AFRICAN REFUGEE PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S
SCHOOLS: BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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The purpose of this study was to examine involvement of African refugee parents in the education of their elementary school children. The setting of the study was Northern and Southern Texas. African refugee parents and their children's teachers completed written surveys and also participated in interviews. In the study's mixed-method design, quantitative measures provided data about parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of parent-teacher relationship, parent endorsement of children's schools, and barriers to parent involvement. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions provided data on barriers and strategies to improve involvement.

Sixty-one African refugee parents responded to the survey and also participated in an in-depth face-to-face or telephone interview. Twenty teacher participants responded to an online survey. Quantitative data gathered from the parent and teacher surveys were analyzed using frequency distributions and analyses of variance. Qualitative data were analyzed by summarizing and sorting information into different categories using Weft QDA, an open-source qualitative analysis software. From these data, I identified barriers to African refugee parent involvement in their children's schools, as well as challenges that teachers face as they try to involve African refugee parents.
Results of analyses of variance revealed statistically significant differences in parent involvement between African refugee parents with limited English proficiency and those with high English proficiency. A key finding of the research was that, whereas the overall level of parent involvement for African refugee parents was low, a major barrier to involvement was language. Teachers and parents cited enrolment in English as a second language programs as the best strategy to enhance parent involvement of African refugees. Additionally, parents who reported higher education levels were more involved in their children’s education both at home and at school. All groups of African refugee parents reported high endorsement of their children’s school. Strategies suggested to improve involvement include the use of interpreters and parent education on importance of involvement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am especially grateful to our four daughters, Liza, Hope, Jane, and Paula for their patience with me, even when I had to spend “too much time on the computer,” instead of playing hide-and-seek in the backyard.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Refugee children are becoming an identifiable and increasing group in American
schools today (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004). The
United States spends more than $1 billion a year to assist refugees and other conflict
victims. More than $170 million of this money is specifically used to resettle refugees in
the United States, which is the largest refugee resettlement country in the world (Ryan,
2008). Out of the 10 countries that have resettlement programs, the United States
admits more than double the number of refugees accepted by the other nine countries
combined (Singer & Wilson, 2007). More than 2.6 million refugees have been resettled
in the United States since 1975 (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

African refugees constitute a large percentage of this number. For example, of
the 483,243 refugees who resettled in the United States from the year 2000 to 2007,
34.6% hailed from Africa (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2007). In a report from
the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, O’Hara (2006) reported that Africans
represented the largest number of arrivals, with a total of 20,700 refugee arrivals for the
year 2005. The number of African refugee arrivals dropped slightly in fiscal year 2006
and fiscal year 2007 to 18,182 and 17,462 respectively. However, this was still the
largest number of refugee arrivals, representing 44% and 42% of the total number of
arrivals in 2006 and 2007 respectively (ORR, 2007).

Texas is among the top five major destinations for immigrants. From the U.S.
Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) data, the state of Texas is the third most popular
state for refugee resettlement (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2007). Texas also
appears to be a popular destination for African refugees. Approximately 12% of all the African refugees who have resettled in the United States since 2007 have done so in Texas (ORR, 2007).

In 2007, the state of Texas admitted more refugees from Burundi (an African country) than any other state, according to the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR, 2007). Table 1 below shows the total number of refugees who were admitted to the United States, the total number of refugees in Texas, and the total number of African refugees in the United States and in Texas.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total in U.S.</th>
<th>African in U.S.</th>
<th>Total in Texas</th>
<th>African in Texas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>71,534</td>
<td>17,585</td>
<td>3,847</td>
<td>1,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>67,974</td>
<td>18,970</td>
<td>3,469</td>
<td>1,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>26,776</td>
<td>2,525</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>28,281</td>
<td>10,634</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>52,836</td>
<td>29,083</td>
<td>3,382</td>
<td>2,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>53,738</td>
<td>20,699</td>
<td>3,243</td>
<td>1,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>41,150</td>
<td>18,122</td>
<td>2,764</td>
<td>1,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>48,193</td>
<td>17,462</td>
<td>4,392</td>
<td>1,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>390,482</td>
<td>135,080</td>
<td>23,838</td>
<td>11,459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Many of the world’s refugees are children. According to a 2007 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report on global refugee trends, 44% of the refugee population that UNHCR has to care for comprises children under the age of 18. Clearly, almost half of the world’s refugees and displaced people are children (Rutter, 1998) and 11% are under the age of 5 (UNHCR, 2003). When the families of these children resettle in the United States, they usually have to enroll their children in the school systems.
More than four decades of research on parent involvement have produced unanimous, persuasive results: When parents get involved in their children’s education, children achieve higher rates of success in school (Berger, 1991; Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Cooper, 2005; Epstein, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Walberg, 1984). Parents who help and encourage their children to learn at home, and who help develop positive attitudes toward school, contribute to the personal growth and academic success of their children (Comer, 2005; Englund, 2004; Ford & Amaral, 2006).

Studies have documented that regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child’s education is a major factor in determining success in school (Jeynes, 2003). Comeau (2006) stated that:

> When schools work together with families to support children’s learning, children tend to succeed in both school and later life. Many people are surprised that the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement is not income or social status; it is how involved the student’s parents are in their children’s education (p.1)

Evidently, this analysis speaks volumes for the impacts of parental involvement, both at home and at school, regardless of their ethnicity, social economic status or nationality. It is therefore important to foster parental involvement, thus promoting the healthy development of all children, including refugee children. Shields and Behrman (2004) noted that, “All society benefits when all [immigrant] children receive the education and support they need today to become America’s productive, engaged citizens of tomorrow” (p. 4).
Significance of the Study

Existing literature has called attention to the importance of parent involvement in children’s academic as well as social success (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2008; Decker, Decker & Brown, 2007; Englund, Luckner, Whaley & Egeland, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Lin, 2003; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan & Evans, 2006).

Findings of this study are pivotal in helping African refugee families, teachers, school administrators as well as communities in their efforts to maximize parental involvement. The findings of this research can be used to inform practice as well as policy on issues surrounding parental involvement among African refugees.

Further, from the findings of the study, I presented strategies that schools, families and communities can utilize in order to foster parent involvement. It is very important for refugee families, teachers and schools to work together and to increase efforts to involve refugee parents at greater levels in order to ensure that their children receive effective education.

Statement of the Problem

Promoting parental involvement is not a new goal in the United States (Epstein, 1995; Page, 1999). Extant research shows that children and families as well as schools all mutually benefit when schools and families work together (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Colombo, 2006; Comer, 2005). Indeed, children from all ethnic groups benefit from parent involvement (Jeynes, 2003). Lahaie’s (2008) study found that parental involvement was especially valuable for children of immigrants whose parents speak another language at home.
However, parental involvement, especially as defined in the United States, may not be commonplace among African refugees (Colley, 2005). Protheroe (2006) pointed out that adults in many immigrant families may lack sufficient understanding of the American educational system to become more involved. Ariza (2000) indicated that when immigrant parents fail to get involved in the school, teachers often assume that they are uninterested. This misconception may result in educators not encouraging parents to participate in school (Bloom, 2001).

Other researchers have noted that more families from immigrant populations typically fall into the “uninvolved” category and educators view them as being unconcerned about their children’s welfare (López, 2001). When teachers and administrators unsuccessfully make numerous efforts to involve culturally and racially diverse parents, they often conclude that these parents do not care enough to engage (Lightfoot, 2004). However, that is rarely true (McBrien, 2003). Parents from all societal groups, regardless of their economic, ethnic, or cultural background, are concerned about their children’s education (Lopez, 2001). Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld (2007) noted that ethnic minority parents desire to be involved in their children’s schools, but they often are not aware how to be involved.

Researchers, policy makers and educators, as well as parents, have called for more parental involvement in education (Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Desimone, 1999; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ramírez, 2003). However, optimal parental involvement is not a reality for many immigrant groups (Marschall, 2006). One such group is the African refugee population. As a largely minority group in the United States, African refugees face a variety of barriers such as language and lack of understanding of the
American educational system. These barriers make it difficult for them to be involved in their children’s education. Turnkey and Kao (2006) used data from three waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), and found that the level of participation in children’s education among foreign-born parents is lower than that of American-born parents – at home and at school. This result was stable even after controlling for family structure and parental socioeconomic status. The researchers further found that foreign-born parents reported a larger number and degree of barriers to involvement than their American-born counterparts. Some of the barriers include culture, language and work schedules (Denessen et al., 2007; Ramírez, 2003; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

There are numerous studies addressing parental involvement among the majority population as well as some minority immigrant populations in the United States (Ariza, 2000; López, 2001; Ramírez, 2003). For example, there exists abundant literature on parent involvement among Latino immigrants (Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Marschall, 2006; Tinkler, 2002) and Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Bondioli, 2000; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Sohn & Wang, 2006). However, the topic of parental involvement remains understudied among refugee families in the United States. Even less researched is parental involvement specifically among African refugees in the United States (Nderu, 2005). A search for research studies on parental involvement reveals a dearth of studies on the African immigrant and refugee population in the United States. Despite the fact that the African refugee population has increased dramatically in the last 10 years (ORR, 2007), not enough studies have been carried out to explore families’ experiences and involvement in the American educational system. A search on EBSCOHOST for
“Refugee parent involvement” yielded one article by McBrien (2003). When the search was limited to “African parent involvement” or “African family involvement,” EBSCOHOST yielded no results. A search on Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) yielded one study, conducted in 1996. However, this study was a comparison between Hmong refugee children and children from other ethnic backgrounds, none of whom were African refugees.

Epstein and Sheldon (2006) stated that in order to gain more knowledge on schools, family and community partnerships, it is important for researchers to utilize better measures and to use larger and diverse samples. The paucity of studies on parental involvement among African refugee families signals that time is ripe for researchers to examine parent involvement among African refugees in order to understand the challenges they face in an effort to be more involved in their children’s education.

Given the rapid increase of African refugee children in American schools (Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006), more research specifically with African refugee populations needs to be conducted in order to increase our understanding of how to better serve them. The lack of research on African refugee parent involvement signifies a need to increase our fund of knowledge on the topic in order to be able to enhance the parent involvement among African refugee families. I conducted an investigation of parent involvement among the African refugee population in the United States, which provided deeper insight on challenges that the families and teachers face in trying to increase parent involvement.
Research Questions

This dissertation study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent, if any, are African refugee parents of elementary school children currently involved in their children’s education?
2. What barriers, if any, do African refugee parents of elementary school children encounter in getting involved in their children’s schools?
3. To what extent, if any, are there differences in parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, frequency of parent-teacher contact and barriers to parent involvement among African refugee parents from different demographic groups?
4. In what ways, if any, do elementary school teachers currently involve African refugee families?
5. What challenges, if any, do elementary school teachers face in trying to involve African refugee parents in their children’s education?
6. How can African refugee parents of elementary school children improve their involvement in their children’s education?
7. How and to what extent can teachers meaningfully and effectively involve African refugee families?

Definition of Terms

Parent – For this study, I used the term “parent” to refer to biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, guardians or extended family members who are charged with the care of the children.
Parent involvement – For the purpose of this study, I used Epstein’s (1995) definition of parent involvement, which refers to the active, ongoing participation of a child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) in his or her child’s education. Involvement can take a variety of forms from maintaining a two-way flow of communication between the home and the school, creating a positive learning environment in the home, strengthening parenting skills, and parents volunteering or serving as decision-makers within the school. Parents can be involved in their children’s education by participating in school functions, volunteering in their children’s schools and responding to school-based obligations such as parent-teacher conferences. Parents can also support their children’s learning by being involved at home in ways such as providing homework help, and reading at home with their children.

African refugee – The term “African refugee” refers to a refugee of African origin.

Distinction between “Refugee” and “Immigrant”

Most often, the terms “immigrant” and “refugee” tend to be erroneously used as synonyms (Fong, 2004). In much of the literature reviewed for this study, differentiations between immigrants and refugees were not clearly delineated. In order to better understand these rapidly growing populations in the United States, it is important to understand who and what refugees are, and what their circumstances are in terms of reasons for immigration, since these circumstances and experiences affect the way individuals adapt to the United States (Fong, 2004).

A refugee, also referred to as an “involuntary immigrant,” is defined as a person who has fled his or her country because of fear of persecution (Ethiopian Community
The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) defines a refugee as:

Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (USCIS, n.d, para. 1).

In essence, a refugee does not freely select or plan to settle in the United States but is forced by circumstances to flee his or her country (Ogbu, 1998). Currently, refugees comprise 10% of annual immigration to the United States (Singer & Wilson, 2007).

An immigrant (also referred to as a voluntary immigrant), on the other hand, is a person who made a decision to relocate and establish a new and permanent home in a different country (Fong, 2004). According to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), about 20% of all youth in America are currently from immigrant families.

Because immigrants and refugees settle in the United States for different reasons, they have different issues with which they have to deal (Fong, 2004). Ogbu (2003) discusses the differences between voluntary immigrants and involuntary immigrants (refugees). Immigrants view education as a means to better life and strive to overcome barriers by acquiring the dominant language and developing other skills needed for their success. However, refugees often view education as a means of establishing the ways of the dominant culture and tend to reject the established rules. Involuntary immigrants often take longer to acquire English language. This could have an impact on their involvement (or lack of it) in their children's education because language and communication have been identified as important components of the
parent involvement process (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Watts, White & Trlin, 2001), and have also been reported as major barriers to parent involvement in education (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Kauffman, Perry & Prentiss, 2001; Peterson & Ladky, 2007).

Many refugee children and families experience adjustment problems as they enter their new homes (Fong, 2004). As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) state, immigrants and refugees are in the borders of two ways of life, belonging neither “here” nor “there.” In order to be able to draw specific conclusions about refugees, it is therefore necessary to put into consideration the unique differences between refugees and voluntary immigrants.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The majority of the studies available on minority groups in the United States are mostly focus on African Americans and Mexican immigrants (Nderu, 2005). Also, there are few studies that specifically address parental involvement of refugee immigrants. There are even fewer studies that focus directly on the education and parental involvement among refugees who resettle in the United States from Africa. At best, refugees are included in the immigrant studies. Refugee families share certain characteristics with other groups of immigrants (Loewen, 2004) and therefore these studies can be used to some extent to draw some general conclusions regarding refugees. For the literature review, I used mostly literature on minorities and immigrants.

Models of Parent Involvement

There are several models of parent involvement that have been developed. Some of the existing ones include those by Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000), Eccles and Harold, (1996), and Epstein (1995).

Kohl et al. (2000) delineated six dimensions of parent-initiated and teacher-initiated parent involvement. These dimensions include: (a) parent-teacher contact; (b) parent involvement at school; (c) quality of parent-teacher relationship; (d) teacher’s perception of parent’s value of education; (e) parent involvement at home; and (f) parent endorsement of school.
The current study grouped parental involvement variables into categories more like those described by Kohl et al. (2000) because these variables include most dimensions of parent involvement that I was interested in measuring.

Parent Involvement in the African Context

In our culture [Somali], you send the kids to school and they are the school’s responsibility (Parent quote in Nderu, 2005, p. 81).

In the past, education was viewed as the exclusive sphere of influence of the school, which resulted in minimal, if any parent involvement (Mestry, 2004). This is still the case in many African countries even to date. In the context of many African countries, for example in Ghana, parent involvement entails the parents’ responsibility for daily care and for school fee payments, while teachers’ responsibility is to teach (Sefa Dei, 2004). According to Mestry (2004), in South Africa, most parents are not meaningfully involved in their children’s education. This is evidenced by low attendance at parent-teacher meetings, lack of interest in learners’ school work and homework and their limited involvement in fundraising projects. In Kenya, Miguel (1999) noted that the level of parent involvement is particularly low in schools that are ethnically heterogeneous. Ackers, Migoli and Nzomo (2001) pointed out that in most Kenyan primary schools (the equivalent of elementary through middle school in the United States), the schools see the parent as a source of funding and meaningful involvement beyond that is often discouraged.

In Nderu’s study of parent involvement of Somali refugees in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, she found that many of the parents in the study grew up with the notion that the school and the home are separate entities (Nderu, 2005), so it is a surprise for them
when they come to the United States and schools expect them to be actively involved in their children’s education.

Public Policy Related to Parent Involvement in the United States

Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children (Goal 8 – National Education Goals).

In the United States, parent involvement is the eighth goal of the National Education Goals of 2000. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act recognizes parental involvement as a crucial component of school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The NCLB further calls for educators and parents to share information and decisions regarding the enhancement of family involvement programs. The NCLB was a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The parental involvement provisions in Title 1, Part A of the ESEA reflected principles that stress the shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

One of the four “common sense” principles that NCLB uses to achieve its goals is involving parents by giving them information and choices about their children's education (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Under NCLB, states, districts and schools are required to develop ways to get parents more involved in their children's education and in improving their children's schools. For instance, both Title I districts and schools must have written policies on parental involvement and provide this information to the parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Section 1118 of NCLB requires each school district that receives Title 1 Part A funds to implement programs, activities and procedures for the involvement of parents, including parents with limited
English proficiency and parents of “migratory children” (NCLB, 2004). Furthermore, school districts that receive more than $500,000 per year in Title 1 funds are required to allot no less than 1% of the funds for parent involvement activities. Schools and districts are also required to provide materials and training for parents to help them improve their children’s achievement and to train school staff on how to work with parents as equal partners (Moles, 2001).

Because of evidence of the importance of parent involvement in education, many states have endorsed legislation intended to improve parent involvement in schools. Texas is one of 17 states that direct all districts, boards of education, and schools to employ parent involvement policies. Texas is also among 15 states that encourage, support, expect or direct employers to enable parents to attend school activities such as parent/teacher conferences (Zinth, 2005).

The National Research Council (NRC) recommends that early childhood programs build relationships with parents to develop equally beneficial learning environments for young children at home and at school (National Research Council, 2001)

Benefits of Parent Involvement

The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, p. 300).

Research in parent involvement points out that parent involvement has benefits for students, schools and the parents themselves (Comer, 2005). Epstein (2001) indicated that partnerships between parents, schools and communities produce great benefits for the schools and their students. Parent involvement in education is believed to be a promising means to close the achievement gap between ethnic majority
students and their ethnic minority counterparts in the United States (Lahaie, 2008; Wong, 2005). Results from Lahaie’s (2008) study revealed that parental involvement “decreases the gap in math scores between children of immigrants and children of the native born by a third of a standard deviation” (p. 684).

The benefits of parent involvement in their children’s education apply to all ethnic groups (Jeynes, 2003). Parent involvement may even be more beneficial for refugee students. Jackson and Davis (2000) assert that encouraging parent involvement is particularly essential in helping recent immigrant children have a smooth transition to U.S schools. Jackson and Davis further stated that parent involvement can help bridge cultural gaps that exist between home and school lives of language minority students, regardless of how long they had lived in the United States.

**Student Benefits**

*Academic Benefits*

Parent involvement has been documented as a very important aspect of children’s education, with decades of research supporting the role parents play in their children’s education (Ford & Amaral, 2006).

There is copious literature linking parent involvement and student achievement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Brandon, 2007; Comer, 2005; Couchenour & Chrisman, 2008; DeHass, 2005). There is also increased evidence from extant literature that parent involvement results in improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates. These improvements are true regardless of families’ economic, racial, or cultural background (Tinkler, 2002). In a study of Caribbean immigrants, Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan and Evans (2006) found that when
parents monitored their children’s activities, including keeping track of their academic progress in school, children seemed to gain academically.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) showed that parent involvement in children’s learning is positively related to achievement. They further explained that the achievement effects are more beneficial when parents are involved more intensively in their children’s learning. This is true for all dimensions of parental involvement in children’s learning and for all types and ages of students.

All children gain greatly when their parents are responsive to, conversant of, and encouraging about school experiences of their children. A report by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) examined current research on the benefits that students reap when schools support and encourage parent involvement. It is clear from the research that no matter what the families’ education level, income or ethnic background, children are more likely to regularly attend school, have better social skills, adapt well to school, graduate from high school and enroll in higher level programs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Other studies have shown evidence that children of involved parents tend to make higher grades and enjoy school more than children whose parents are not involved (Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005). In a study of 71 Title 1 elementary schools that the Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, the researchers found that in schools where teachers involved the parents more, test scores grew at a rate 40% higher than in schools with lower levels of parent involvement.
Literacy Achievement

Research has shown parent involvement to be related to improvement in children’s reading skills. When parents are involved in reading activities at home with their children, the children reap significant benefits not only in reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, & Welsh, 2004), but also in children’s interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Wade & Moore, 2000). Flouri and Buchanan (2004) posited that parental involvement in their child’s literacy development is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.

Children whose home literacy environments are richer exhibit higher levels of reading knowledge and skills at kindergarten entry (Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler, 2000). Research also shows that the earlier parents become involved in their children’s literacy practices, the more meaningful the results and the longer-lasting the effects (Mullis, Mullis, Cornille, Ritchson, & Sullender, 2004). Moreover, of all school subjects, reading has been found to be most sensitive to parental influences (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

In 2006, Morrow, Kuhn and Schwanenflugel conducted a study with 129 second-grade pupils. Three classes were placed in the control group, and three similar classes were placed in the Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) program. Parents were encouraged to follow the program at home. At the end of the year, parent, teacher and student surveys revealed improvements in reading for the participants whose parents were involved in reading at home. Morrow, Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2006) found that
“Home-school connections can support fluency development for all readers, including at-risk students and English language learners.”

Quigley (2000) studied a group of third graders who participated in an educational program involving parent-child communication, parenting and home learning activities; those in the program demonstrated more improvement in reading skills. With funding from the National Institute for Family Literacy, the National Center for Family Literacy conducted a meta-analysis on research literature to find out what effects parent involvement had on children from kindergarten to third grade. Twenty interventions, representing 1,583 families, demonstrated clearly that parent involvement positively affected children’s reading acquisition (Darling & Westberg, 2004).

It is also important to note that the benefits of parent involvement persist over time. For example, in a study of 261 Head Start children and parents, Mantizicopoulos (2003) found a positive relationship between parent involvement activities such as keeping in touch with a teacher, volunteering in the classroom and attending school activities and children’s promotion after kindergarten into the first grade.

Social Competence

Children also make great gains socially when their parents are involved in their schools. Research has shown that those children whose parents are involved demonstrate superior social and emotional development. In a study of 307 ethnic minority children, McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen and Sekino (2004) found that when parents have direct and regular contact with school, their children display positive engagement with their peers, adults, and learning. McWayne et al. further found that children of parents who had less direct school contact tended to exhibit more problem
behaviors in school. Prior and Gerard (2007) cited parent involvement as one of the primary prevention techniques for bullying problems in schools, noting that lack of parent involvement provides fertile ground for bullying in schools. Using sixth graders as participants in their study, Simons-Morton and Crump (2003) confirmed the importance of parent involvement in school adjustment and engagement.

A study by Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry and Childs (2004) revealed that children whose parents were involved in school-based activities (for example, volunteering and attending parent teacher conferences) as well as in home-based involvement activities (such as reading to children and taking them to the library) were less likely to exhibit conduct problems in the classroom.

Parent involvement has been shown to increase children’s positive attitudes toward school, as well as to improve their attendance and homework habits (Prior & Gerard, 2007). According to Prior and Gerard, when parents are involved in their children’s education, the children tend to see a connection between their home and school.

School Benefits

When parents are involved in their children’s school, the schools reap great benefits too. Improving parent involvement in schools is greatly significant for pushing the school systems to higher standards (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005).

Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) revealed that reading scores grew at a rate of 50% higher, and math scores 40% higher, for schools that reported high levels of outreach to parents. When schools’ academic scores are high, those schools tend to be ranked higher.
Schools that have more parent involvement tend to have more improved teacher morale than those schools with low levels of parent involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Secondly, teachers get higher ratings by parents when they reach out and involve the parents. Third, when schools involve parents, they receive more support from the families they serve and better reputation from the community (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). According to the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) (NCPIE, n.d.), when parents are involved at home and at school, schools get better and attain higher student performance.

Family Benefits

When parents are involved in their children’s schooling, they develop more confidence in the school and even become more effective advocates in matters related to their children’s education (Comer, 2005). Comer further stated that higher involvement levels among parents motivated them to further their own education and to secure jobs and promotions that they previously believed were out of reach.

According to the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) (NPTA, 2000), parents who are more involved in their children’s education experience higher self esteem, feel more confident in their decision making and are more skilled at using community agencies to meet family and child needs. Additionally, more-involved parents tend to be more sensitive to their children's social, emotional and intellectual development needs.

Parents who are more involved with their children's education become more conversant about school goals and procedures (Hill & Taylor, 2004) and are able to better communicate the importance of education to their children (Lareau, 2000). Harris
and Wimer (2004) reported that parents who participated more tended to be more satisfied with their children’s schools than parents who did not participate. González-Mena (2006) posited that when parent involvement takes the form of family support, there is likelihood that it can lessen parental stress level and make parents lives easier.

Other benefits to families that Harris and Wimer (2004) mentioned include:

- Better connections among parents, children, and communities
- Increase in support and services to families
- Improved family relationships.

### Barriers and Challenges to Parent Involvement

All types of families want their children to succeed in school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). However, not every family has the resources or opportunities to be involved in children's education. Newcomer parents frequently convey concern about their children's education and are not certain about their role in their children’s learning process (Strohl, Jecklin, & Dixon, 2005).

Even though research has provided a consistent stack of evidence that, regardless of economic status, cultural or ethnic background, parent involvement plays a role in children’s academic, social and emotional well-being, barriers exist that impede many African refugee families’ participation in their children’s educations. These barriers include language/communication barriers, cultural barriers, and scheduling barriers. These barriers are discussed in the following section.

### Scheduling or Time Barriers

Lack of time or work obligations is a major impediment to parent involvement (Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001). Indeed, as Moles (2001) stated, lack of time for the
parents as well as school staff seems to be at the top of the list of impediments to parent involvement. Many refugee parents have busy lives, having to work two or more low-paying jobs to get by (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2003). Furthermore, when given a chance to work overtime, they prefer to take the opportunity, which makes it hard for them to find time to get involved in school activities or to help their children at home (ISBE, 2003).

Finding time to be involved in their children’s education is a challenge for many parents regardless of their background (Jackson & Davis, 2000). When school events or parent teacher conferences are scheduled during the work day, some parents are not able to attend. In other cases, the school might be far away from the family’s home or workplace, which creates a challenge for parent involvement. Lahaie (2008) cited lack of transportation to participate in school programs and events as a barrier to parent involvement among immigrant parents. According to C. Mwita, refugee families face problems of transportation since they often do not own vehicles (C. Mwita, personal communication, September 9, 2008). Time can also be a barrier even for teachers, who are already overburdened with meeting many other expectations (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2002).

*Language and Communication Barriers*

Communication is an important factor in the enhancement of parent involvement. Indeed, communication is one of the six types of parental involvement which Epstein (1995) espoused. Hiatt-Michael (2001) pointed out that children undergo less stress as they navigate between the school and home cultures when there is better communication between the home and school.
Language plays a very vital role in the task that refugee families face as they try to fit into their new homes (Watts, White, & Trlin, 2001). Among children in immigrant families, 72% speak a language other than English (Shields, 2004). Among other challenges refugees face is the challenge of acquiring a new language (Loewen, 2004).

An Urban Institute report by Fix and Passel (2003) showed that 5% of the students in U.S schools are categorized as having limited English proficiency (LEP). Of these, 30% have been in the United States for 10 years or more. Also worth noting from the Urban Institute report is that 80% of LEP students live in families where all parents are themselves LEP. Having limited English proficiency makes interaction a source of stress for parents and creates a hurdle for schools that are trying to effectively engage their students’ parents (ISBE, 2003).

Most African refugee families arrive in the United States with little or no English language skills (Nderu, 2005) and face linguistic barriers when they resettle in the United States (Shields, 2004). Because of this language barrier, they might not be as involved in their children’s education as they need to be. Teachers frequently complain about the lack of involvement among immigrant parents (Protheroe, 2006).

Limited communication with families facing language barriers has been identified as one reason that refugee families are not involved in their children’s schools (Kauffman et al., 2001). The lack of English language proficiency is a deterrent to parent involvement among immigrant families (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) affirmed that it is a challenge for families who are English language learners (ELL) to be optimally involved in their children’s education. If the
refugee children and their families do not speak English well, this may create an extra challenge for the schools to involve families in their child’s education.

Language can be a barrier to successful parent involvement (Peterson & Ladky, 2007) in various ways. For example, Peterson and Ladky (2007) pointed out that when parents don’t speak the language used in school, they may lack the confidence to become more involved in their children’s schools.

In a parent involvement study of Korean immigrant mothers in the United States, Sohn and Wang (2006) found that regardless of the length of time the participants had been in the United States, the most frequently cited barrier to parent involvement was the linguistic barrier. One participant in the study expressed her exasperation by saying, “Although I really want to communicate with my child’s teacher, I felt frustrated when the teacher often did not understand my English” (p. 128).

Further more, many immigrant parents may not be conversant with some educational jargon used in the school, which makes it harder for them to participate in school events (Peterson & Ladky, 2007). One participant in Sohn and Wang’s study said:

I don’t know educational terms in English. For example, I did not know these English words like “curriculum,” “substitute teacher,” “time-out,” and so on. So when I have to use these kinds of educational terms, I feel stuck (p. 128).

Jackson and Davis (2000) pointed out that immigrant parents who are not proficient in English tend to be reluctant to approach their children’s schools because of communication difficulty. A report by the Illinois State Board of Education (2003) confirmed that immigrant and refugee parents are hesitant to participate in school activities where spoken English is necessary. For example, they shy away from
activities such as making calls to the school to report student absences, participating in parent-teacher conferences, or volunteering in classroom or field activities.

Most schools primarily communicate with parents using written materials. If these materials are written in English only, many refugee parents might not be able to read them (ISBE, 2003). In many cases, parents use their children as translators for both written and oral communication from school personnel. However, children are not reliable translators and might not relay the messages accurately (ISBE, 2003). Additionally, Morland (2004) cautioned against using children as interpreters because parents may not be comfortable sharing some information with their children.

Cultural Barriers

A lot of parents come to this country and do not know how to support their children. They do not know how to go to school and advocate for their kids. The children are left to sink or swim. Sandy Dang, quoted by Mary Beth Sheridan (2005, ¶10).

Because of the unfamiliarity with a completely new culture, refugee students and their families encounter many challenges as they transition into the American school system (Georgia Department of Human Services, 2007). Refugee families arrive in the United States with cultures that are different from the American culture. African refugee families may hail from cultures where it is not an expectation for parents to assume an active role in their children’s education or where parents’ roles are very different from what the American school system expects (ISBE, 2003). For example, refugee parents from Liberia may need encouragement to become more active participants in their children’s schooling, attending school conferences and meetings, and other parent involvement activities, which are not always the norm in Liberian education (Schmidt,
In many African cultures from which African refugee families hail, families trust the teachers to know what they are doing, and prefer not to “meddle” in the teachers’ affairs (Colley, 2005).

Cultural differences between families and schools pose challenges for schools trying to develop parent involvement policies that are successful (Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007). An Illinois State Board of Education report (2003) indicates that refugee parents may see the school as a threat to the preservation of their language and culture, hence their reluctance to participate in their children’s schools.

When parents stay away from schools, school personnel may perceive that refugee parents do not care about their children’s education (ISBE, 2003). These perceptions may be based on cultural misunderstandings on the parts of both the parents and the school personnel.

**Low Levels of Parental Education**

Parent education has been recognized in previous research as an important predictor of parent involvement (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Liu, 2000). According to Parker et al. (1996), many parents are ill at ease about their levels of education and fear that they are not educated enough to be helpful in the classroom. Lahaie (2008) also indicated that parents with little formal education have to deal with many barriers to involvement in their children’s education. Protheroe (2006) posited that adults in many immigrant families have limited formal education and might lack the understanding of the educational system or the confidence to become more involved in their children’s education.
Shields and Behrman (2004) showed that children in immigrant families are much less likely than children in U.S.-born families to have parents who have graduated from high school. Of children in U.S.-born families, 12% of mothers and 12% of fathers are not high school graduates. On the other hand, for children with foreign-born parents, 23% of mothers and 40% of fathers are not high school graduates (Hernández, 2004). Research has shown a negative correlation between parents’ level of education and the level of involvement in their children’s education.

Preparing Educators to Involve African Refugee Families

Expanded parental involvement requirements necessitate that we learn how parents in diverse communities can affect student learning, confront traditional barriers between schools and communities, and involve parents of all backgrounds (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002).

With the ever-increasing levels of immigration to the United States, teachers are receiving more students from diverse backgrounds into their classrooms (Hiatt-Michael, 2007). For the most part, the teacher has the enormous responsibility of ensuring that these children succeed in their academic endeavor. It is thus very important for teachers to reach out to the children’s families in an effort to ensure that these children attain their potential.

Teachers can help African refugee parents realize the value of their participation by welcoming them into the school experience (Prior & Gerard, 2007). However, according to Epstein (2001, p. 5), “most teachers are presently unprepared to work with their students’ families.” Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2002) stated that pre-service teachers generally receive minimal preparation on how to involve parents.
Epstein believes that many educators do not adequately understand the backgrounds, languages, cultures and other characteristics of their students or families. Teachers receive little, if any, training specifically on refugee families and lack knowledge about the refugee experience and cultural differences (McBrien, 2005; Nizigiyama, n.d.).

Fong (2004) pointed out that refugee families face many adjustment challenges. It is important that teachers have a better understanding of the refugee families’ cultures and practices. Fong further noted that working with refugee populations necessitates knowledge of their social and cultural environments and warned against assuming that immigrant and refugee families of the same ethnic group come from identical social backgrounds.

Cultural competence has been identified as a necessity for eliciting family involvement (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2008). Educators need to be culturally competent in order to be able to meaningfully engage and involve families from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and López as cited in Couchenour and Chrisman (2008) listed some knowledge and skills that are central in helping teachers become culturally competent, including:

- Awareness of the teachers’ beliefs and prejudices that influence building partnerships with all families
- Knowledge about cultural variations in parenting and education
- Skills in gaining translators and creating ways to communicate with all families
- Knowledge of variations in communication styles of various groups of people
- Skills to incorporate family “funds of knowledge” into student learning at home and at school.
McDermott (2008) underscored the fact that it is important for educators to learn about the diversity within and among the families who they work with. She further pointed out that it is crucial for educators to become culturally competent by learning about various cultures as this helps them become aware of the range of possible parent beliefs and behaviors for all parents. It is also important for educators not to assume that parents from the same culture are the same. For example, a teacher might assume that all African refugee families are the same, based on the fact that they all come from Africa. However, the many African nations from which refugees hail encompass a wide array of religions, cultures, and social practices (Stephen, 2000), which might affect parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Teachers can also learn about their African refugee families’ cultures and backgrounds by reading both fiction and nonfiction literature by persons from those cultures (McDermott, 2008).

Child welfare workers in a study of refugee families in Texas voiced their concern that schools and teachers do not reach out to refugee parents to involve them in their children’s education (Ilze, 2005) and recommended in-service training for all refugee service providers so as to “ensure continuity of knowledge for practice” (p.12). The authors of the study further found that school personnel are not always aware or culturally responsive about issues in refugee families. However, when teachers encourage refugee families to get involved in their children’s education, the parents are more comfortable in going to the school (Ilze, 2005).

Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, and Moore (2002) posited that teachers face the challenging barrier of connecting with families that don’t “look like” their own. Even though it is unrealistic to expect teachers to know everything about the languages and
cultures of every child in their classroom, Kyle et al. emphasized that teachers need to have an attitude of willingness to learn more about the different cultures represented in their classrooms. This desire to learn is a great starting point in the teachers’ ability to engage the children’s families meaningfully.

Teachers and parents possess distinctive, often different knowledge and experience about the children that can be harnessed to help refugee students have an easier transition into their new schools and have successful educational experiences (Hiatt-Michael, 2007). The teachers have educational resources and training and bring their educational experiences to the situation. Immigrant families have a wealth of knowledge concerning their children and their culture as well as their language (Hiatt-Michael, 2007). Involvement of refugee families in their children’s educations may make it easier for teachers to better help the children achieve success. When teachers reach out to refugee families, the families feel more at ease and are more inclined to involvement, hence heightening the likelihood of the child’s success. Good relations between teachers and parents enable both parties to better understand children’s activities and learning practices in the school and home environments (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006). This is true for children and families from all ethnic backgrounds.

In its Guide to Building Successful Partnerships Process manual, the National Parent-Teacher Association (2008) recommends continuing education for all school stakeholders about the importance of family involvement in children’s academic experience, and the crucial roles they can play. Thus, it is important that educators are aware of the impact of family involvement on student achievement.
Conclusion

The literature review forcefully speaks in favor of parent involvement, both at home and at school, regardless of the family’s ethnicity, social economic status or nationality. It is therefore important to invest in the healthy development of all children, including refugee children by fostering parental involvement. The whole country benefits when all children receive the support they need today to become America’s productive, engaged citizens of the future (Shields & Behrman, 2004).

When refugee families resettle in the United States they face many challenges (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services, 2007). These challenges hinder participation and involvement in their children’s education. Schools and teachers can better serve African refugee families by employing strategies such as hiring bilingual staff and forming partnerships with refugee-serving organizations. Additionally, schools can offer leadership training to refugee parents (Petsod, Wang, & McGarvey, 2006). These strategies make it possible for refugee parents to become more actively involved in school programs and to help improve their children’s education.
CHAPTER 3
PROCEDURES FOR THE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

I examined parent involvement of African refugee parents, the barriers they face and the strategies they believe would work to help them increase their involvement in their children’s education. Further, the study examined how teachers involve African refugee parents, what they perceive to be the barriers to African refugee parent involvement and what strategies they recommend to improve parent involvement of African refugee parents. The following sections describe the elements of the surveys and interviews, the characteristics of the sample, the procedures followed for the data collection, and the statistical procedures used for data analysis.

Research Design

The design of this study was a mixed method research. I utilized the survey method to acquire data from a sample of 61 parents who had emigrated from seven African countries to the United States on refugee status. The 61 participants had at least one child attending private or public elementary school (pre-K thru 5th grade). Six of these parents agreed to participate in an in-depth face-to-face or telephone interview. Twenty teachers of participating parents’ children completed parent-teacher involvement survey online.

Parent involvement was measured using two surveys, (a) the Parent and Teacher Involvement – Parent Version, and (b) the Parent and Teacher Involvement – Teacher Version, as well as open-ended, face-to-face or telephone interviews. Barriers to parent involvement were measured using the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey.
and in-depth, open-ended, or face-to-face interviews with parents as well as open-ended survey questions that the teachers answered.

Location of Study

This study was conducted in four localities in North, South, and Northwest Texas. The participants were from the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, Houston, and San Antonio regions. These regions have been identified as being central in the regional areas where immigrants and refugees are presently being resettled in Texas (Ilze, 2005). Figure 1 shows the percentage growth of the foreign-born population in the United States, Texas, and six major Texas metropolitan areas.

Figure 1. Percentage growth of the foreign-born population in the United States, Texas and six major Texas metropolitan areas. (Petersen & Assanie, 2005).

Research Participants

The parent population sample for this study was limited to African refugee families with children attending elementary school. Since different school districts have different grades that constitute the elementary school years, “elementary school” for this study referred to grade pre-K through 5th grade. The sample population for this study
was refugees of African descent who have resettled in the United States within the last 10 years.

Teachers of the children of participating African refugee families automatically qualified to participate in the study. Demographic details of the teachers, such as age and teaching experience were not a consideration for participation in this study. There were 20 teacher participants. The reason for such a small number in comparison with the number of parent participants was that some school districts did not allow me to involve their teachers in the study, and also many of the parent participants did not know their children’s school or teacher names which made it difficult for me to obtain teacher information. Sixty-two percent of the parents knew their children’s school name while 37.7% did not know school name. Only 36.07% knew their children’s teacher name while 63.93% did not know teacher name.

Procedures

This study utilized quantitative (paper-and-pencil survey and online survey) and qualitative (in-depth face-to-face and telephone interviews) methods of data collection. Parent participants responded to a survey that I and a trained assistant administered. According to Groves et al. (2004), face-to-face survey administration has been found to increase response rates and to motivate respondents to give correct information. The decision to conduct face-to-face survey administration was based on the fact that many of the respondents had low levels of English and literacy proficiency; therefore the likelihood of responding to mail-in, self-administered surveys was low. As Groves et al. (2004) indicated, mail-in surveys would not be appropriate for those with low literacy
since they might not comprehend the questions. This made a strong case for the face-to-face survey administration.

I administered the surveys in participants' homes, at a church for African refugees in Fort Worth, and at a language learning center in San Antonio. In a few cases, an interpreter assisted me with participants who did not understand English or Kiswahili.

After the initial parent survey administration, I conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with 6 participants. These participants were selected based on the fact that they had agreed to be interviewed when they completed the survey.

The teacher participants responded to an online survey. I obtained permission from participating school districts and contacted the schools that had participating families. After getting the teachers’ email addresses from the principals, I sent the teachers a link to the survey, which they completed.

Instrumentation

Garson (2008) advised that whenever possible, the researcher should use standard items that have been validated in other settings, positing that:

In addition to heightened validity, use of standards enables the researcher to make better comparisons of his/her results with those of other researchers using the same standard instruments. Even if unique items are needed for the local research setting, it is helpful to use standard instruments to determine the correlation of local items with standard items (frequently asked questions section, ¶ 1).

For the present study, I utilized three instruments to collect the quantitative data. Two of these instruments are the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Parent Version (PTIQ-PV) (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group [CPPRG], 1991), and the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Teacher Version (PTIQ-TV)
(CPPRG, 1991). I obtained permission to use these two instruments from the CPPRG project director. The third instrument used was the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey (BPIS), adapted from the Orange County Public School’s (2005) Parental Involvement Survey. These three instruments are discussed in detail in the section that follows.

**Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Parent Version**

To gather the data from parents, I used the CPPRG Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Parent Version. The instrument contains 26 items that evaluate the type and amount of contact that takes place between parents and teachers. It further assesses the parents’ interest and comfort in talking with their children’s teachers, the parents’ satisfaction with their children's school, and the parents’ degree of involvement in the children’s educations (e.g., reading to them, taking them to the library, volunteering at school, attending school events). The answers are coded on a 5-point Likert scale that includes specific frequency ratings ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once per week); general impressions of frequency ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). Ratings for level of agreement with statements about school ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Corrigan (2002) reported 4 factors within the PTIQ-PV and constructed corresponding subscales:

- Quality of the relationship between parent and teacher (Items 11-17)
- Parent’s involvement and volunteering at school (Items 5-7, 9, 10, 18-22)
- Parent’s endorsement of child’s school (Items 23-26)
- Frequency of parent-teacher contact (Items 1-4)
A psychometric analysis was conducted for both a normative sample of families and a high-risk sample. The subscale Cronbach’s alphas for the combined normative and high-risk sample, the normative sample, and the high-risk sample are in Table 2.

Table 2

*Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Parent and Teacher Involvement Measure: Parent Version*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>Normative</th>
<th>High-risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the relationship between parent and teacher</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement and volunteering</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s endorsement of child’s school</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>.905</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of parent-teacher contact</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td>.658</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data from Corrigan (2002)*

In order to gather information about the parent respondent, I added a section on demographics. These include the age of the respondent, length of stay in the United States, relationship to child, country and other general demographic information.

**Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey**

Since the CPPRG (1991) parent involvement survey did not address the barriers that parents face as they try to become more involved in their children’s education, I adapted 6 questions from the Orange County Public School's (2005) Blue Ribbon Panel on Education Parent Involvement Survey. The answers on the challenges are coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Each response has 1 to 5 points assigned to it, with 1 representing *no barriers* and 5 representing a *high level of barriers*. I also included 2 open-ended questions in the
survey that address any additional barriers not addressed on the Likert-style section of the survey and to identify strategies that schools and families can use to enhance African refugee parent involvement in education.

In order to establish the internal consistency of the additional items, I had a pilot group complete the survey. An analysis of the pilot test survey yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .909 for the instrument.

*Parent and Teacher Involvement Measure: Teacher Version*

Data from the teacher participants was collected using the CPPRG Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Teacher Version. The original survey is a 21-item measure which assesses the amount and type of contact that occurs between parents and teachers, the parents’ interest and comfort in talking with teachers, the parents’ satisfaction with their children’s school and the parents’ degree of academic stimulation with their children (e.g., reading to them, taking them to the library). The answers are coded on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents *no involvement* and 5 represents *high involvement*.

Malone (2000) conducted a psychometric analysis on the instrument, which yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .906. Malone identified 3 factors within the instrument, which were verified using principal component analysis and constructed corresponding subscales:

- Parent comfort and endorsement of school (Items 12-18, 20, 21)
- Parent involvement (Items 5, 6, 7, 11, 19)
- Parent-teacher contact (Items 1-4, 8, 9)
Three additional open-ended questions were included in order to address the challenges teachers face as they try to involve African refugee parents, and what strategies they think that schools and families can employ to improve involvement of African refugee parents.

Variables

**Parent Involvement at Home**

Parents reported their involvement at home on activities such as reading to their children, playing games with them and taking them to the library. They responded to the questions on the PTIQ-PV.

**Parent Involvement at School**

African refugee parents reported their parent involvement in their child’s activities such as volunteering at the school, attendance at school activities, and parent-teacher conferences, by 6 items on the PTIQ-PV. The child’s parent was asked to rate themselves on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once per week). Likewise, the child’s teacher was asked to rate the parent on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once per week) on the parent’s involvement at school using the Parent and Teacher Involvement-Teacher Version.

**Frequency of Parent-teacher Contact**

The frequency and type of contact between parents and teachers was measured by 5 items on the PTIQ-TV and 4 items on the PTIQ-PV. The children’s parents rated themselves on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) and 5 (more than once per week). Similarly, the children’s teachers rated the parents on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) and 5 (more than once per week).
Quality of the Relationship between Parent and Teacher

The African refugee parents responded to 7 items on the PTIQ-PV regarding their interest and comfort in talking with their children’s teachers. The children’s parents rated themselves on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (more than once per week).

Comfort and Endorsement of School

The parents’ interest and comfort in talking with teachers and the parents’ approval of their children’s schools were assessed by 9 items on the PTIQ-TV and 4 items on the PTIQ-PV. The children’s parents rated themselves on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). The children’s teachers rated the parents on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very interested).

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parents responded to the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey. The items on the survey included whether or not it was difficult for the parents to attend parent-teacher conferences, and if so, what were the barriers they faced. Additionally, the parents responded to 2 open-ended questions on what they thought would be the best strategies (employed by themselves or the teachers and the schools) to help them increase their involvement in their children’s educations.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Prior research has indicated that foreign-born parents are less likely than white, native-born parents to participate in their children’s education at home and at school, and that foreign-born parents reported a larger number and degree of barriers to involvement than their American-born counterparts (Turnkey & Kao, 2006). The purpose of the current study was to examine the extent, if any, to which African refugee parents were involved in the education of their elementary school children. African refugee parents and their children’s teachers completed the parent involvement surveys. This study also examined the barriers that parents faced in getting involved in their children’s education, as well as barriers that the teachers faced in trying to get the African refugee parents involved in their children’s school. The study further explored strategies that parents and teachers could employ in order to enhance parent involvement among African refugee parents.

Extant research has recognized gender, level of parental education, and level of English proficiency as important predictors of parent involvement. The current study examined the differences in parent involvement between African refugee parents of different gender, education level, English proficiency and length of stay in the United States.

Data were gathered from 61 African refugee parents using the Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Parent Version (PTIQ-PV), the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey (BPIS) and in-depth interviews. The 61 parents were representative
of 61 families. Only 1 parent per family responded to the survey. Twenty teachers of participating parents’ children responded to an online Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire: Teacher Version (PTIQ-TV).

This chapter presents the findings of the study and a detailed discussion of the results. The findings are categorized around the research questions on which the study was based, which were presented in Chapter 3. Respondents’ demographic characteristics are presented in detail.

Data Screening and Analysis Procedures

The full data set for the parent respondents was screened using SPSS® statistical and data management package (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, www.spss.com) software to check for missing data, homogeneity of variance normal distribution and outliers. I analyzed individual histograms for each variable to check for kurtosis and skewness.

Responses from the survey items were analyzed using frequency distributions and analysis of variance (ANOVA) both performed using SPSS® statistical and data management package software. Frequency distributions were used to organize and summarize demographic information, parent involvement and barriers to parent involvement.

For the analysis of the open-ended questions and the in-depth interview data, I transcribed the information from the digital voice recorder, and utilized Weft QDA, a free, open-source qualitative analysis software application, to sort the responses into categories.
Deleting Cases with Missing Data

Missing value is one of the most persistent problems in data analysis. The seriousness depends on the pattern of missing information, how much is missing, and why it is missing (Graham, Cumsille, & Elek-Fisk, 2003). If less than 5% of data are missing randomly from a data set, the problems are less serious and almost any procedure for handling missing values can be used without altering the results. No firm guidelines exist for how much missing data can be tolerated for a sample of a given size.

Analysis of the current data set revealed 2 parent respondents (3.2%), with missing data. The 2 respondents answered only demographic questions and could not answer the other questions on the survey. One of the respondents had arrived in the United States barely 2 months before the survey was administered, and his child had been in the school for only 1 month. Since most of the questions referred to the last school year, he had not had sufficient interaction with the teacher or school to respond to the questions. The other respondent was the child’s grandmother and she felt she did not have sufficient information to answer the questions. These 2 surveys were excluded from the analysis.

I then obtained descriptive statistics on the intact data set of 61 respondents. Frequency histograms were obtained to determine whether the continuous variables were normally distributed. Individual histograms were analyzed for the five parent involvement variables (quality of relationship between parent and teacher, frequency of parent-teacher contact, parents’ endorsement of school, parent involvement at home and parent involvement at school) and barriers to parent involvement to check for
kurtosis and skewness. Table 3 shows the descriptive data for each of the dependent variables used in the study. No outliers were detected in the data.

Table 3

**Descriptive Data for Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of relationship</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.106</td>
<td>-.503</td>
<td>-.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of contact</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.481</td>
<td>1.036</td>
<td>.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ endorsement of school</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>-1.920</td>
<td>2.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at home</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.921</td>
<td>1.974</td>
<td>4.194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at school</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to parent involvement</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Maximum score = 5*

Normality concerning skewness and kurtosis was evident among all dependent variables except for parents' endorsement of school (kurtosis = 2.307) and parent involvement at home (kurtosis = 4.194). These numbers were slightly higher than normal but because they were still within a couple of points of 2, no transformations were made. Furthermore, the data met assumptions for other statistical testing such as the analysis of variance (ANOVA) that I used to analyze results.

**Demographic Data**

The first part of the parent survey requested respondents to provide demographic information including age, gender, relationship to child, number of years in the United States, and highest level of education. Other demographic information included how many children the family had in elementary school, level of English proficiency, and
country of origin. The responses were evaluated to provide background information on characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study.

In total, 61 African refugee parents responded to the parent involvement survey. The participants represented a total of 7 different African countries. Most of the participants were from Burundi, 27 (44.26%), followed by Somalia, 18 (29.5%). There were 7 participants from Congo (11.48%) and 3 (4.92%) from Sudan. Rwanda and Liberia had 2 participants each (3.29%) while Sierra Leone and Tanzania had 1 participant each (1.62%). The representative trend was consistent with the recent pattern of refugee resettlement in the Texas. For example, in the fiscal year 2007, Texas accepted more refugees from Burundi than any other state (ORR, 2007).

More females, 38 (62.30%), participated in the study than males 23 (37.70%). Thirty seven out of the 38 female participants reported that they were a child’s mother, while 1 was a sister to a child. Of the 23 male participants, 22 reported that they were a child’s father, while 1 was a grandfather. Forty-one of the respondents (67.21%) had less than high school education, while 15 (24.59%) and 5 (8.20%) had high school diplomas and associate degrees respectively.

Only 6 (9.84%) reported that they spoke English “very well.” Thirty-five (57.38%) reported that they spoke “a little” English and 20 (32.79%) reported that they spoke no English at all. Quite a few who reported that they spoke “a little” English still needed an interpreter. One respondent had completed English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, had 3 certificates of completion, yet she could barely speak English. Slightly more than half (59.02%) of the participants had been in the United States for 2 years or
fewer. Twenty-one (34.43%) had been in the United States between 3 and 5 years while (6.56%) had been in the United States between 9 and 10 years.

Table 4

Demographic Summary of African Refugee Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Adjusted %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 20 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-50</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 and older</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest level of education completed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>67.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/vocational license</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English proficiency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>09.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>57.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of stay in the U.S.A.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2 years</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 years</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 20 teachers form Dallas Independent School District (ISD), Fort Worth ISD, North Side ISD (San Antonio) participated in the study. Seven questions guided the analysis for quantitative and qualitative data. The following data analysis reiterates the research questions and elucidates the results associated with the questions.

Analysis of Research Question 1

To what extent, if any, are African refugee parents of elementary school children currently involved in their children’s education? Each of the 5 parent involvement variables served as dependant variables in measuring parent involvement among African refugee parents of elementary school children. Using SPSS®, I ran descriptive statistics for each of the questions on the survey and used frequencies and percentages of descriptive statistics to analyze each dependent variable.

Table 5 gives a summary for responses to each item on the Parent Involvement at School variable. Slightly fewer than half of the parents (47.5%) indicated that they had never been invited to attend a special event at their children’s schools, while slightly more than half (55.7%) said that they had actually attended special events at their children’s schools. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the parents had been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference and 65.6% had attended a parent-teacher conference during the year. An overwhelming majority of the parents (88.5%) reported that they had never volunteered at their children’s schools. It is worth noting here that many of the parents were not even aware that volunteer opportunities were available, and even if they were aware, their lack of English language skills deterred them from volunteering.
### Table 5

**Percentages for Involvement at School Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Once or twice %</th>
<th>Almost every month %</th>
<th>Almost every week %</th>
<th>More than once a week %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have been invited to my child’s school for a special event (such as book fair, carnival)</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year I have visited my child’s school for a special event (such as a book fair, carnival)</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have attended a parent-teacher conference</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I send things to class, like story books and other materials</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I volunteer at my child’s school</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.*

On the parent involvement at home variable, displayed on Table 6, it is clear that a majority of the parents are least involved at home. Nearly two thirds (60.7%) of the parents reported that they did not read to their children at all. Slightly more than 3/4 (80.3%) had never taken their children to the library while more than half (57.4%) indicated that they did not play any educational games with their children. A few parents said that their children played video games and games on the computer by themselves, while other parents said that the children played with other children in the neighborhood.
Table 6

Percentages for Involvement at Home Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not at all %</th>
<th>A little %</th>
<th>Some %</th>
<th>A lot %</th>
<th>A great deal %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I read to my child</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take my child to the library</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play games at home with my child to teach him/her new things</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.

The results, as demonstrated on Table 7, revealed that majority of the parents initiated little or no contact with their children’s teachers. For example, about two thirds (67.2%) of the parents reported that they never called their children’s teachers while 18% indicated that they had called their children’s teachers only once or twice. However, it is evident that the teachers did attempt to contact the parents. Only 39.3% of the parents reported that their children’s teachers did not contact them while 42.6% reported that their children’s teachers had contacted them at least once or twice. It is worth noting, though, that about half of these parents reported that they received calls from their children’s teachers because their child was in trouble.

Almost half the parents (45.9%) reported that they had stopped by to talk to their children’s teachers. This group mainly consisted of parents who lived very close to their children’s schools, and had to drop the children off to school every morning and pick them up every afternoon.
Table 7

Percentages for Frequency of Parent-Teacher Contact Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Once or twice %</th>
<th>Almost every month %</th>
<th>Almost every week %</th>
<th>More than once a week %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have called my child’s teacher</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, my child’s teacher has called me</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have written to my child’s teacher</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, my child’s teacher has written to me</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I stopped by to talk to my child’s teacher</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.

The results, as illustrated in Table 8 of this study, showed that the majority of African refugee parents are somewhat happy with their relationship with their children’s teachers. For example, when asked if they feel welcome and appreciated when they visit their children’s schools, almost half (44.3%) responded that they feel appreciated a great deal. Those who did not feel welcome and appreciated were mostly those who had not been to their children’s schools at all. More than one third (39.3%) of the parents did not ask their children’s teachers questions or make suggestions about their children. This was mostly because of the language barrier.

One interesting finding here was that majority of the African refugee parents did not know the names of their children’s schools, let alone the names of their children’s teachers. Forty percent (40%) of the parents did not know the name of the school their
children attended, while 65% of the parents did not know the name of their children’s teachers. In order to obtain teacher information, I had to call the participants’ homes later in the evenings and ask the children for the names of their schools and teachers. In some cases, the parents called their friends, whose children attended the same schools and classrooms, in order to get the names. In other cases, I had to go to the school district Websites and to find the teachers’ names.

Table 8

Percentages for Quality of Relationship between Parent and Teacher Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not at all %</th>
<th>A little %</th>
<th>Some %</th>
<th>A lot %</th>
<th>A great deal %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel welcome and appreciated when I visit my child’s school</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy talking with my child’s teacher</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my child’s teacher cares about my child</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think my child’s teacher is interested in getting to know me</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable talking with my child’s teacher about my child</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my child’s teacher pays attention to my suggestions</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask my child’s teacher questions or make suggestions about my child</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.

Table 9 shows the results for parents’ comfort and endorsement of children’s schools. A great majority of the African refugee parents in the study had confidence in the staff at their children’s schools, believed that their children’s schools are good
places for their children to be, that the staff are doing good things for their children, and
that their children’s schools are doing a good job of preparing children for their futures.
For all these items, more than 80% of the parents strongly agreed with the statements.

Table 9

Percentages for Comfort and Endorsement of School Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly disagree %</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>No opinion %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child’s school is a good place for my child to be</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff at my child’s school is doing good things for my child</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in the people at my child’s school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child’s school is doing a good job of preparing children for their futures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.*

Analysis of Research Question 2

The second question addressed barriers, if any, that African refugee parents of
elementary school children encountered in getting involved in their children’s schools.
Extant literature revealed that some of the barriers that parents face in trying to get
involved in their children’s education are language barriers, time constraints, and lack of
transportation. The survey used for the study included lack of childcare as another
barrier to parent involvement. Table 10 shows the findings of the study.
Table 10

Percentages for Barriers to Parent Involvement Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for me to participate in parent-teacher conferences.</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulties because of time constraints</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty participating in school activities because of lack of childcare (other small children)</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulties participating in school activities because of lack of transportation</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are language barriers that interfere with participation at my child's school</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total (N = 61) might not equal 100% because of rounding.

Language

English language proficiency is evidently a hindrance to parental participation in schools. A majority of the participants in this study mentioned difficulties arising from poor ability to communicate in English. Those who were not able to communicate in English articulated their frustration and sense of helplessness, not only in regard to their children’s educations, but also with life in general in the United States.

An overwhelming majority of participants (90.2%) indicated that the main problem they faced was a language barrier, since they were not able to effectively communicate with their children’s teachers. Consistent with existing literature, parent responses to the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey in the current study revealed that the main
obstacle to African refugee parent involvement is language. Almost 2/3 (65.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed that language was a barrier. This response was consistent across all categories of African refugee parents.

Communication between home and school is more complex because it is usually in written form. Twenty-five participants (41%) indicated that their children’s teachers never sent them a note in the past year, while 27 participants (44.3%) reported that they had received a note from their children’s teachers once or twice in the past year. Several participants admitted that they threw the letters away because they did not understand English. One parent said, “I think it would help if they sent mail home in a language I can understand. I get mail from school but I can’t read, so I throw them in the trash.”

Language is also a barrier for parent involvement at home. Two-thirds of the participants (60.7%) pointed out that they never read to their children at home because they could not read English. When I asked one participant if he read to his son at home, he laughed and responded, “Do you mean ‘does he read to me?’” To the question about whether he took his son to the library, the same father responded, “how will my taking him to the library help if I can’t read?” Three quarters (80.3%) of the parents had never taken their children to a library.

More than half (57.3%) of the participants indicated that interpreters were not available at the school and that most times, children were used to interpret. As discussed in the literature review section, this is usually not very effective. Sometimes the subject being discussed is too sensitive and the parents might not be comfortable having the child present. Other times, the children might distort the message.
One parent shared an experience he had when his son got into trouble at school. He went to school and since there was no interpreter, the teacher tried to explain to him, sometimes using sign language to communicate. The parent understood that his son was in trouble for taking a cell phone to school. However, when the son came home that evening, his dad asked him about it, and he denied and told his dad a different story, adding that, “you did not know what they were telling you since you do not understand English.” One Burundi parent told me that she went to her daughter’s school but could not communicate with the principal. Her daughter did not know English yet, but there was a boy in the school who was from Burundi and was somewhat fluent in English, so the principal, assuming that the boy knew Kirundi, called him to interpret. Unfortunately, the boy could not interpret because he did not know Kirundi. His parents had moved to the United States from Zimbabwe, so he did not speak Kirundi.

Time Constraints

Extant literature has shown that time constraints (ISBE, 2003; Kauffman, Perry, & Moles, 2001; Prentiss, 2001) and scheduling conflicts thwart parent involvement. This was found to be true for all parents regardless of their background (Jackson & Davis, 2000). However, the current study failed to affirm this finding. Of all the African refugee parents who participated in the study, fewer than half (44.3%) indicated that time was a barrier to their parent involvement. This was mostly due to the fact that most of the African refugee women who participated in the study had young children, and so they stayed home to take care of the children; therefore, time was not a problem for them.
Lack of Transportation

Lahaie (2008) cited lack of transportation to participate in school programs and events as a barrier to parent involvement among immigrant parents. According to C. Mwita, refugee families face problems of transportation since they often do not own vehicles (C. Mwita, personal communication, September 9, 2008). However, findings from the current study showed that an overwhelming majority (78.7%) of the African refugee families did not have transportation problems. This can be explained by the fact that most of the participant families live in apartment complexes that are very close to their children’s schools so the parents are able to walk to school if need arises.

Lack of Knowledge about the American School System

In response to the question on whether the parents had heard of parent involvement, or if anyone from the school had talked to them about parent involvement, all 6 interviewees indicated that they had not heard about parent involvement and that no teacher or staff member had talked to them about it. Once they sent their children to school, the assumption was that they had done their part and did not need to bother the teachers any more. In one respondent’s words, “Some of African refugee parents don’t even go to the schools; the case managers just complete the forms and tell them where to sign. The parents don’t even know what they are signing for.”

Analysis of Research Question 3

The 3rd research question examined if there were differences in parent involvement and barriers to parent involvement among African refugee parents from different demographic groups. I used 1-way ANOVAs to analyze the differences in
parental involvement among African refugee parents from the different demographic groups. The following section gives a detailed narrative of the results.

To investigate if differences in parent involvement and barriers faced existed between respondents from different demographic categories, several 1-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether or not the levels of parent involvement and barriers to parent involvement for each group differed significantly. Parent involvement was analyzed into 5 categories that were used as the dependent variables: (a) parent involvement at home, (b) parent involvement at school, (c) frequency of parent-teacher contact, (d) parent's endorsement of child's school, and (e) parent's endorsement of child's school. The demographic categories used were: (a) gender, (b) level of English proficiency, (c) level of education, (d) length of stay in the United States and (e) country of origin.

Before conducting a 1-way ANOVA, it is necessary to check the assumptions underlying the ANOVA. The homogeneity of variance assumption was met for all 1-way ANOVAs. Additionally, the assumptions of dependent variable normality and independence of observation were met.

To assess the statistical significance, the conventional .05 level of Type I error rate was used. For practical significance, I used eta square ($\eta^2$). Cohen (1988) used the following rule to determine the degree of a variance-accounted-for type of practical significance: less than 1% as trivial, 1% as the minimum threshold for a small effect size, 9% as the minimum value for medium effect size, and 25% as the minimum threshold for a large effect size. This study observed these rules (see Table 11).
Table 11

Analysis of Variance for Level of Education and Parent Involvement Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>2.370</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.951</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.437</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>29.564</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.782</td>
<td>40.272</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>21.289</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50.852</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of parent-teacher contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1.564</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>3.741</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>12.126</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.690</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of relationship between parent and teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>12.826</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.413</td>
<td>6.127</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>60.709</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.047</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73.535</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s endorsement of child’s school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>1.314</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.414</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.660</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means were calculated by averaging all scores for each group; *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

The results of 3 dependent variables (parent involvement at home, frequency of parent-teacher contact, and quality of relationship between parent and teacher) showed statistically significant differences among African refugee parents of different levels of education. Level of education accounted for 58% of the variance in parent involvement at home. Frequency of parent-teacher contact and quality of relationships between parent and teacher both had medium-size effect with the level of education accounting for 11% and 17% of the variances respectively. Table 12 shows a summary of analysis of variances for levels of English language proficiency by the 5 parent involvement dependent variables.
### Table 12

**Analysis of Variance for English Language Proficiency and Parent Involvement**

**Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependant variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent involvement at home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>13.309</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.665</td>
<td>.261</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>37.594</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.648</td>
<td>10.627</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50.904</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent involvement at school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>3.524</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.735</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.431</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of parent-teacher contact</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2.792</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.396</td>
<td>7.283</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>11.120</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.912</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of relationship between parent and teacher</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>26.641</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.321</td>
<td>16.493</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>46.844</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.808</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73.485</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent endorsement of child's school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>.397</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.482</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.660</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the English language proficiency variable, statistically significant differences \((p < .05)\) were found between the means for all parent involvement variables except the parent endorsement of child’s school. A measure of association \((\eta^2)\) was calculated to determine the strength of the association between the independent and dependent variable. The calculated \(\eta^2\) for English language proficiency by parent involvement at home was \(.261\); thus, the level of English language proficiency accounts for 26% of the variance in parent involvement at home.

There was also a statistically significant difference in the means for level of English proficiency and parent involvement at school. The level of English proficiency accounts for 10.8% of the variance in parent involvement at school, and for 20% of the variance in the frequency of parent-teacher contact.

Level of English proficiency by quality of relationship between parent and teacher had the highest \(\eta^2\) at \(.363\). This means that the level of English proficiency accounted for 36.3% of the variance in the quality of relationship between parent and teacher. The items included in this variable were: enjoyment talking with child's teacher, comfort talking with child's teacher about the child, and whether or not the parent asked the teacher questions or made suggestions about the child.

All these items require to a large extent that the parent be able to communicate in English. Those who were more proficient in English reported higher levels of involvement and lower levels of barriers to their involvement. The results, shown on Table 13, indicated no statistically significant difference among African refugees originating from different African countries.
Table 13

Analysis of Variance for Country of Origin and Parent Involvement Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1.330</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>1.972</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.107</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.437</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at home</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>9.780</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.397</td>
<td>1.803</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>41.073</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.775</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50.852</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of parent-teacher contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3.070</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>2.188</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>10.621</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.690</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of relationship between parent and teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>15.062</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.152</td>
<td>1.950</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>58.473</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1.103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73.535</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents endorsement of child's school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.459</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.660</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were statistically significant differences for length of stay in the United States and parent involvement at school, frequency of parent-teacher contact and quality of relationship between parent and teacher. The length of stay accounted for 9.9% of the variance in African parents' involvement at school, 29.7% of the variance in the frequency of parent-teacher contact, and 25% variance in the quality of relationship between parent and teacher. The longer the African refugee parents had lived in the United States, the more likely they were to be involved, and the fewer barriers they reported (see Table 14).
Table 14

**Analysis of Variance for Length of Stay in the United States and Parent Involvement**

**Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.319</td>
<td>3.195</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.798</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.437</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>4.829</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.415</td>
<td>3.043</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>46.023</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50.852</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of parent-teacher contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>4.067</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.033</td>
<td>12.255</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>9.624</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.690</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of relationship between parent and teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>18.430</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.215</td>
<td>9.699</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>55.105</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73.535</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's endorsement of child's school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>5.535</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.660</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding barriers to parent involvement, results indicated that the only independent variable that had a statistically significant difference was gender. Gender accounted for 12.4% of the variance in barriers to African refugee parent involvement. Females were more likely ($M = 3.4$) than males ($M = 2.8$) to experience barriers. This can be explained by the fact that the African refugee fathers tend to be the ones who speak more English; therefore, language barrier might not be as much of an issue for them as it is for the mothers. A few mothers actually reported that their husbands speak more English and are the ones who attend parent teacher conferences when needed. Table 15 illustrates the ANOVA results for gender by barriers to parent involvement.
Table 15

Analysis of Variance for Gender and Barriers to Parent Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>4.300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>30.257</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>8.385</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34.557</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Research Question 4

In what ways, if any, do elementary school teachers currently involve African refugee families? Results of the current study revealed that teachers of African refugee children are generally not able to involve their families due to language barrier. As shown on Table 16, 60% of the teachers reported that they had never called the child’s parent during the school year, while 20% had called once or twice, and 20% had called almost every month. Half of the teachers reported that they had written the parents a note once or twice, while 10% had written a note to the parents almost every month. The teachers’ responses revealed that even though the parents received invitations to attend special events at school, only a small fraction actually attended. Only 5% of the teachers had never invited the parents to attend a special event.
Table 16

*Percentages for Parent-Teacher Contact Items: Teacher Version*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Once or twice a year %</th>
<th>Almost every month %</th>
<th>Almost every week %</th>
<th>More than once per week %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often has this child’s parent called you in the past year?</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you called this child’s parent in the past year?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often has this child’s parent written you a note in the past year?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you written a note to this child’s parent in the past year?</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often has this child’s parent stopped by to talk to you in the past year?</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 20*

Table 17 shows the percentages for teacher responses for parent involvement at school. The large majority (95%) of the teachers had invited parents to the schools at least once or twice a year, yet 50% of the teachers reported that the parents never attended the special events. Ninety percent of the teachers reported that they had invited parents to attend parent-teacher conferences, but 45% of the teachers reported that the parents had never attended parent-teacher conferences. Seventy percent of the
teachers provided parents with information on volunteer opportunity but all (100%) teachers indicated that the parents never volunteered.

Table 17

*Percentages for Parent Involvement at School: Teacher Version*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Once or twice a year %</th>
<th>Almost every month %</th>
<th>Almost every week %</th>
<th>More than once per week %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 6. How often has this child’s parent been invited to visit your school for a special event (e.g., book fair, carnival) in the past year?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 7. How often has this child’s parent visited your school for a special event (e.g., book fair, carnival, etc) in the past year?</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 8. How often has this child’s parent been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference in the past year?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 9. How often has this child’s parent attended a parent-teacher conference in the past year?</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 18. How often does this parent send things to class like story books, or other materials?</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 21. How often have you provided this child’s parent any information about volunteer opportunities at the school or in the classroom?</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. 22. How often does this parent volunteer at school?</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: One teacher did not respond to Q. 8*
Analysis of Research Question 5

What challenges, if any, do elementary school teachers face in trying to involve African refugee parents in their children’s education? Of the 20 teacher participants who completed the online survey, 100% cited language as the main barrier to the involvement of the African refugee parents. The teachers believed that if the parents spoke English, they might be able to be more involved.

A major problem that the respondents mentioned was the lack of interpreters available at the schools, thus sometimes requiring students to interpret for their parents. Lack of interpreters at the schools and using children as interpreters were concerns that the African refugee parents raised in their responses. The teachers were concerned about the use of children as interpreters because as one teacher said “we can use an interpreter but that is not available everyday. I depend on the student to get messages home to his parents. I don’t always know if the message got passed on to the parent.” Another teacher was concerned that “the messages sent by the teachers more often than not get distorted by the students, since some of the students don’t even speak English very well themselves.”

Another barrier that the teachers cited was the lack of transportation for the refugee families. Thirty-six percent of the teachers reported that the African refugee parents face transportation problems that hindered them from getting involved.

Lack of time because of work schedules of the African refugee parents was another barrier that the teachers mentioned. Almost one third of the teachers (31%) indicated that the African refugee parents did not have time to attend meetings and conferences because of work schedules. As one of the teachers said, “As with many
parents, these parents cannot afford to miss work. It is difficult for them to coordinate with school hours.”

Analysis of Research Question 6
How can African refugee parents of elementary school children improve their involvement in their children's education? In analyzing this question, I combined responses for the open-ended questions administered to the parents and the open-ended question that the teachers responded to in the online survey.

Enroll in ESL Classes
From both the parents’ and the teachers’ points of view, learning English (through enrolment in English as a second language [ESL] programs) is key in improving African refugee parent involvement. Slightly more than half (52%) of the parents reported that learning ESL might help them overcome language barriers and enable them to better communicate with their children’s teachers, help with homework, and read to their children at home. This did not come as a surprise since language was cited as the number 1 barrier to African refugee parent involvement. The parents reported that it would be helpful if the schools offered ESL classes, or if they collaborated with the apartment complexes to provide ESL within the complexes so that the parents who had no means of transportation could attend the classes.

The parent interviews indicated that attending ESL classes did not always mean that the parents become fluent in English, as evidenced by one mother who had attended and completed ESL classes through Catholic Charities (and had 3 certificates of completion) yet at the time of the research, the mother did not speak English and I had to use an interpreter.
Another strategy to increase parent involvement among African refugee parents is to provide interpreters. More than half (57%) of the parents reported that there were no interpreters at their child’s school, so they did not feel comfortable attending parent-teacher conferences or even going to the school since they would not understand what the teacher or the school staff said. The teachers in the study concurred that lack of interpreters was a problem for them, too. Both the teachers and parents indicated that having interpreters at the schools would be very helpful in enhancing parent involvement among African refugees.

*Help More with Homework*

A few of the parents (9%) indicated that they needed to improve their involvement by trying to help more with homework, even if it meant finding friends who understood English to help them help their children. Slightly more than one fourth (23.5%) of the teachers believed that the parents could be more involved by trying to make sure that their children did their homework.

*Schedule More Meetings with Teachers*

Slightly more than one third (35%) of the teachers reported that they believed the parents could be more involved by scheduling more meetings with their children’s teachers by contacting their assigned case workers who could also act as their interpreters. However, this would be a tough option because the case workers can work with refugees for only 180 days from their date of arrival, after which they are on their own. The number of days varies by the organization resettling the refugees but it is generally between 4 and 6 months.
Only 1 parent indicated that he would try to improve his involvement by taking his child to the library more often, while 1 parent reported that she could improve her involvement by finding friends to translate written material from school. This, she said, would enable her to “know what was going on at school, and if she was needed there.” Two teachers believed that the parents could improve their involvement by attending weekend family events and field trips.

Analysis of Research Question 7

How and to what extent can teachers and schools meaningfully and effectively involve African refugee families? In their responses to the open-ended questions, the African refugee parents and teachers provided information on what they thought that they and the schools could do to involve African refugee families.

Provide ESL Classes for Parents

In order to enable the African refugee parents to learn English, 2 teachers reported that schools could provide ESL classes to African refugee parents while about 1/4 (25%) of the parents thought that one way that the schools could help them improve their involvement would be to provide ESL programs where they can learn English. One parent respondent said that the schools should “collaborate with the apartments to teach us English” while another indicated that ESL programs needed to be close to the apartment complexes, because if they are far away, like those offered by Catholic Charities, then they are not able to attend because of transportation problems.

Provide Interpreters at the Schools

Both the teachers and the parents strongly indicated that having interpreters available would be a great way to enhance parent involvement among African refugee
parents. Some suggestions that both the teachers and the parents made were that the schools could have interpreters on campus or have interpreters on contract who could interpret over the phone as needed. Also, teachers and parents strongly discouraged the use of children as interpreters because many times, the messages were distorted.

Conduct Home Visits

Nearly one third (30%) of the teachers reported that in order to involve the African refugee parents, they needed to conduct more home visits. They mentioned the fact that they could liaise with the case workers to organize for meeting dates and times as well as to provide interpretation services during the home visits. In one teacher’s words, “I could go to the apartment more often in the afternoon, evenings, or weekends. I could let the case worker know I wanted to meet with the parents.” Another teacher said, “I can continue to go to the child’s home and encourage them to become more involved in the students education and reassuring them that they are in a safe environment.” Two parents indicated that more frequent home visits would be helpful for them.

Conduct Orientation Sessions

When refugees arrive in the United States, they have little, if any, knowledge of the American school system and what is expected of them. Many parents in this study indicated that they did not even know that the teachers expected them to return some of the paper work that the children brought home. The respondents indicated that orientation sessions would go a long way in helping them understand what is expected of them. One of the respondents who participated in the in-depth interviews, and who was the most educated of all the participants summed it up thus:
My suggestion would be for schools to organize seminars emphasizing involvement and teach the parents on the importance of involvement. The parents need information. If schools reach out to African refugee and educate them, they will improve their involvement. Biggest challenge is language barrier. This makes them think they cannot contribute in any way, except by providing material things. Educate the refugees on how to be more involved.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, the major findings of the research are interpreted, conclusions are reached, and recommendations are made for future research. I addressed parent involvement of African refugee parents of elementary school children. I examined the barriers African refugee parents face and the strategies they believe could improve parent involvement. Further, the study examined teacher perspectives of African refugee parent involvement, including teacher perceptions of impediments to their own ability to involve parents. Additionally, this chapter will discuss teacher-recommended strategies for both parents and teachers to improve African refugee parent involvement.

To investigate the variables discussed in chapter 4, the study relied on 2 forms of data, including paper-and-pencil surveys that I and a trained assistant administered to the parents and an online teacher survey. The parent survey included 2 open-ended questions. The responses to these questions and data obtained from in-depth, face-to-face interviews provided the qualitative data from the parents. The teachers completed an online survey that included 3 open-ended questions. The data from the open-ended questions provided the qualitative data from the teachers.

Overall, the results of this study support the theories and research examined in the literature review regarding parent involvement of minority groups and immigrants and the barriers they face in trying to get involved in their children’s education. The summary of findings follows the order of the research questions as listed below:
1. To what extent, if any, are African refugee parents of elementary school children currently involved in their children’s education?

The results of this study generally indicated that African refugee parents' levels of involvement in their children’s schools and at home are low. This is congruent with previous research on immigrant and refugee families in the United States (Ariza, 2002; Lahaie, 2008; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Strohl, Jecklin, & Dixon, 2005). In the current study, the mean scores for parent involvement at school and at home were 1.49 and 1.72 respectively. The parents reported a low level of parent-teacher contact with a mean of 1.65. The mean of the quality of parent-teacher relationship variable, according to the parent reports, was 3.50, which indicates that African refugee parents had a somewhat active relationship with their children’s teachers. The parent endorsement of school variable had the highest mean of 4.84, indicating that African refugee parents were happy with their children’s schools and believed that the schools were doing their best to prepare their children for the future.

2. What barriers, if any, do African refugee parents of elementary school children encounter in getting involved in their children’s schools?

The mean for the barriers to parent involvement variable was 3.20, indicating that more than half of the African refugee parents encounter obstacles as they try to get involved in their children’s schools. As the literature review suggested (ISBE, 2003; McBrien, 2005), language was the most common obstacle cited in the current study, with an overall mean of 4.44. Slightly more than 65% of the parents indicated that they “strongly agree” that they face language barriers, while 24.6% reported that they “agree”
that they face language barriers. Of the 61 participants, only 2 reported no linguistic barriers at all.

The teacher participants agreed at a 100% rate that language was the main reason they were not able to involve the African refugee parents. This suggests the need for English language classes to help overcome this barrier. The results indicated that African refugee parents somewhat experienced time constraints ($M = 2.85$), and lack of childcare ($M = 2.54$) as obstacles to their involvement. However, lack of transportation ($M = 1.89$) was less likely to bar African refugee parents from being involved in their children’s schools. This can be explained by the fact that many of the African refugee families live in apartment complexes that are close to their children’s schools, hence they could walk to the school if the need arose.

3. To what extent, if any, are there differences in parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, frequency of parent-teacher contact and barriers to parent involvement among African refugee parents from different demographic groups?

Results of this study were consistent with findings from earlier studies that parent education (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Liu, 2000; Parker, et al., 1996) and English language proficiency (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Kauffman, Perry & Prentiss, 2001; Peterson & Ladky, 2007) affected parent involvement. Results from this study revealed that there were statistically significant differences in parent involvement among African refugee groups with different levels of education. The higher the level of education, the higher the level of parent involvement and the lower the level of barriers reported. The analysis also revealed statistically significant differences
among groups with different levels of English proficiency. Those who spoke English well tended to be involved more, and faced fewer barriers.

4. In what ways, if any, do elementary school teachers currently involve African refugee families?

The findings of this research showed that teachers strove to involve African refugee parents by sending them invitations to attend parent teacher conferences, sending them information about volunteer opportunities, and sending their children activities, such as reading assignments, for the children to engage in at home with the parents. A few of the teachers conducted home visits with the African refugee parents in an effort to get them more involved.

5. What challenges, if any, do elementary school teachers face in trying to involve African refugee parents in their children’s education?

Congruent with existing studies (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Sohn & Wang, 2006), teachers overwhelmingly reported language and communication as the number one reason why they were not able to involve African refugee parents, stating that when the parents cannot speak English, it is difficult for the teachers to communicate with them. To make matters worse, most teachers reported that interpreters were not available, which left only the option of using children as interpreters.

6. How can African refugee parents of elementary school children improve their involvement in their children’s education?

Responses from parents and teachers indicated that African refugee parents can improve their involvement in their children’s education by helping more at home with homework, scheduling more meetings with the teachers, and trying to visit the library
with their children more often. Some parents also indicated that they could make the
initiative to try to find adult English as a second language (ESL) programs on their own
and not wait for the schools to provide ESL. Existing literature has indicated that in
order for families of English language learners to be more involved, they need to learn
the language of the host country (Haynes, 2004; Watts, White, & Trlin, 2001). This enables them to communicate easily with the teachers and school personnel.

7. How and to what extent can teachers and schools meaningfully and effectively involve African refugee families?

Teachers as well as parents reported that the best strategy that can be used to help African refugee parents would be to provide ESL classes for parents to help them to learn English. Other strategies cited were providing interpreters at school, translating materials sent home into a language parents could understand, providing bilingual books that parents could read at home to their children, and providing alternative times for conferences. Responses from the teachers revealed that teachers could help improve African refugee parent involvement by having more home visits.

Limitations

The sampling procedure decreased the likelihood of the findings being applicable to the entire African refugee parent population in Texas. Since the study focused on particular subgroup of African refugee population (parents of elementary-school-aged children) the results do not apply to the entire immigrant parent population in Texas. It is also inappropriate to attribute the findings from this study to all refugee parents in the United States.
I, as an instrument of data collection, might have affected the outcome of the survey interviews as well as of the in-depth interviews. Being an African female, I might have fostered a comfort level with the participants to a degree, since I was generally perceived to somewhat share the participants’ culture and sometimes language. However, this same factor might have been counterproductive, especially with the male participants, in that in many African societies, males are not very comfortable with females interviewing them.

The research assistant who conducted the interviews in the San Antonio and Houston areas was an African. The responses seemed consistent for both data collectors.

Implications for Policy and Practice

When refugee families immigrate to the United States, they receive assistance from their sponsoring organizations for a limited period of time. For example, the Refugee Settlement of Texas organization provides support to refugee families for exactly 180 days, after which they are on their own. When it comes to enrollment in school, the organization provides a case worker, usually a person who speaks the refugees’ native language. The case worker completes the enrollment documents and all the parents have to do is to “sign on the space with an X.” One respondent informed me that he had no idea what the forms he was signing were about, he just did as instructed. The families usually had not visited the school, or met the teacher or staff, but they trusted that the schools their children were going to were the best, as evidenced by their responses to the questionnaire.
Since parent involvement has been identified as a crucial component for improving children’s lives, it is important for schools and families from all backgrounds to make an effort to collaborate in order to make this happen. It is crucial to start working with new families as soon as possible to better prepare them for their experiences in the United States. Schools and teachers need to help African refugee families and students understand the norms and expectations of schools and education systems in the United States, and to teach the parents new skills to help their children. The following are some recommendations that would greatly enhance parent involvement among African refugees, hence improving achievement among African refugee students.

*Parent Education on Importance of Involvement*

As stated earlier, many African refugee parents have the notion that education is solely the responsibility of the schools and the teachers (Mestry, 2004; Sefa Dei, 2004). Once they send their children to school, they feel they have no business meddling with the teachers’ affairs because they believe the teachers know and do what is best for their children. The parents are not used to questioning the teachers or making any suggestions about their children because they believe it is not their place to do so. Indeed, parent involvement might actually be viewed as disrespectful in some cultures. In the United States, parents are expected to be involved in schools and in children’s learning. In the current study, a majority of the parents indicated that they did not make any suggestions to the teachers regarding their children. Many of them indicated that they did not know about parent involvement, and that they did not know how they could be involved.
In order for African refugee families to get more involved, a significant shift in mind-set for them as well as for schools and teachers is required. Schools can offer parent education seminars where they can educate new African refugee parents on the importance of parent involvement, and ways in which parents can be meaningfully involved in their children’s education. Many of the parents in this study indicated that they had not heard about parent involvement and did not know what ways they could be involved. Teachers and schools also need to have a shift in mind-set by changing their attitudes about how African refugees are, or are not, involved in their children’s education. In essence, there should be a bridging of the cultural divide between the African refugees and their children’s teachers and schools.

The schools can also offer orientation sessions at the beginning of each school year or each semester. During these orientation sessions, the schools and teachers can provide the refugee families with important information regarding parent involvement as well as other school policies and programs. Of all the African refugee parents that took part in this study, none had attended any orientation at their children’s schools or school districts. Usually, the case workers, or other refugees who have been here longer, complete the school paper work for them. During orientation sessions, the African refugee parents could be invited to share their experiences and what their expectations of the children’s teachers and schools might be.

Schnee and Haynes (2004) posit that having effective meetings with parents of English language Learners (ELLs) can help participants understand the school cultures and procedures as well as improve communication between ESL teachers, mainstream
teachers, and parents. The following tips from Schnee and Haynes (2004) would be very helpful for teachers and schools who serve African refugee populations.

How to Hold an ESL Parent Meeting

- The school administration should send letters to teachers asking for concerns about their African refugee students
- The school should send letters to African refugee parents whose children are in their schools
- Send reminders to parents of date time and place where meeting will be held
- Provide handouts in English and translations of the general idea of meeting
- Invite personnel who work directly or indirectly with the African refugee children and parents. These might include nurses, PTO representatives, police/community liaisons

Some Topics to Cover at the Meeting

- Clarification of school procedures and culture
- Parent involvement: what the school expects, the parent’s responsibility
- How to help with homework
- Report cards, study habits, parent-teacher conferences
- State testing (if applicable) and the school and parent expectations
- The school’s ESL program and its benefits

What to Do After the Presentation:

- Divide parents into groups according to language
- Supply pens and paper for them to write concerns and questions
- Use more fluent parents to act as a translator/group leaders
• Answer questions and keep papers for feedback to share with teachers and other personnel

Offer Culturally Relevant and Effective ESL Learning Opportunities for African Refugee Parents

Congruent to existing literature (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Kauffman, Perry & Prentiss, 2001; Peterson & Ladky, 2007) findings from parent and teacher participants in the current study revealed that language and communication were the greatest barriers to African refugee parent involvement. Richman (as cited in Hamilton, 2004) stressed the importance of building mechanisms that help immigrant parents acquire the host language by organizing language classes at the school.

One strategy that many teacher and parent participants mentioned was that of providing opportunities for the African refugee parents to improve their English language skills. Development of effective English as a second language (ESL) classes is crucial. The schools can provide this by having classes on-site at the schools. Another alternative would be to collaborate with the apartment complexes where the African refugee parents live and provide ESL classes there. This would be an even better alternative because many African refugee families live in clusters in the same apartments, hence the school districts would be able to reach many parents at one time, and they would not have to contend with transportation issues. Furthermore, the parents might be able to organize for childcare with other family members at the apartment complexes.

Schools can also provide babysitting for mothers of young children so that they can attend these classes. This would be a great strategy for helping African refugee
mothers to learn English because quite a few of the mothers who participated in this study indicated that they were unable to attend ESL classes because they had no one to watch their children. The schools could recruit volunteers from the African refugee community to babysit.

One participant said, “I would like to learn English. If there are opportunities for me to do that, I will be glad to take them.” Many African refugees are not aware of opportunities available to them through nonprofit organizations to learn English. For example, Catholic Charities offers free ESL classes to newly arrived refugees.

However, from the findings of this study, the ESL instruction might not be as effective as it should be. One participant told me that she had completed 3 levels of ESL instruction, and had the certificates of completion on the wall. Nevertheless, she did not understand much English and had to have an interpreter during the interview with me. Another participant said that “we just go there and they (ESL instructors) talk in English and we can’t understand a word and we don’t learn anything. It would help if they had an interpreter at the class especially for beginners.” Some schools in Dallas Independent School District (ISD) who serve refugee populations collaborate with apartment complexes where the refugees live. These complexes provide a room for the ISD personnel to conduct ESL classes.

*Use Interpreters and Translators*

Participants reported that when they received mail or phone messages from the schools, they saved them and later they asked fellow refugees who speak English to translate the message for them. I found that in every African refugee community, there was at least one member who was somewhat fluent in English, and this person helped
almost everyone in the community with translation and interpretation. Schools can liaise with such members (either as volunteers or contracted workers) to help translate communiqués sent home to the parents, or use them as interpreters even on the phone if they are not available to be physically present at the school.

Haynes (2004) suggests starting a bilingual parent volunteers program to help with translation and interpretation needs. Haynes suggested several strategies that I believe would be effective in working with African refugee parents. The bilingual parent volunteers could be used to work with new African refugee families during orientation meetings or parent-teacher conferences and other parent functions. A school can start by recruiting a few approachable parents who have been in the United States a little longer and are more established. Additionally, schools should consider training these bilingual parent volunteers. The schools can solicit for help with training from the refugee resettling organizations in their school districts, as these groups have case workers who usually speak the native languages of the new African refugees.

When a school uses bilingual volunteers, everyone gains. The school gains from an increase in the quality of communications with the parents of their language-minority population. The classroom teacher gets much needed help with new refugee students and their families. The students gain because their parents are able to get more involved in their education, hence improving their social and academic achievement, and their parents feel more at ease communicating with the teachers and schools. According to Haynes (2004), bilingual volunteers have stated that they benefit from a growth of self-esteem and pride in their culture. They feel more comfortable in the school and often develop friendships with the teachers they help.
Some ways in which bilingual volunteer parents can help are:

*Become a liaison between new families and the school.* If the teachers or schools have information they want to make sure the parents of their African refugee students understand, they can ask the volunteers to call and introduce themselves. The volunteers can explain that they are working with the children in the school and give their home telephone numbers to the newly-arrived parents. In the future the teachers or schools will only have to write notes to the volunteers or call them on the phone to make contact with new parents. Many African refugee parents work and are not available to participate in school the way they would like. The volunteer parents can be asked to translate school correspondence and help interpret during evening parent-teacher conferences.

*Explain the American school system.* The schools in the United States can be very different from schools in the native countries of African refugee families. Bilingual parent volunteers can explain to new parents what these differences are. Parents have a difficult time understanding many concepts taught in American schools, such as cooperative learning and use of manipulatives in math. They may have a hard time understanding school expectations. They certainly do not usually understand the partnership role that American parents have with schools in their children's education. The volunteers can also explain registration in sports and music programs, if available in the schools the children attend.

*Assist new African refugee arrivals during registration and a tour of the school.* As stated earlier, every African refugee family is assigned a case worker by the resettling organization. Because of short staffing, these case workers are usually very
busy, since they have to deal with all the new and existing African refugee families. They often just complete the registration paperwork for the families and give it to them for signatures. Bilingual parent volunteers can go to the schools to translate for new African refugee families and help introduce them to the schools. This enables the schools to make important decisions about placement if the children's school records are in another language, and provides an opportunity to impart important information. The family can ask questions and provide the school with information about their children through the bilingual parent volunteers.

**Assist with sensitive issues.** Bilingual parent volunteers can help special-subject teachers, administrators, and the school nurse with sensitive issues: retention, referral, and social problems. They can answer questions about culture, explain the expectations of a particular teacher to parents, and call parents on behalf of the principal or school nurses. However, there can be problems relating to confidentiality when working with bilingual families. If the teacher has something private to discuss with parents, the teacher needs to tell the parent volunteer to ask the family to bring their own interpreter. If they show up without anyone, the district might need to hire an interpreter from another district in order to safeguard the confidentiality of the family involved. This is especially important when discussing possible referrals by child study teams and retention of the child.

**Help with in-service training of teachers and personnel.** Bilingual parent volunteers can help with teacher and other school personnel in-service training. They can discuss cultural and social behaviors in the African refugee families and give the
teachers and staff an understanding of the families’ cultural and social backgrounds and expectations.

*Send information home in a language that African refugee parents can understand.* Many of the parents in this study neither speak nor read English. All the materials sent home from school is usually in English, and parents cannot read the material. Many of them reported that they had never received any information about volunteer opportunities at school, while most of the teachers indicated that they sent the parents volunteer opportunity information. A strategy that the teachers and schools can use in order to ensure that the parents are getting the information sent home would be to have the letters translated into the African refugee languages. In most of the schools, there usually is a cluster of certain refugee groups, so it would be necessary to translate material into only one or two languages. As I stated earlier, schools could recruit volunteer translators from the African refugee communities they serve. Schools can also collaborate with local resettling agencies to provide translations of important documents for African refugee parents since they already have translators in their organizations.

*Support and encourage family literacy through bilingual books.* When asked whether he read to his child at home, one parent in the study said, “How can I read to him? I can’t read in English?” The same parent indicated that if he had books in Kiswahili or in Kirundi, he might read to his child more often, but as it is now, he has to learn English before he can read to his child. By the time he learns English, his child will be “too old for me to read to him.” Schools need to invest in bilingual books for African refugee families. In a study of how to foster new immigrant parent involvement, Peterson and Ladky (2007) underscore the importance of encouraging parents to read
to their children in their mother tongue. The school can provide dual language books, and if these are not available, teachers can help their students create simple dual language books that their parents can read to them.

Provide alternative times for conferences. When African refugees move to the United States, they sometimes work two or more jobs to make ends meet. This leaves little, if any, time to be involved in their children’s education, whether at home or at school. Many times, they are not able to attend even important parent teacher conferences. A recommendation that the teachers had was that they can provide alternative times for the meetings, or try to work with the parents’ schedules as much as they could. This might help the African refugees be able to attend conferences and other school events. One parent who had 3 children at the same school said that one time, the teachers scheduled all her children’s conferences at the same time and then she “got in trouble” for not attending 2 of them.

Train school personnel. If school personnel have a basic understanding of the cultural norms and values of the refugee families and students they serve, this can help schools involve African refugee parents in ways that respect the needs and values of both cultures. One teacher in the current study said, “It is very obvious that parent really wants for the child to do well, but I feel that parent is shy and will not speak up if she has a concern.” In many African cultures, the teacher is highly revered, even by parents. Some parents might be shy talking to the teacher because they look at the teacher as being high above their status. In many African cultures, when a person addresses someone older or of a higher status, the person does not look directly at the higher-status person. Instead the person looks down or away from the higher-status person.
This might be interpreted as “shy” while in actual sense, it is a show of respect. The teacher in this study assumed that his mother was shy when she was probably just being respectful. For this reason, it is crucial that teachers and other school personnel get some basic understanding of cultural norms and practices of the families they serve in order to be able to maximize those families’ involvement.

Recommendations for Future Research

Previous research has established that parent involvement positively contributes to student achievement for all students regardless of background. This study contributed to the existing field of research by providing a context for understanding the parent involvement experiences of African refugee parents. The following narrative presents suggestions for future research.

To begin with, the sample for the current study was a convenient sample; therefore, it might not have included a normal random sample for African refugee families. A study of African refugee families utilizing a random sample is recommended for future research whenever possible.

Secondly, the study was localized to 5 regions in Texas and the results cannot be generalized to the entire African refugee population in the United States. Therefore a study with a nationally representative sample is recommended for future studies.

Thirdly, because of time and financial constraints, the sample size in the current study was small. A larger scale study can be conducted in order to be more representative of the African refugee population.

The current study examined the extent to which African refugee parents were involved in their children’s education and what hindered their involvement. A further
contribution to this body of knowledge includes an understanding of the impact, if any, of parent involvement on African refugee student achievement. It is recommended that future longitudinal studies examine whether African refugee parent involvement increases achievement of their children.

Next, I and a research assistant administered the surveys to the parents. The chances of test administration error increases when more than 1 person is involved in administering any standardized instrument. Future studies need to carefully control for and monitor the possibility of test administration error.

Conclusion

This study examined parent involvement of African refugee parents of elementary school children. The findings were congruent with findings from other, similar studies conducted with different immigrant and refugee populations. The African refugee parents in this study were not optimally involved in their children’s education because of barriers such as limited language skills and time constraints. Strategies to overcome these barriers include teaching African refugee parents English, having interpreters available for parent-teacher conferences and other meetings, as well as sending materials home in a language that the parents can understand.
APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO USE THE PARENT-TEACHER INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (PTIQ), PARENT AND TEACHER VERSIONS
--On Thursday, January 08, 2009 2:57 PM -0600 Purity Githembe wrote:

Dear Pamela Ahrens

Thanks for your response.

I did decide to go ahead and use the parent involvement measure as it is and then address my additional questions by way of in-depth personal interviews with a sample of the participants. I will not copy and distribute the original instrument (as stipulated on the fast-track website) but instead, I have used the questions/items to create my questionnaire. I will credit CPPRG (1991) for the measure.

Please let me know it that sounds alright.

Thanks

Purity

Dear Purity,

That sounds fine. I apologize for not being able to call you back. Good luck with your research and please let me know if you need anything else.

Pamela
APPENDIX B

IN-DEPTH PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Questions and Script

If it is alright with you, I will tape record our conversation so that I make sure I don’t miss any of your responses.

Topic one: What is parent involvement?
Q1a: Have you heard the term “parent involvement”?
What comes to mind when you hear people talk about parent involvement?
Q1b: Has anyone in your school—a teacher, the principal, or another person—explained to you how to participate or helped you to be involved in your children’s education? Could you give me a few examples?
Q 1c: Why do you think schools want parents to get involved in their children’s education?
Q 1d: Are there any benefits to being involved? What are they?

Topic two: How are you as a parent involved in your children’s education?
I am very interested in finding how you are involved in the education of your child/ren.
Q 2a: How do you, as a parent, prefer to be involved in your children’s education?
Q 2b: What things do you do to support your children’s education?
Q 2d: How do your children feel about your involvement in their education?
Probe 1: Do they like that you are involved in their education? Why?

Topic three: Barriers to parent involvement
The following questions deal with things that discourage or prevent you from participating in your children’s education.
Probe 3: Have you ever participated in your children’s education but found that the way in which you were involved was not considered useful by the school? Describe the situation(s) or provide some examples.

Topic four: Strategies to increase parent involvement

Q 4a: Schools sometimes try to get parents to participate in their children’s education. What strategies have schools used that have helped you, as an African refugee parent, get involved in your children’s education?

Probe 1: What things do schools do that you like or that encourage you to participate in your children’s education?

Q 4b: Do you have any suggestions for teachers and schools that would help you get more involved in your children’s education?

Probe 1: What would you like schools to do to make you feel that you are better supporting your children’s education?

Any additional comments?

That’s all of the questions I have.

Is there anything else that you’d like to share with me?

Thank you very much

****************************************************************************************************
REFERENCE LIST


