent communications in both English and Spanish, which they viewed as a strong gesture of inclusion. Josefina, for example, praised the school's decision to send communications in both English and Spanish: "This has been extremely helpful. It saves the step of using the translator." Samantha's daughter had a bilingual teacher whom she affectionately called "la maestra del corazón", the teacher of the heart. This home language connection made a significant emotional and educational impact.

A recurring recommendation among participants was the need for systematic English instruction for emergent bilingual students, as well as ESL classes for parents. Mayra, in her individual interview, advocated for more targeted language instruction, observing, “My son has been in school two years, and if he’d had this from the beginning, he would be much further ahead.” Alicia echoed this, suggesting schools offer classes for parents: “We’ve heard some schools offer English classes for parents… That would be great.”

In the focus groups, all three participants confirmed that language barriers remained one of the most significant challenges throughout their virtual learning experience. Although translator tools such as Google Translate provided occasional support, the participants expressed concern that schools relied too heavily on these tools instead of offering direct communication in the families’ preferred language. Alicia emphasized the need for bilingual staff, stating, “If we have to talk to someone that does not speak Spanish, it is harder to communicate.” Josefina added, “Once I found out that we had a bilingual case manager, I felt more supported.”

Interpreted through the lens of CHAT, language operated as a central mediating tool within the activity system of virtual schooling (Engeström & Young, 2001). Communication platforms, translation functions, and bilingual interactions either facilitated or hindered participation depending on how effectively they connected caregivers, teachers, and students. When translation tools failed or when school messages were not linguistically accessible, the flow of information across the system broke down. Conversely, when bilingual teachers or translated messages were available, families reported feeling recognized and empowered, reinforcing language as a bridge rather than a challenge. From the perspective of BDCRT (Herrera, 2022), these findings highlight how linguistic responsiveness affirms families’ cultural and linguistic biographies. When educators acknowledg and incorporated families’ home

languages, they validated their identities and created space for deeper trust and collaboration. Through the dual lenses of CHAT and BDCRT, language emerged not simply as a communication tool but as a powerful cultural mediator that shaped belonging, participation, and advocacy withing the virtual schooling environment.

In summary, the theme of language as a challenge and tool reveals the significance of linguistic access in virtual education. Without sufficient support, language becomes a limiting factor, contributing to confusion and parental anxiety. When supported by bilingual staff and inclusive communication strategies, language can serve as a meaningful connector that helps CLD caregivers better participate in the educational process.

Theme 3 – Parents as Learning Coaches, Translators, Co-Teachers, and Advocates

A defining feature of the virtual learning experience for CLD caregivers was the active and multifaceted role that parents assumed in their children's education. Far beyond the traditional notion of support, participants described taking on the roles of learning coach, translator, co-teacher, and even advocate. This heightened involvement was especially prominent in families with younger children or in households where language barriers made parental intervention essential.

Nearly all participants in the semi-structured interviews emphasized the need to monitor progress, structure the learning environment, and communicate with school staff, often daily. Samantha captured this expanded parental role clearly: “At home, I am my daughter’s coach.” She described setting up phone alarms to get her daughter fed, dressed, and logged in for class, emphasizing that success in virtual school required not just access but intentional preparation. Isabel similarly described how she worked closely with her daughters and incorporated

structured routines: “Sometimes at the end of the day, we review what the girls learned and practice words.”

For families with limited English proficiency, parental involvement also meant translating or reteaching content. Mayra, whose son struggled with both anxiety and language barriers, noted, “It puts pressure on me to explain the material.” She emphasized that while the virtual environment provided emotional safety, it also required her to learn alongside her son to support him effectively. Alicia echoed this, noting that she was most able to help with mathematics.

This co-teacher role also extended to advocacy when navigating and troubleshooting school systems. Josefina described the effort required to resolve conflicting messages about her son's academic performance: “We see his grades online… but then we receive different grades at the end of the grading period. It’s confusing.” When assignments were marked as missing despite being completed, Josefina took photos of the work to advocate on his behalf. “This is frustrating,” she said, “but we respond, we prove it.”

Several participants also reported becoming primary communicators with teachers, technical support staff, and administrators. Lorena, who had three children in virtual school, explained, “There is a lot of online marketing and a lot of emails. For me, for important notices, I like a call or a text. I might miss an email.” These preferences reflect a broader pattern of parents customizing their own systems of engagement to meet the demands of virtual schooling.

All three parents in the focus group talked about their evolving roles as “learning coaches.” Josefina joked, “Sometimes I feel like I am in school doing two grades,” while Isabel described setting alarms and checking assignments daily. Alicia, whose son has become more independent, said she now mostly monitors and supports when needed.

In the demographic and technology background survey (see Appendix D), all participants responded as they did not have a full-time job outside of the home. Mayra and Josefina both did not work outside of the home; Lorena and Alicia have flexible hours for their work, and Isabel and Samantah work part time. Samantha said, “There is no way I can work with my kids in virtual school. Right now, I do Door Dash delivering food. It works because I am my own boss…I have to work around my kids’ schedules.” Samantha’s comment underscores the significant time commitment required of parents serving as learning coaches in a virtual environment. For many caregivers, supporting their child’s online learning was not a peripheral task but a full-time responsibility that demanded constant supervision, technical troubleshooting, and communication with teachers. Samantha’s decision to take flexible work reflects how virtual schooling often necessitated families to reorganize employment around the daily needs of their children’s learning.

Within the framework of CHAT, the evolving roles of caregivers described reflect a reorganization of the traditional activity system of schooling (Engeström & Young, 2021). In virtual environments, caregivers became central actors mediating instruction, technology, and communication. These roles traditionally have been distributed among teachers and school personnel. This shift in the division of labor illustrates how contradictions within the system, such an unclear procedures or limited language access, prompted families to develop new roles and strategies for ensuring their children’s success. Aligned with the principles of BDCRT (Herrera, 2022), these caregivers enacted culturally responsive teaching practices drawn from their own linguistic and cultural biographies. Caregivers daily coaching, teaching, and advocacy reflected values of familismo (a deeply held cultural value emphasizing family loyalty,

interconnectedness, and collective responsibility) and perseverance that shaped how they supported their children's learning and wellbeing (Valenzuela, 1999).

Across interviews, parents described investing extraordinary emotional, intellectual, and logistical labor into supporting their children's virtual learning. Their advocacy was not reactive but proactive, and their presence was central to student success. Rather than being passive to the learning process, these parents functioned as essential agents in making learning happen, often bridging systemic gaps through persistence, creativity, and deep commitment

Theme 4 – School Disorganization and Inconsistent Communication

While families expressed gratitude for the opportunities virtual education afforded, several also described experiences of school disorganization and inconsistent communication that caused confusion, frustration, and, at times, emotional strain. These challenges were particularly acute when families attempted to advocate for their children's progress, understand school expectations, or access timely support, and were described consistently across both the semi-structured interviews and the voluntary focus group.

Many participants pointed to inconsistent messaging, unclear academic policies, and unresponsiveness from staff. Josefina shared how her confidence in her son's academic standing was shaken by misaligned grade reporting. When she attempted to get clarification, communication gaps within the school added to the problem: "We emailed people, and they would direct us to someone else, and the next person would direct us to another person. The school people themselves did not know who we should contact."

Samantha described multiple incidents that reflected a lack of coordination and oversight, especially concerning her eighth-grade son's transition into virtual school. "Recently, his social studies classes disappeared, and I don't know why," she explained. "And now, at the end of the

year, I find out he was not placed in special education classes that should have been under an Individualized Education Plan that was in his previous school records. How are we just finding this out?" She also expressed confusion about policies surrounding unused supplies, explaining that procedures seemed unclear and inconsistent. "I just didn't know what to do or who to ask," she said. Such uncertainty, coupled with her discovery of misplaced academic records, illustrated the broader lack of coordination and follow-through within the system. Samantha also expressed concern about receiving warning that her son could fail the school year, even though he had only been enrolled for part of it and had encountered blocked assignments and inaccessible materials.

Several participants, including Lorena and Alicia, also voiced concern over email overload and lack of responsiveness. Alicia, for example, explained that while she preferred email for its translatability, the lack of confirmation or timely replies made it hard to know whether concerns were being addressed. "It would be nice to get an automatic response just to know someone received our email," she said. "And if someone has an emergency and cannot respond, we should know who can help us."

For Josefina and others, teacher turnover further complicated communication and continuity. Her daughter experienced four different teachers in one school year, and each change disrupted learning and emotional stability. "The students establish a connection with a teacher," Josefina said. "When that changes, it causes problems, my daughter cries. We lose touch with whom to communicate with."

Participants in the focus group expressed their frustration about the schools not being as organized as they could be, especially at the beginning of the year. Isabel said, "At first it is hard to understand how everything works, the class schedule and submitting work, but orientation helped." Josefina mentioned difficulty managing the volume of emails, "Sometimes we get too

many emails, and it is hard to manage all the information." Additionally, participants expressed appreciation for consistent contacts. Alicia and Isabel stressed how teacher communication styles and consistency contributed to their children's emotional well-being.

Applying CHAT, the recurring communication challenges can be seen as contradictions within the virtual schooling activity system (Engeström & Young, 2021). Misaligned policies and fragmented communication systems disrupted the connections among subjects (caregivers), tools, and community members, forcing caregivers to compensate through additional advocacy and coordination. Drawing on Herrera's (2022) BDCRT framework, these gaps highlight the absence of culturally responsive communication practices, such as providing bilingual explanations of school processes and offering communication in formats preferred by families, that recognize the needs of all caregivers. When viewed together, the two frameworks underscore how disorganization within the system not only created procedural barriers but also eroded relational trust between the school and CLD families.

Across interviews and the voluntary focus group, caregivers described a disconnect between the promise of virtual learning and its institutional delivery. For many CLD caregivers, a lack of clear guidance, coordinated support, and consistent personnel made it harder to trust the system or engage effectively. Despite these barriers, participants consistently attempted to compensate for systemic disorganization, often through their own persistent efforts, revealing a significant burden placed on families already navigating language, cultural, and technological transitions.

Theme 5 – The Need for Greater Cultural Responsiveness and Comprehensive Support

A recurring thread across all six interviews was the participants' call for more holistic, culturally responsive support systems within the virtual learning environment. While families expressed appreciation for existing resources; such as bilingual teachers, ESL coordinators, and technology tools, they also identified unmet needs in areas such as emotional support, language development, and meaningful inclusion of families' cultural contexts.

Several parents emphasized that virtual learning environments must address not just academic needs, but also social, emotional, and linguistic development. Alicia described how her son's initial struggles with English caused significant distress: "He thought he would never be able to understand… it caused him terrible anguish." She stressed the importance of teachers who could "intervene in both languages," especially when students face emotional challenges tied to language acquisition. Alicia also advocated for greater outreach to immigrant families, suggesting that parent testimonials and online visibility of program benefits could help ease fears and misconceptions. While Samantha shared confusion about policies surrounding unused supplies and special education placements—issues that could have been avoided with clearer family-facing communication.

Lorena similarly noted the emotional toll of disengaged teachers and called for more engaging, empathetic teaching: "Sometimes all the kids will be in a class, and nothing is happening, not even the teacher is talking." Josefina pointed out the limitations of online social interaction and suggested that schools invest in supervised virtual spaces that promote safe socialization and emotional development: "Some kids may need some kind of emotional care and social attention."

In the focus group, participants unanimously expressed a desire for resources tailored to parents themselves, including language support and more accessible school communication. Alicia and Isabel both suggested offering English classes for parents, Isabel emphasized how transformative it was to gain access to a bilingual ESL coordinator: "Once I got access to her, everything was fine… she helps me in Spanish with any problems I have."

Cultural respect and flexibility were also named as indicators of a supportive environment. Isabel noted how teachers worked with her patiently, even using translators or interpreters when needed. Samantha described how her daughter's bilingual Kindergarten teacher used the heart-hand gesture every day, earning the affectionate nickname "la maestra del corazón" "the teacher of the heart." These small but meaningful gestures created emotional bonds and affirmed students' identities in a virtual space that could otherwise feel distant or impersonal. Lorena described how her child's teacher allowed extra time for assignment completion and offered optional live sessions in small groups. She expressed gratitude that the teacher "understood that sometimes technology or family things happen" and "didn't punish the students for being late." Alicia spoke of how the school allowed her to attend meetings in Spanish through an interpreter and how staff "never made her feel bad for needing help." Together these examples illustrate how culturally responsive flexibility communicated respect for families' realities and strengthened the trust between caregivers and educators.

Anchored in CHAT, participants' calls for clearer communication, empathy, and sustained bilingual support point to the need for restructuring the virtual schooling activity system to promote equity (Engeström & Young, 2021). When the rules (e.g., expectations that communication occur primarily in English or that parents serve as daily learning coaches), tools, and community members within that system are misaligned, CLD families experience

fragmented support and limited participation. However, these experiences extended beyond linguistic access because they are deeply rooted in the families' emotional realities that shape how caregivers and their children engaged with the school. Many participants described feelings of anxiety, isolation, and discouragement when communication failed, contrasted with relief and renewed motivation when educators demonstrated understanding or compassion. Guided by BDCRT (Herrera, 2022), this theme further underscores not only the importance of creating culturally responsive engagement with CLD caregivers that is grounded in respect, linguistic accessibility, and authentic partnership but also attends to the socioemotional dimensions of trust, belonging, and validation. When educators and institutions honor caregivers lived experiences as sources of expertise, the activity systems become more streamlined, inclusive, and capable of supporting students' success in virtual environments.

Participants' accounts underscored the importance of virtual learning environments that respond to the whole child and the whole family culturally, academically, linguistically, and emotionally. For CLD families, success in virtual schooling is tied not only to curriculum delivery but also to whether the system recognizes their realities and affirms their identities.

Connections Across Themes and Systems

Taken together, the five emergent themes revealed an interconnected system of activity in which CLD parents navigated and reshaped the structures of virtual schooling. Interpreted through the lens of CHAT, these findings demonstrated the coexistence of two interdependent systems: the intended school system, designed to deliver structured communication and support through digital tools, and the parent lived system, defined by adaptive problem-solving and advocacy within the home. Within the shared virtual learning space, contradictions such as communication barriers, role confusion, and institutional disorganization emerged as key

tensions that shaped caregiver experiences. Yet these tensions also catalyzed new forms of agency, as parents engaged in new learning by using technology, linguistic resources, and advocacy to bridge systemic gaps and ensure the academic success of their children. Notably, two themes, parents as advocates, coaches, and co-teachers and the need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support, were evident across all six participants. Together, these universally present themes highlight both strength and strain. Meaning CLD caregivers demonstrated remarkable capacity and commitment in supporting virtual learning, yet systemic gaps in culturally responsive practices and communication structures continue to shape and constrain their engagement. Figure 1 synthesizes the study's five emergent themes through the framework of CHAT, illustrating how the intended virtual school design and the caregiver lived experience operated as intersecting activity systems. The figure highlights the systemic tensions, contradictions, and adaptive strategies that allowed families to make the virtual learning environment work within their cultural and linguistic contexts. that occurred to make the system work for the families.

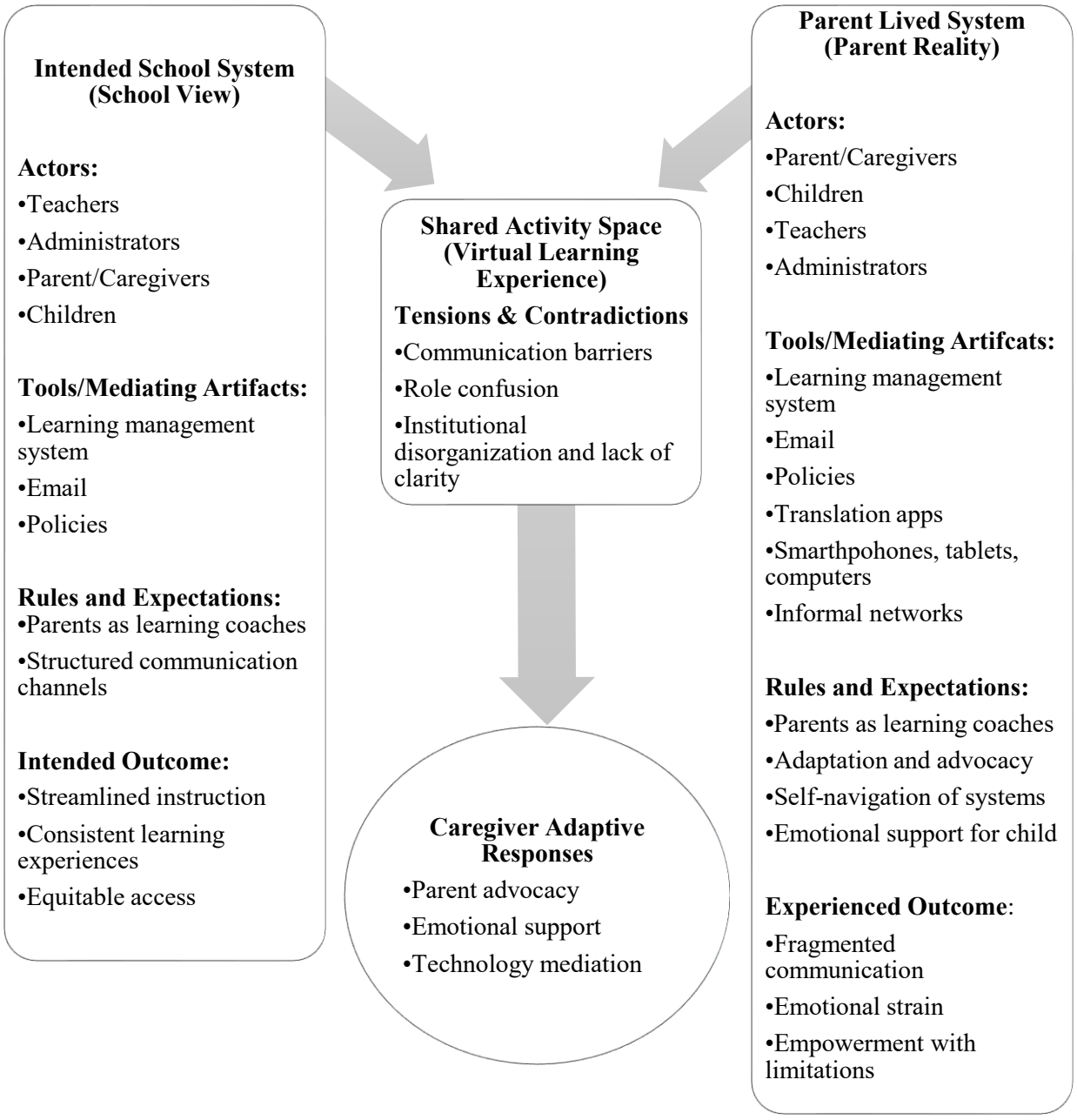

Figure 4.1 – Systems of intended design vs. Lived reality in the virtual learning environment

Summary

The themes that emerged from the data in the study were the following: (1) virtual learning as a source of safety and empowerment, (2) language functioning both as a challenge and a tool, (3) parents as learning coaches, translators, co-teachers, and advocates, (4) school

disorganization and inconsistent communication, and (5) the need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support. Together, the lived experiences of the CLD mothers in this study revealed a complex and deeply personal journey through virtual education. While each participant's story was unique, their collective insights pointed to the critical roles that emotional safety, language access, parental agency, institutional clarity, and cultural responsiveness played in shaping their experiences with virtual learning.

All caregivers had a positive attitude about helping their children navigate the virtual learning experience. They viewed the effort required to support virtual learning as worthwhile because it aligned with their family's needs and values. Beneath their expressions of gratitude were recurring concerns and thoughtful suggestions that revealed systemic gaps. These insights offer meaningful guidance on how CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with virtual education systems. Interpreted through the dual lenses of CHAT and BDCRT, these findings illustrated how caregivers navigated and restructured the activity systems to meet the demands of virtual school (Engeström & Young, 20210) while drawing on their cultural and linguistic biographies as strengths (Herrera, 2022) to ensure their children's success in the virtual learning environment. Chapter 5 explores the implications of these findings and offers recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of CLD caregivers of students in virtual "online" learning environments. The study aimed to identify the specific challenges, barriers to success, and areas of improvement across all aspects of the caregiver interaction with educators, administrative systems, and the virtual learning platforms, from the perspective of the CLD caregivers themselves. The central research question guiding this study was: In what ways do CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems to facilitate the virtual learning of their children.

This chapter begins with an interpretation of the study's findings and their broader meaning withing the context of virtual education. The experiences of the CLD caregiver participants are examined in relation to existing research and the guiding theoretical frameworks, CHAT and BDCRT. The chapter then discusses implications for educational practice followed by recommendations for future research and a concluding reflection on the study's overall significance.

The study employed a qualitative research methodology, which involves the exploration of rich, non-numeric data collected to investigate subjective phenomena such as the lived experiences of individuals (Moustakis, 1994). A qualitative research methodology was appropriate, as the focus of the investigation was to gain understanding and insight into the specific lived experiences of CLD caregivers of children in virtual learning environments. Phenomenological research centers on the lived experiences of individuals concerning a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological research is set apart from other forms of

qualitative research in that it supports uncovering the essence of individual experiences through an emphasis on descriptions of lived realities (Smtih et al., 2009).

In short, the experiences of the six CLD caregivers highlighted both the opportunities and the challenges of virtual education. While the mothers described online schooling as a positive option that provided their families with safety, flexibility, and a sense of empowerment, they also faced ongoing struggles with language barriers, inconsistent communication, and institutional disorganization. These challenges often placed the responsibility for their children's learning on their shoulders. Their persistence and advocacy underscored the strength of these families while also pointing to the need for virtual schools to establish clearer structures and more culturally responsive support. These insights provide the foundation for the following discussion of findings, where the meanings and interpretations of the participants' experiences are explored in depth.

Discussion of Findings

Theme 1: Virtual Learning as a Source of Safety and Empowerment

Participants consistently described virtual schooling as a choice that brought their families a sense of safety, flexibility, and empowerment. Caregivers in this study emphasized that online learning allowed them to protect their children from negative social or environmental influences while maintaining closer oversight of their academic progress. This perspective aligns with Feeney et al. (2023) who found that many CLD families valued virtual education to engage in learning while balancing unique family needs during the pandemic. At the same time, Devkota (2021) and Mehta and Aguilera (2020) cautioned that while online schooling offers access and flexibility, it also has the potential to reinforce inequities if systemic supports are not in place.

The findings of this study highlight how families interpreted virtual education not only as a logistical solution but also as an emotionally safe environment that reflected and supported their cultural values and family priorities, consistent with Antony Newman's (2019) observation that immigrant caregivers' engagement in their children's education is closely tied to their cultural beliefs and lived realties. Molnar (2023) observed that virtual schools across the United States continue to face questions of quality and equity, yet for the parents in this study, the model was deeply meaningful as a protective and empowering option.

Theme 2: Language as Both a Barrier and Tool

Language emerged as one of the most complex aspects of participants' experiences, functioning both as a barrier to engaging with schools and as a crucial tool for promoting learning at home. Caregivers described difficulty navigating school communication systems and understanding institutional processes when information was provided only in English. These struggles mirror findings from Antony-Newman (2019), who identified language barriers as among the most significant challenges for immigrant parents, and Smith and Sheridan (2019), who emphasized how limited translation resources can discourage caregiver-school communication. Other researchers have similarly noted that stigma, bias, and lack of institutional support often leave CLD caregivers feeling excluded from meaningful engagement (Alkhushayban, 2020; Philominraj et al., 2022).

At the same time participants in this study reframed language as a resource, explaining how Spanish allowed them to tutor, encourage, and emotionally connect with their children. This dual role of language expands on existing research, which often describes language primarily as a barrier. Singh and Pallai (2023) and Kalenda et al. (2022) argue that inclusive language practices and translation support are essential for fostering trust and equitable participation. It is

important to note that caregivers heavily rely on translation tools for simpler messages and assignments but, in the end, having access to a person who speaks the home language was key to getting responses or support for more specific individual needs. The findings from this study reinforce these recommendations and add nuance by showing how home languages can be leveraged as assets rather than seen as deficits in virtual schooling. This perspective challenges schools to move beyond a deficit orientation and to embrace bilingualism as a strength that can enhance both communication and student access.

Theme 3: Parents as Advocates, Coaches, and Co-Teachers

The caregivers in this study described stepping into roles that extended far beyond traditional expectations of parental support. They often acted as advocates for their children, ensuring that their educational needs were met, while also serving as learning coaches and, at times, as co-teachers in the virtual environment. Participants spoke about sitting alongside their children, explaining lessons, troubleshooting technology, and communicating with educators on their behalf. These findings echo research that indicates parental engagement is a critical component of student success, particularly in online contexts where students lack daily in-person interactions (Carrion-Martinez et al., 2021; Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Johnson et al. (2022) similarly emphasized that parents in the virtual schooling setting often take on expanded responsibilities that are essential for sustaining student engagement.

However, while prior research has highlighted the importance of parental engagement, the findings of this study illustrate the degree to which CLD caregivers shouldered responsibilities that schools might typically manage. Throughout the interviews, it was evident that caregivers understood their role as holding more responsibility for the academic growth of their children in virtual school versus when their children attended brick and mortar school

settings. Rossetti and Burke (2018) found that interventions designed to support parents frequently overlook the structural barriers that prevent equal participation, leaving families to fill gaps on their own. The participants' willingness to act as advocates and co-teachers demonstrated resilience and commitment but also underscored the need for schools to clarify and support the appropriate roles of caregivers in virtual learning. Alameda-Lawson and Lawson (2019) argue that sustainable engagement emerges when schools create collective structures for family participation rather than relying solely on individual parent efforts. The findings of this study reinforce that point, showing how overreliance on parents can both empower families and strain them, suggesting the need for more balanced partnerships between schools and caregivers.

Theme 4: School Disorganization and Inconsistent Communication

Participants consistently expressed frustration with what they perceived as disorganization and inconsistent communication from their virtual school experiences. Examples included difficulty receiving timely updates, conflicting instructions from staff, and confusion caused by frequent teacher turnover. These experiences mirror broader findings in the literature that identify poor communication and lack of coordination as persistent challenges in school-family relationships (Gilmore et al., 2022). While Gilmore and colleagues noted that parents often feel undervalued due to poor communication, Butler et al. (2019) found that teachers may become frustrated when they perceive parents as unresponsive. Study participants' accounts highlighted how both perspectives may coexist in virtual settings, with disorganization creating mistrust and disconnects on both sides.

Scholars such as Paetsch et al. (2023) and Scanlan et al. (2021) have argued that a significant gap persists between what should happen in schools when it comes to collaboration, and the practical systems schools have in place to implement said practices. The experiences of

the caregivers in this study reinforced this gap, illustrating how systemic disorganization undermines opportunities for meaningful parent-school interactions. Scanlan et al. (2021) suggests that sustainability in school initiatives for CLD students and families depends on institutional clarity, systemic alignment, and commitments to culturally responsive practice. For the families in this study, the lack of stability and clarity in communication signaled that schools were not fully prepared to meet the needs of CLD parents in virtual environments. These findings highlight the importance of prioritizing consistency and transparency in communication as essential foundations for trust-building with diverse families.

Theme 5: Need for Greater Cultural Responsiveness and Comprehensive Support

Across all interviews, caregivers expressed a strong desire for schools to be more culturally responsive and to provide support that acknowledged the realities of their families. Participants described wanting educators who value their linguistic and cultural identities, respect their input, and provide resources that address their specific needs as CLD parents. This finding strongly aligns with Herrera's (2022) BDCRT framework, which emphasizes that meaningful engagement begins with affirming the cultural and linguistic assets of families. Herrera et al. (2020) similarly highlights that trust between schools and families grows when educators engage in culturally responsive practices that honor parents' backgrounds and perspectives.

Other scholars have echoed this call for cultural competence training and inclusive approaches, noting that schools cannot simply adopt surface-level interventions without deeper reflection on teacher attitudes and practices (Singh & Pallai, 2023; Wehmeyer & Kurth, 2021). The participants in this study confirmed the importance of these principles by directly linking their sense of support to whether teachers acknowledged their cultural and linguistic realities. At

the same time, their stories revealed that two virtual schools have not yet embedded these practices in consistent ways. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) argue that inclusive family engagement requires intentional strategies to reduce stigma and bias, while Revell (2021) and Stembridge (2019) stress the importance of sustaining culturally responsive teaching as an ongoing practice rather than a one-time initiative. Participant experiences reinforce these insights and add urgency to the call for virtual schools to establish comprehensive systems of support that are not only culturally responsive but also consistent and reliable.

Interpretation Across Themes

Taken together, the five themes which emerged from this study revealed the layered and sometimes contradictory realities of how CLD caregivers experienced virtual education. Families consistently described online learning as both empowering and challenging. They valued the safety, flexibility, and oversight it offered the family, yet faced persistent barriers that limited full participation, especially around language, disorganization, and inconsistent communication. These tensions highlighted how families often found themselves carrying much of the responsibility for ensuring their children's academic success.

A unifying thread across all themes was the persistence and resilience of parents. Despite encountering communication breakdowns and inconsistent support, caregivers demonstrated agency by acting as advocates, co-teachers and navigators of complex educational systems. Their determination not only reflected a deep commitment to education, but it also exposed systemic shortcomings that placed disproportionate burdens on CLD families. As Herrera's (2022) BDCRT framework emphasizes, CLD families possess vital assets that schools must recognize and build upon, rather than expecting families to compensate for systemic gaps.

The findings also underscored the interconnected nature of safety, language, communication, and cultural responsiveness. The sense of empowerment families found in virtual education could not be sustained without clear communication, linguistic access, and trust in the school systems. Similarly, parents' ability to step into instructional and advocacy roles was both a strength and a symptom of institutional shortcomings.

To synthesize across these interconnected experiences, the following conclusions can be drawn from each theme:

- Theme 1 - Virtual Learning as Safety and Empowerment: Families viewed online schooling as a protective and values-aligned choice that offered both physical and emotional safety while granting them agency in their children's learning.
- Theme 2 - Language as Both a Barrier and Tool: Linguistic differences both hindered and empowered families; although language barriers restricted access and clarity, bilingualism served as a vital tool for advocacy and connection within the home.
- Theme 3 - Parents as Advocates, Coaches, and Co-Teachers: Caregivers assumed multiple educational roles out of necessity, demonstrating resilience and dedication while revealing gaps in institutional support and communication.
- Theme 4 - School Disorganization and Inconsistent Communication: Frequent staff turnover, unclear processes, and fragmented communication diminished caregiver trust and made it difficult to navigate and maintain consistent engagement with the school.
- Theme 5 - Virtual Need for Greater Cultural Responsiveness and Comprehensive Support: Families' experiences underscored the need for culturally responsive,

relational approaches that affirm families' identities and provide coordinated and equitable systems of support.

Together, these conclusions pointed to a central interpretation: the success of virtual schooling for CLD families depends not only on parental persistence and adaptability but also on the school's ability to create and establish transparent, culturally sustaining, and linguistically inclusive structures that honor families as authentic partners in the learning process.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study provided new insights into how CLD caregivers interpret their engagement with virtual schools, offering important contributions to both CHAT and BDCRT.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Engeström (2001) and later CHAT scholars such as Postholm (2014) and Sannino and Engeström (2018) emphasized how human activity is affected by the interaction of individuals, tools, and institutional structures. The findings of this study highlighted contradictions within the virtual school system. Parents described themselves as advocates as well as technology and academic supporters, roles that were not formally designated for them but became necessary to ensure their children's academic participation in the virtual learning environment. These contradictions illustrated how virtual schools unknowingly shifted responsibility for problem-solving onto parents without providing adequate tools, bilingual resources, or clear communication systems.

As Engeström and Glăveanu (2012) explain, education systems reveal tensions when institutional rules are misaligned with the lived realities of participants. In this study, the lack of organizational clarity and the absence of stable communication processes created new challenges for CLD caregivers. Families were forced to compensate for institutional disorganization.

Although the CLD families in this study persevered and found ways to overcome these challenges, many CLD families do not bring background knowledge of how the virtual school system works and might succumb to the struggle of navigating uncharted waters. Documenting the experiences of the participating CLD caregivers extends the application of CHAT in educational research by demonstrating how virtual schooling models may unintentionally exacerbate inequities when the needs of CLD caregivers are not intentionally accounted for and met in the virtual setting. A review of the exiting literature revealed limited research applying CHAT specifically to virtual schooling contexts, highlighting the contribution and relevance of this theoretical application within the present study.

Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching (BDCRT)

Herrera (2022) emphasized that students' and families' biographies are essential assets that must inform teaching and learning. The findings of this study reveal both the empowering potential and the limitations of virtual schooling in honoring these assets. Parents described moments of empowerment, such as being able to monitor and directly support their children's learning from home. However, the lack of transparency in communication and the inconsistency of language-access services suggested that schools were not fully prepared to engage CLD families in ways that affirmed their lived experiences.

Gay (2018) argued that culturally responsiveness requires not only the integration of students' cultural and linguistic knowledge into instruction but also systemic commitments to equity. Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) demonstrated through her concept of authentic caring that families and students thrive when schools build relationships based on respect for cultural identity rather than superficial engagement. Together with Herrera's (2022) BDCRT framework, these perspectives highlight that culturally responsive practice must extend beyond the classroom

to include schoolwide systems of communication, family outreach, and organizational accountability. The findings in this study reinforce these perspectives, confirming that culturally responsive practice must include intentional, equity-driven systems that support CLD families in virtual education.

Contribution to Understanding CLD Parent Experiences in Virtual Learning

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of CLD family and caregiver engagement in the underexplored domain of virtual schooling. While prior studies using CHAT and BDCRT frameworks have primarily examined classroom practices or face-to-face family engagement (Gay, 2018; Herrera 2022; Valenzuela, 1999), the present research extends their application to virtual learning environments.

The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of virtual education for CLD caregivers depends on the schools' ability to sustain consistent communication in a language that parents understand, recognize parents are co-educators and advocates, and embed culturally and linguistically responsive practices into instructional systems, not just individual classrooms. Having a teacher that is supportive of CLD families has an impact on the students and families. If all students are expected to be successful, the school must implement practices and procedures that consider the needs of families served in the virtual environment. Taken together, the study findings point toward pathways for culturally responsive/sustaining school reform (Scanlan et al., 2021).

Practical Implications

Participants in this study valued having educational choices for their children and intentionally sought out virtual schooling rather than brick-and-mortar settings. They highlighted the safety, and the flexibility that online learning provided, particularly in meeting the personal

needs of their families. At the same time, caregivers identified consistent barriers that limited their experiences, including challenges with communication, technology support, teacher stability, and culturally responsive engagement.

While the study referred to teachers and administrators collectively as educators, the findings suggest the need to consider their roles separately. Schools and educational systems create the structures within which virtual learning occurs, but teachers and administrators operate within the system in different ways that uniquely influence the experiences of CLD families. For this reason, the following discussion is organized into three sections: implications for schools and educational systems, implications for administrators, and implications for teachers. This distinction allows for more precise recommendations that address both systemic responsibilities and the day-to-day practices that can better support CLD caregivers in virtual learning environments.

Implications for Schools and Educational Systems

Virtual school providers must anticipate the enrollment of CLD students and establish clear processes to identify and address their needs from the onset. This begins at enrollment, where personnel trained in culturally responsive practices should be available to answer questions, clarify procedures, and provide initial orientation. It is critical for virtual school providers to develop and disseminate guidelines and resources that help schools explain what engagement in virtual learning entails. Families should receive clear information about navigating online platforms, accessing and using the necessary technology, accessing the curriculum and materials, and understanding school and academic expectations.

Robust resource development is essential to supporting CLD families. Virtual school providers should create centralized resource lists and create comprehensive help libraries with

videos or quick reference guides that address common parent needs. These resources should cover tasks such as contacting technical support, understanding attendance and participation requirements, recording absences, navigating the online learning platform, and using electronic translator tools (e.g., Google Translate) to communicate with teachers or translate emails. Resources should also direct families to appropriate staff for schoolwide policies or requirements. Furthermore, providers must allocate sufficient funding to hire bilingual personnel in key positions and to provide translation and interpretation services for less commonly spoken languages or when electronic tools are insufficient.

Finally, system-level communication requires intentional design. Families' preferred languages should be recorded during enrollment and consistently honored in all communication. Providers should designate personnel responsible for answering family questions and facilitating connections with school-based staff. Just as importantly, culturally responsive practices must be embedded across the school systems policies, family engagement initiatives, and professional learning programs. Training for leaders and staff should ensure that all schools within the virtual system are equipped to engage CLD families effectively and equitably.

Implications for Administrators

Administrators play a central role in ensuring that CLD families experience consistent and responsive support in virtual school settings. One of the most pressing needs identified in this study was stability. Administrators must prioritize minimizing teacher turnover and creating schedules so that families can rely on consistent routines. Caregivers in the study found that frequent changes in teachers made it difficult to make a positive connection. When classes were reassigned or schedules shifted without notice, parents reported significant stress and frustration.

Providing stable teacher assignments and timely communication about necessary changes builds trust and allows families to plan effectively.

Administrators are also responsible for ensuring that grading policies are timely, transparent, and fair. Caregivers expressed concern when grades were delayed, changed without explanation, or not reflective of their child's efforts. Administrators should establish systems to monitor grading practices and support teachers in maintaining consistency. This also includes creating opportunities for families to learn how to check grades and understand how academic progress is reported within the online learning system.

Communication emerged as a critical area of need for CLD families. Administrators should create structures that allow parents to access live support, such as scheduled questions and answer sessions or office hours where they can ask questions about assignments, procedures, or other concerns. The timing for live support sessions should be consistent and accessible, accommodating the varying schedules and linguistic needs of families. For example, sessions might be offered at two different times, and sessions could offer the option to ask all questions in a language other than English in a breakout room. Administrators must also ensure families know who to contact in their own language for in-depth conversations, moving beyond reliance on translation tools for more family- or child-specific matters.

Finally, administrators carry responsibility for connecting families to the right resources within the broader system. Parents reported difficulty figuring out who to approach for specific issues, whether related to special education, MTSS, emergent bilingual supports, or 504 accommodations. Once they found a staff member willing to guide them, their experiences improved substantially. To avoid caregiver frustration, administrators should intentionally

coordinate across departments to provide parents with clear pathways of support and ensure that no family is left navigating the system on their own.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers are often the first and most direct point of contact for CLD families in virtual learning environments. Caregivers in this study consistently noted that once they connected with a teacher who was caring and responsive, their experience with school improved significantly. This underscores the importance of teachers demonstrating authentic care for students and families, building relationships based on trust, and ensuring that parents feel valued as partners in their children's education.

Caregivers also described confusion when receiving instructional materials, noting that not every item sent home was actually used in class. This uncertainty left families unsure about which resources were important or how to support their child's learning effectively. Teachers can address this challenge by taking a few minutes at the beginning of each term or unit to explain how each resource will be used. Clear guidance about which items are essential, which are supplemental, and how they connect to assignments helps caregivers feel prepared and reduces frustration. Providing this orientation in both English and the families' preferred language further ensures equitable access to information. If caregivers are expected to be learning coaches and support the lessons, they must understand the resources are available and how to use them.

In addition to these relational responsibilities, teachers also play a key role in supporting the processes and frameworks that administrators put in place. While administrators are responsible for creating consistent master schedules, establishing grading expectations, and coordinating systemwide communication practices, teachers reinforce these processes and frameworks through their daily interactions with families. At the teacher level, this includes

maintaining consistent routines, grading work promptly, explaining student progress clearly, and directing parents to the appropriate department staff when additional support is needed. By aligning their classroom practices with administrative initiatives and approaching families with care, teachers ensure CLD caregivers experience the school as both organized and genuinely invested in their children's success.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations shaped the scope of the present work. First, the study included a small sample of six CLD caregivers. While the sample size is appropriate for a phenomenological design that prioritizes depth and understanding over breadth, it limits the transferability of the findings to other populations or contexts.

Second, the study focused specifically on virtual school providers in Texas. This geographic and institutional focus provided a consistent context for exploring participants' lived experiences, yet it also means that the results may not reflect the realities of CLD caregivers in other states or virtual learning systems that operate under different policies, demographics, or school structures.

Third, all participants were Spanish-speaking caregivers. Although this linguistic focus allowed for rich exploration of language-related experiences among one of the largest CLD groups in Texas, it excludes the perspectives of caregivers from other linguistic backgrounds whose experiences may differ in meaningful ways.

Finally, the study was limited to families of English learners in general education classrooms. As a result, the findings do not capture the experience of caregivers whose children receive special education services or participate in dual language or newcomer programs.

Together, these boundaries provided a clear and manageable focus for understanding the phenomenon under study, while the researcher acknowledges that additional perspectives and contexts remain unexplored.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could expand this work in several directions. Research that includes larger and more diverse samples of CLD caregivers would provide a more comprehensive picture of parents' lived experiences across different linguistic and cultural groups. A comparative study could examine if caregivers from other language backgrounds or education levels encounter similar challenges or if their experiences differ from those of Spanish-speaking families. Additionally, including the perspectives of both administrators and teachers would provide valuable insights into the systemic and instructional challenges they face when engaging with CLD caregivers in virtual schooling settings.

Another promising direction for future research involves the perspectives of students themselves. Phenomenological studies that explore how CLD students experience virtual learning environments could reveal important insights into how parental engagement, school communication, and cultural responsiveness influence students' sense of belonging and academic motivation.

In addition, future research could employ quantitative and mixed methods to examine the relationship between caregiver engagement and student outcomes. Longitudinal studies that track families who remain in virtual education over multiple years, while measuring academic achievement alongside caregiver experiences, would provide insight on how sustained engagement in virtual schooling influences success. This type of work would complement

qualitative studies and provide a stronger evidence base for the long-term effectiveness of virtual schooling for CLD students and families.

Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of CLD caregivers navigating virtual education. The voices of six participants revealed that while online schooling offered safety, flexibility, and empowerment, it also introduced ongoing barriers tied to language access, communication, and systemic disorganization. These dual realities highlighted the complexity of caregiver engagement in virtual environments: families embraced the model for what it provided yet often carried the weight of responsibilities that schools were unable or unprepared to shoulder.

The implications of this research point to both theory and practice. The study extended application of existing frameworks such as CHAT and BDCRT, showing how contradictions within institutional systems placed disproportionate demands on parents, while at the same time demonstrating the resilience and cultural wealth of the families. This research highlighted that equity in virtual schooling requires more than individual effort or goodwill. The system needs intentional structures, policies, and practices that affirm family assets and reduce systemic barriers.

Virtual schools must ensure organizational clarity, provide consistent bilingual communication, and design culturally responsive systems that support rather than overwhelm families. Administrators and teachers alike have critical and unique roles to play in building trust and fostering sustainable engagement. At the same time, this study reinforced the importance of continued research into how CLD families experience virtual education, including quantitative examinations of how caregiver engagement intersects with student outcomes.

In closing, this study affirmed that CLD caregivers bring resilience, advocacy, and cultural wealth to their children's education in virtual schools. Their lived experiences revealed both the opportunities and the inequities of online learning, reminding us that true equity requires intentional systems, responsive practices, and authentic partnerships between schools and families. The voices of these caregivers' challenge educators and policymakers to listen more closely, act more responsively, and collaborate with CLD families to reimagine virtual education in ways that empower families, sustain culture, and build a more equitable future for the students served.

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Appendix A - Timeline of Study

Date	Data Collecting Activity
January – February 2025	• Submitted study proposal and supporting materials to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). • Received official IRB approval to begin study.
March 2025	• Recruited participants through email invitations and follow-up phone calls • Collected signed consent forms from participants. • Distributed and received completed Parent Demographic and Technology Surveys.
April 2025	• Conducted semi-structured individual interviews with participants via Zoom.
May 2025	• Conducted voluntary focus group with interested participants. • Translated and transcribed all individual and group interview data.
June 2025	• Began initial coding and analysis of interview transcripts. • Developed preliminary emergent themes.
July 2025-August 2025	• Refined and clustered emergent themes into categories. • Began drafting Chapters 4 and 5 based on analysis findings.

Appendix B - IRB Approval Letter

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Office of Research Integrity, Compliance and Security

TO: Socorro Herrera
Curriculum and Instruction
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-12653

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 03/11/2025

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Exploring the Lived Experiences of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Caregivers of Students in Virtual Learning Environments."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 03/11/2025

EXPIRATION DATE: 03/10/2028

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 03/11/2025 10:43 AM ET

203 Fairchild Hall, 1601 Vattier St., Manhattan, KS 66506 | 785-532-3224 | fax: 785-532-3278 | comply@k-state.edu

Appendix C - Invitations to Participants

The images below show the recruitment invitation sent to parents who met study participation criteria.

Recruitment Invitation (English)

Recruitment Invitation (Spanish)

Appendix D - Demographic and Technology Survey

Process:

After the initial phone call with the researcher and receipt of the singed consent form, the demographic and technology survey was distributed to participating parents. This process ensured that informed consent had been obtained prior to data collections. Parents completed the survey electronically before participating in the semi-structured interview.

Survey Description:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about your experience in the virtual education setting for your child. The information in this survey will help me gather some general information about you. If you have questions about any of the questions, please feel free to contact me via email at laurathiess91@gmail.com

Gracias por aceptar participar en este estudio sobre su experiencia en el entorno de educación virtual para su hijo. La información de esta encuesta me ayudará a recopilar información general sobre usted. Si tiene preguntas sobre alguna de las preguntas, no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo por correo electrónico en laurathiess91@gmail.com

Questions /Preguntas

1. **Your name / Su nombre**
2. **Your e-mail / Su correo electrónico**
3. **Your phone number / Su número de teléfono**
4. **Grade level(s) of children in virtual school / Nivel de grado de los niños en la escuela virtual**
5. **What is the primary language spoken at home? / ¿Cuál es el idioma principal que se habla en casa?**
   a. Spanish / español
   b. English / inglés
   c. Both are used in the home regularly / Ambos se usan en el hogar con regularidad

6. **What is your preferred language? / ¿Cuál es su idioma preferido**?
   a. Spanish / español
   b. English / inglés
   c. Both / Los dos
7. **What is your education level? / ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación?**
   a. Elementary / Primaria
   b. Middle School / Secundaria
   c. High School / Preparatoria
   d. College / Universidad
   e. Prefer not to respond / Prefiero no responder
8. **What is your comfort level with technology? (Rate 1–5) / ¿Cuál es tu nivel de comodidad con la tecnología? (Escala del 1 al 5)**
   a. 1 – I do not feel very comfortable / No me siento muy cómodo
   b. 5 – I feel very comfortable / Me siento muy cómodo
9. **What technology are you comfortable using? / ¿Con qué tecnología se siente cómodo usando?**
   a. Social media / Redes sociales
   b. Internet searching for information I need / Búsqueda en internet para la información que necesito
   c. Email / Correo electrónico
   d. Texting / Charlar por mensaje
   e. Completing forms for school / Completar formularios para la escuela
   f. Using streaming services / Uso de servicios de streaming
   g. Other / Otra cosa
10. **Which work schedule best describes your job? / ¿Qué horario describe tu trabajo?**
    a. Full time / Tiempo completo
    b. Part time / Tiempo parcial
    c. Multiple jobs / Múltiples trabajos
    d. Flexible hours / Horario flexible
    e. I do not work outside of the home / No trabajo fuera de mi hogar

11. **What best describes your family structure? / ¿Qué es lo que mejor describe tu estructura familiar?**
    a. Two-parent household / Hogar con madre y padre
    b. Single-parent household / Hogar con un(a) solo(a) madre/padre
    c. We have extended family living in our house (parents, grandparents, siblings) / Tenemos familia extendida viviendo en nuestra casa (abuelos, padres, hermanos)
    d. Other / Otra cosa
12. **What is the best time for us to connect for an interview? / ¿Cuál es el mejor momento para que nos conectemos para una entrevista?**
    a. Any time during the day / En cualquier momento del día
    b. In the mornings / Por las mañanas
    c. In the afternoon / Por las tardes después de comida
    d. Only in the evenings / Solo en las tardes
    e. Only on the weekend / Solo en los fines de semana
    f. Other / Otro tiempo

Appendix E - Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Process:

After participants completed the Parent Demographic and Technology Survey, the researcher scheduled individual semi-structured interviews via Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in the participants preferred language (English or Spanish). Interviews were audio recorded with permission and later transcribed and translated for analysis.

The interview questions were designed to explore caregivers' lived experiences with virtual schooling and to elicit detailed reflections about communication, advocacy, challenges, and support. Participants were encouraged to elaborate freely, and the researcher used probes to clarify and deepen understanding when appropriate.

Research Question:

In what ways do CLD caregivers make sense of, navigate, and engage with educators and educational systems for facilitating the virtual learning of their children?

Interview Questions:

Demographics & Background/ Demografía y antecedentes**:**

- What is your family's cultural and linguistic background? ¿Cuál es el origen cultural y lingüístico de su familia?
- Why did you decide to enroll your child/ren in virtual learning? ¿Por qué decidió inscribir a su hijo/a en el aprendizaje virtual?

Understanding and Making Sense of Virtual Learning/ Comprender y dar sentido al aprendizaje virtual:

- Do you understand the goals of virtual learning for your child? ¿Comprende los objetivos del aprendizaje virtual para su hijo?

- What has been your initial reaction to your child's virtual learning experience ¿Cuál ha sido su reacción inicial a la experiencia de aprendizaje virtual de su hijo?
- What has worked well and what has been challenging? ¿Qué ha funcionado bien y qué ha sido un desafío?

Navigating the Virtual Educational System/ Navegando por el Sistema Educativo Virtual:

- How have you found the process of accessing resources (like class schedules, materials, and assignments) for virtual learning? What barriers, if any, have you encountered? ¿Cómo ha encontrado el proceso de acceso a recursos (como horarios de clases, materiales y tareas) para el aprendizaje virtual? ¿Qué barreras, si las hay, ha encontrado?
- Have you faced any difficulties in understanding or navigating school communications, such as emails, notifications, or online meetings with educators? ¿Ha enfrentado alguna dificultad para comprender o navegar las comunicaciones, como correos electrónicos, notificaciones o reuniones en línea con educadores de la escuela?

Interactions/Engagement with Educators / Interacciones/Compromiso con los educadores:

- How do you communicate with your child's teachers and school staff about their learning progress? What methods have been most helpful for you (email, phone, video calls, etc.)? ¿Cómo se comunica con los maestros y el personal escolar de su hijo sobre su progreso de aprendizaje? ¿Qué métodos le han sido más útiles (correo electrónico, teléfono, videollamadas, etc.)?
- How do you perceive the responsiveness of educators to your questions? ¿Cómo percibe la capacidad de respuesta de los educadores a sus preguntas?

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations/ Consideraciones culturales y lingüísticas

- Have you encountered any challenges related to language barriers when engaging with teachers or school materials? If so, how have you overcome them? ¿Se ha encontrado con algún desafío relacionado con las barreras lingüísticas al interactuar con los maestros o los materiales escolares? Si es así ¿cómo los has superado?

- Do you feel that the educational system acknowledges and values your cultural background in the context of virtual learning? If yes, how? If no, what could be improved? ¿Siente que el sistema educativo reconoce y valora su cultura en el contexto del aprendizaje virtual? En caso afirmativo, ¿cómo? Si la respuesta es no, ¿cómo se puede mejorar?

Support and Resources/ Apoyo y recursos

- What kind of support have you received from the school in facilitating your child's virtual learning (i.e. tech support, language support, academic assistance)? ¿Qué tipo de apoyo ha recibido de la escuela para facilitar el aprendizaje virtual de su hijo (es decir, soporte técnico, apoyo lingüístico, asistencia académica)?
- Do you feel there are enough resources to help you support your child in a virtual learning environment? What additional resources would be helpful? ¿Cree que hay suficientes recursos para ayudarlo a apoyar a su hijo en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual? ¿Qué recursos adicionales serían útiles?

Barriers and Challenges / Barreras y desafíos

- What are the biggest challenges you have faced in supporting your child's virtual education? ¿Cuáles son los mayores desafíos que ha enfrentado para apoyar la educación virtual de su hijo?
- How have technology issues (i.e. access to devices, internet connection, digital literacy) impacted your ability to facilitate your child's virtual learning? ¿Cómo han afectado los problemas tecnológicos (es decir, el acceso a dispositivos, la conexión a Internet, la alfabetización digital) a su capacidad para facilitar el aprendizaje virtual de su hijo?

Strategies and Coping Mechanisms / Estrategias y mecanismos de afrontamiento

- How do you balance your personal or work responsibilities with helping your child with virtual learning? ¿Cómo equilibra sus responsabilidades personales o laborales con ayudar a su hijo con el aprendizaje virtual?
- Have you created any specific routines or structures in your home to support your child's learning? What has worked well for your family? ¿Ha creado alguna rutina o estructura específica en su hogar para apoyar el aprendizaje de su hijo? ¿Qué le ha funcionado bien a su familia?

Feedback and Improvement / Sugerencias para mejorar

- What changes or improvements would you suggest to make virtual learning more accessible and effective for families like yours? ¿Qué cambios o mejoras sugeriría para que el aprendizaje virtual sea más accesible y efectivo para familias como la suya?
- If you could share one piece of advice with other parents navigating virtual learning, what would it be? Si pudieras compartir un consejo con otros padres que navegan por el aprendizaje virtual, ¿cuál sería?

Appendix F - Voluntary Focus Group Questions

Process:

Following the completion of the individual semi-structured interviews, participants were invited to take part in a voluntary focus group discussion conducted via Zoom. The purpose of this discussion was to allow participants to share additional reflections and collectively explore common experiences related to virtual schooling. Participation in the focus group was optional and occurred after all interviews had been completed.

The focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes and was facilitated by the researcher in Spanish. The session was audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and included in the overall data analysis process.

Questions that guided the discussion:

Opening Script: Thank you all for being here today and for your participation in this study. This voluntary focus group is an opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences with virtual learning and to share with one another what has worked, what has been difficult, and what improvements you think are needed. Your insights today will help confirm or expand the findings from the individual interviews and ensure your voices are accurately represented. This is a voluntary session, and you may choose to speak or simply listen. Everything you share will be kept confidential and used to support the research findings.

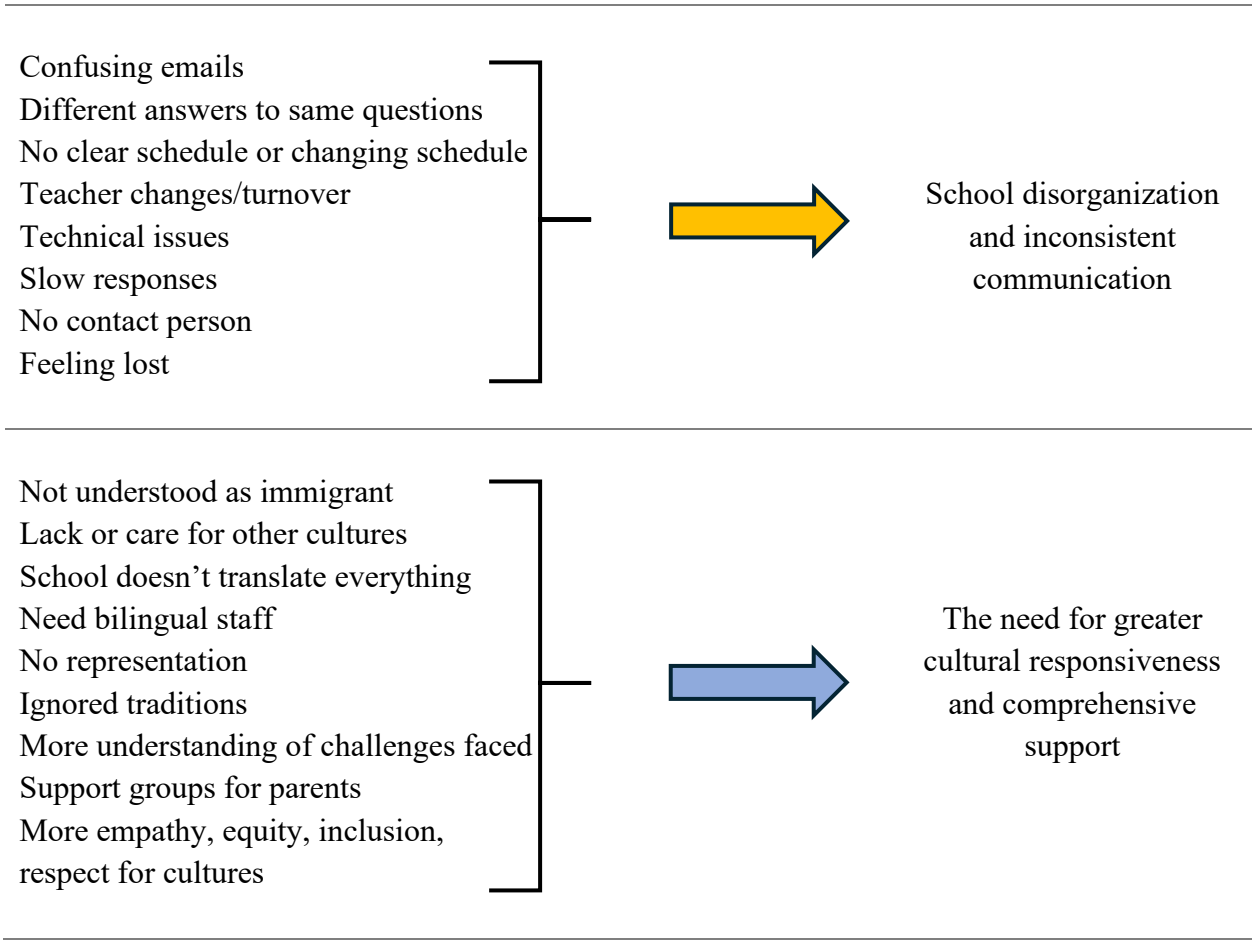
1. Now that you've had time to think about your experiences, what parts of virtual learning worked best for your family? Ahora que ha tenido tiempo para reflexionar sobre sus experiencias, ¿qué aspectos del aprendizaje virtual funcionaron mejor para su familia?
2. What has been the most confusing or difficult part of virtual school for you as a parent or caregiver? ¿Cuál ha sido la parte más confusa o difícil de la escuela virtual para usted como padre, madre o cuidador(a)?

3. How do you prefer to receive information from the school? Have you found it easy or difficult to know who to contact? ¿Cómo prefiere recibir información de la escuela? ¿Le ha resultado fácil o difícil saber con quién comunicarse?
4. Did you feel supported in your preferred language when helping your child with virtual learning? What could schools do better in this area? ¿Se sintió apoyado en su idioma preferido al ayudar a su hijo con el aprendizaje virtual? ¿Qué podrían hacer mejor las escuelas en este aspecto?
5. How have your responsibilities changed since your child began virtual learning? Do you feel like a teacher or coach at home? ¿Cómo han cambiado sus responsabilidades desde que su hijo comenzó el aprendizaje virtual? ¿Se siente como un maestro o guía en casa?
6. If the school could make one big change to better support families like yours, what would it be? Si la escuela pudiera hacer un cambio importante para apoyar mejor a familias como la suya, ¿cuál sería?
7. Do you all agree that access to bilingual staff was a challenge or strength? What about technology access and support do you feel was a challenge or strength? ¿Están de acuerdo en que el acceso a personal bilingüe fue un desafío o una fortaleza? ¿Y en cuanto al acceso y apoyo tecnológico, fue un desafío o una fortaleza?
8. Are you planning to enroll in virtual school next year? ¿Planea inscribirse en la escuela virtual el próximo año?

Closing Script: "Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences. Your contributions today will help ensure that the findings in this study reflect the real-life experiences of families navigating virtual education. If you have any final thoughts or questions, please feel free to share."

Appendix G - Codes and Emerging Themes

Codes	Emerging Themes
Safe space Flexibility Less bullying Security Sense control No fear No discrimination No peer pressures Family priorities	Virtual learning as a source of safety and empowerment
Translation issues Translation tools (Google Translate) Teachers do not speak Spanish Communication gap Bilingual advantage Using home language to explain lessons Proud to use Spanish at home Interpretation needed	Language functioning as both a challenge and a tool
Help with homework Sit next to child Teach myself first Coach through lessons Contact teachers Ask for help Track assignments Remind teachers Check grades daily Guiding and motivating Balancing work and teaching	Parents as advocates, coaches, and co-teachers


Confusing emails
Different answers to same questions
No clear schedule or changing schedule
Teacher changes/turnover
Technical issues
Slow responses
No contact person
Feeling lost
School disorganization and inconsistent communication
Not understood as immigrant
Lack or care for other cultures
School doesn't translate everything
Need bilingual staff
No representation
Ignored traditions
More understanding of challenges faced
Support groups for parents
More empathy, equity, inclusion, respect for cultures
The need for greater cultural responsiveness and comprehensive support