

# In Solidarity: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Family Engagement and Home Learning Program During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused serious social disruptions and posed significant challenges to all families, especially immigrant families. Immigrant families who spoke languages other than English and who had young bilingual children faced numerous barriers as they struggled to navigate remote learning with their children without adequate language and technological support. The need to design action plans to mitigate the negative educational impact of the pandemic on immigrant families with young bilingual children was urgent. To address the immediate needs of immigrant families during the first year of the pandemic, this transformative mixed-methods study presents a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection. This program was collaboratively designed and implemented to support 20 immigrant families with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. Focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, findings from this study demonstrate how the family participants actively engaged with and positively evaluated the program. These findings also suggest that family and community engagement play a crucial role in creating a more sustainable support system for immigrant families as well as equitable learning experiences for young bilingual children during and after the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Immigrant families, bilingual students, community-based research, family engagement, transformative mixed-methods, COVID-19 pandemic

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused critical social disruptions and posed significant challenges to all families, especially immigrant families from low-income backgrounds. These families had limited access to healthcare and social services, overrepresented the essential workforce, and lived in structurally vulnerable neighborhoods with crowded housing that rendered them more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Fortuna et al., 2020). During this time of turmoil, anti-

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immigration sentiments and racial unrest also negatively impacted these families and heightened their risk of facing discrimination, bigotry, and violence (Cholera et al., 2020).

To mitigate the spread of the virus at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, school closures were enacted, and home quarantine was enforced across 50 US states. Most school districts made a sudden shift to emergency remote learning, without much preparation or consideration of students' diverse needs and their families' situations (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). This shift created numerous barriers for immigrant families who speak languages other than English and who have young bilingual children, especially newcomers who were taking initial steps to settle down and build their homes in a new place. During the first year of pandemic schooling, many immigrant families struggled to navigate remote learning with their children due to inadequate language and technological support. For immigrant families living in under-resourced communities, the lack of access to electricity, the internet, reliable technological devices, and learning resources made remote learning impossible (Nguyen, forthcoming).

The need to design action plans to mitigate and redress the negative educational impact of the pandemic on immigrant families and young bilingual children was urgent. Therefore, many researchers advocated for multisectoral community-based approaches to respond rapidly to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and address social, health, economic, and educational inequities (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021; Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020; Wieland et al., 2022). Additionally, action-oriented scholars argued for practical solutions to help immigrant families gain access to healthcare (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020), social services (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021), teletherapy and psychological support (Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020), and education services (Kaiper-Marquez et al., 2020). Collectively, this research has presented possibilities in which reciprocal partnerships between researchers and community members were established and maintained to drive collective actions during times of crisis.

Within this line of action-oriented scholarship, this transformative mixed-methods study (Mertens, 2010) employed a community-based approach to support 20 immigrant families<sup>1</sup> with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. To address the immediate needs of these immigrant families and their children, the principal researcher collaborated with two community partners and 20 immigrant families to design collectively a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection. Focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, the findings from this study demonstrate how the family and child participants actively engaged with and positively evaluated this equity-focused family engagement and home learning program.

## **Literature Review**

### **Socioeconomic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrant Families**

A myriad of factors contributed to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on immigrant families. Many immigrant families work in essential sectors, such as service, food, construction, and agriculture, that took the hardest hit in the beginning of the pandemic, resulting in more job losses and a higher risk of reduced work hours (Gelatt et al., 2021). As reported by the Pew Research Center, the unemployment rate of foreign-born workers rose from 4% to 15.3% in the second quarter of 2020 (Kochhar & Bennetti, 2021). For those fortunate enough to keep their jobs, remote work was typically not an option. Many immigrant families included essential frontline workers, who had to cope with difficult, high-pressure, and unsafe working conditions with limited

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term “family” is purposely used to include not only parents but also older siblings and multigenerational caregivers.

protective measures in place. Furthermore, immigrant families, especially those from low-income backgrounds, tend to take public transportation and live in multigenerational housing in overcrowded and under-resourced neighborhoods, which made it more difficult for these families to comply with social distancing, home quarantine, and other COVID-19 safety measures (Cholera et al., 2020). Therefore, immigrant families suffered from significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2021). Even when they had contracted the virus, some immigrant families, especially unauthorized ones, were afraid to seek testing and treatment due to lack of insurance, lack of low-cost healthcare services, and/or fear of immigration enforcement, such as detention and deportation (Capps et al., 2020).

Although immigrant families were among the most vulnerable populations on which the pandemic had the most significant effects, many of them had limited access to public benefits, healthcare, and social services. For example, unauthorized and mixed-status families were unprotected and purposely excluded from federally funded COVID-19 safety net programs, such as unemployment insurance and stimulus payments through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Gomez & Merez, 2021). Even if they were eligible for some pandemic relief programs, immigrant families faced multiple barriers related to language, culture, and technology when obtaining essential information and gaining access to available services. The pandemic placed tremendous social and economic pressure on immigrant families to sustain their family lives and support their children.

### **Bilingual Students' Schooling Experiences in US Classrooms**

More than five million bilingual students are enrolled in US public schools, most of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants (Jiménez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Labeled as English learners, bilingual students are often minoritized, marginalized, and underserved (American Psychological Association, 2016). Emergent bilingual students need specialized support to sustain their home languages, acquire English as an additional language, and learn new academic content across various subject areas. Many education scholars have provided evidence for and strongly recommended the use of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy to meet bilingual students' learning needs, support their positive identity development, and foster their sense of belonging (Gay, 2014; Herrera et al., 2012; Hollie, 2017; Villegas, 1991; Zhang-Wu, 2017). However, schools often fail to acknowledge these students' full cultural and linguistic repertoire and often devalue their families' and communities' knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Education policies and programs designed to serve this population have often treated bilingualism as a problem and English monolingualism, in the specific form of standard academic English, as the only desired outcome (García & Torres-Guevara, 2009; Hinton, 2016). In addition, these programs rarely address structural challenges that prevent bilingual students from accessing equitable educational opportunities and learning resources. As studies have shown, bilingual students tend to attend segregated and underfunded schools (Knight & Mendoza, 2017), and many are tracked into lower-level classes (Callahan, 2005; Sung, 2018) and taught oversimplified curriculum by less-experienced teachers (Gándara et al., 2003). Struggling to survive in multiculturally deficient spaces with hegemonic structures (Nieto, 2021), bilingual students suffer from discrimination (Huber, 2011), microaggressions (Steketee et al., 2021), linguistic racism (Baker-Bell, 2020), and linguistic violence (Garza Ayala, 2022).

### **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Bilingual Students**

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified existing educational inequities and introduced new challenges to bilingual students. The shift to remote learning placed these students in an extremely disadvantaged position that included multiple new barriers. For example, remote learning required access to high-speed internet and reliable working devices that many bilingual students, especially

those from low-income backgrounds and attending low-resourced schools, did not have (Vogels, 2021). Bilingual students encountered not only infrastructure barriers but also the linguistic, digital, and cultural barriers of an English-only online learning environment in an unfamiliar education system. With their families working away from home, some bilingual students had to navigate remote learning alone.

Specifically, remote learning posed many challenges for young bilingual children, especially those starting their first year of formal schooling. These beginners often lean heavily on in-person interactions and non-verbal cues to develop their proficiency in an additional language and learn both academic content and school norms (Choi & Chiu, 2021). Through an online platform with limited human contact, these young bilingual students had difficulty understanding academic content and learning tasks, all of which were provided solely in English. For these young students, participating in remote learning required substantial adult support, from operating technological devices to navigating various online platforms and learning apps and then following a complicated learning schedule. To engage fully with online learning sessions, young bilingual children needed the co-participation and facilitation of their primary caregivers. However, many caregivers from immigrant families had to work outside of the home and struggled to meet their basic needs during the pandemic. Those who were able to stay at home with their children were not always able to offer substantial help, particularly in the absence of resources, linguistic support, and adequate information needed to navigate learning expectations from teachers, schools, and districts (Sayer & Braun, 2020).

Furthermore, many districts transitioned to emergency remote learning without sufficient resources, technological knowledge, or teacher training. As reported by numerous schools during the transition, not all teachers could quickly adapt culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices to remote learning while prioritizing the specific needs of bilingual students (Cushing-Leubner et al., 2021). Therefore, bilingual students were particularly impacted by the pandemic and were often left behind amid emergency remote learning. In some districts, the situation was so challenging that many students logged out of schools, resulting in a surge in chronic absenteeism among bilingual students in the pandemic school year (Bamberger, 2021).

### **Multisectoral Community-Based Approaches to Support Immigrant Families During the Pandemic**

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health crisis but also carried economic, social, psychological, and educational consequences, many scholars attempted to move beyond their disciplinary boundaries and traditional practices to meet new professional demands and fulfill social responsibilities. To respond rapidly to complex problems posed by the global pandemic, the field required innovative solutions and multisectoral partnerships that drew on “diverse experiences, skills, and knowledge” and drove collective actions (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). Calling these partnerships the whole-of-society approach, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly encouraged multisectoral stakeholders, academia included, to collaborate closely with the public and private sectors, communities, and families to tackle pandemic-related problems together. Compared to governmental institutions and state agencies, community-based and grassroots organizations have more experience serving historically underserved and marginalized communities. These organizations have been proactive in providing support to immigrant families, facilitating immigrant integration and receptivity, and fostering their sense of belonging (Jiménez, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2018). During the first year of the pandemic, many community-based and grassroots organizations filled the gaps to meet immigrant families’ pressing needs, but they faced multiple challenges, such as overstressing their limited budgets, maintaining their own staffing, and performing community outreach under the constraints of COVID-19 quarantine (Bernstein et al., 2020). These organizations required additional funding and support to sustain their pandemic-responsive services. Thus, many scholars adopted

multisectoral, community-based approaches to collaborate closely with these community-based organizations to funnel funding and resources to underserved communities and to create services to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on these communities (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021; Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020; Weiland et al., 2022).

Multisectoral, community-based scholarship embraces “true collaboration between community members who understand their community needs and possible solutions, and professionals who are willing to listen and to learn” (Falicov et al., 2020, p. 866). For example, Weiland et al. (2022) documented how academics, health experts, and community partners co-created messages to deliver credible COVID-19 information to African and Hispanic immigrant populations. The study emphasized how the use of bidirectional communication helped accelerate responses to communities’ concerns and obstacles and facilitated the connection of community members to essential resources. Similarly, Washburn et al. (2022) reported on community-academic partnerships that aimed to improve equitable access to COVID-19 testing, data, communication, and vaccination. They found that such partnerships ensured that community partners’ voices were heard and that their perspectives were included in the decision-making process. Falicov et al. (2020) explained how, through the pandemic, their research team learned to become more flexible in terms of time and space to overcome pandemic-related constraints and attend to communities’ basic needs, such as food, transportation, translation, and interpretation services. In their study, an interdisciplinary team of physicians, pharmacy teams, medical staff, and social workers collaborated closely with *promotoras* (experienced and trusted community members) to provide not only physical and mental healthcare but also cultural and emotional support to Latinx immigrant communities. The *promotoras* understood the communities’ challenges and valued patients’ cultural practices. Their roles as community connectors, health facilitators, and advisors were essential in connecting immigrant patients with much-needed services during the crisis.

These studies informed the present investigation and illustrate the potential of research that engages communities in social action. Adopting a community-based approach also means explicitly addressing social inequities and recognizing how “the vulnerabilities of the pandemic are compounded with the vulnerabilities imposed by policies that have long oppressed immigrants” (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021, p. 116). Therefore, this line of research often adopts an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 2017) to understand how overlapping forces of oppression hinder immigrant families’ survival and wellbeing and seeks concrete solutions from the ground up. It shifts from creating individual-focused intervention programs to redesigning social support systems that funnel resources, increase access, and equip communities. The goal of community-based projects is to enable marginalized communities “to take control of their own context and circumstances” (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020, p. 219). Moreover, actively engaging communities in the process of designing support systems leads to more effective capacity building, stronger program impact, and longer-term sustainability (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021).

### **The Current Study**

Learning from multisectoral, community-based research, the current study aimed to establish meaningful and reciprocal partnerships among the researcher-educator, community organizers, and immigrant families to collectively solve pandemic-related educational problems and advance educational equities. Specifically, this transformative mixed-methods study was collaboratively designed to support 20 immigrant families with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. The community and family partners participated in the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection that included three key components, connection, curriculum, and community, as follows:

- (i) **Connection:** connecting the families with essential services and helping them gain access to remote learning
- (ii) **Curriculum:** co-designing with the families developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, and remote learning experiences for young bilingual children
- (iii) **Community:** establishing reciprocal relationships with families; creating a safe space for them to share their knowledge, resources, and strategies to improve the children's learning experiences; and fostering community building by connecting families from within and across communities

Guided by the equitable collaboration framework (Ishimaru, 2019), the Home Connection program was created to recognize and leverage the families' collective strengths and existing capacities to mitigate the negative forces of the pandemic. It centered on the crucial roles of immigrant families as home educators and aimed to equip and engage immigrant families whose skills, knowledge, and sociocultural resources were highly valued and prioritized. Finally, it aimed to improve remote learning experiences for young bilingual children participating in the program, elevate intergenerational home learning, and foster community building.

### Theoretical Framework

To enhance family engagement efforts, this study relied heavily on the theoretical framework of equitable collaboration (Ishimaru, 2019, 2020). Rooted in critical race, decolonizing, community organizing, and sociocultural learning scholarship, this theoretical framework refutes deficit-based narratives that frame immigrant families as not valuing education, not trying hard enough, or lacking the sociocultural capital and knowledge needed for successful engagement (i.e., always in need of remedies; Valencia, 2010). The framework criticizes traditional family involvement practices that are often centralized around white middle-class norms and have the sole purpose of forced assimilation and acculturation (Levine-Rasky, 2009).

Utilizing an equity-focused lens, the equitable collaboration framework focuses on enacting systemic changes through shared responsibilities and collective efforts (Ishimaru, 2020). Equitable collaboration aims to

- (i) identify existing resources and leverage families' funds of knowledge;
- (ii) build capacities and establish reciprocal relationships with families;
- (iii) shift the focus from the individual to the collective to "facilitate advocacy and leadership to benefit *all* the children in a school or community" (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 7); and
- (iv) cultivate relational power among families, community members, and educators not only to increase access to educational opportunities but also to transform schools systematically.

Within the context of this study, the equitable collaboration framework was used to guide the design and implementation of the Home Connection program. Considering the special circumstances of the pandemic, collective efforts to transform "schools" were redirected to foster family connection, community building, and collective healing during home quarantine. First, we listened carefully to the immigrant families' stories and concerns, attempting to understand their experiences and struggles and identify the educational needs of their bilingual children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the program recognized the immigrant families as co-designers, co-educators, and co-evaluators who actively participated in the program design, implementation, and evaluation processes. Third, the program's goals were to connect the immigrant families with existing resources and provide educational support to the bilingual children who participated in the program within a culture of shared responsibility among the researcher, family partners, and community partners. Fourth, the program included multiple relationship- and capacity-building strategies, such as home visits, family

workshops, and family online gathering sessions. This paper shows that a collaborative learning ecology could potentially be formed in the most difficult circumstance with limited resources if establishing trusting relationships with families and communities is prioritized.

## Research Design

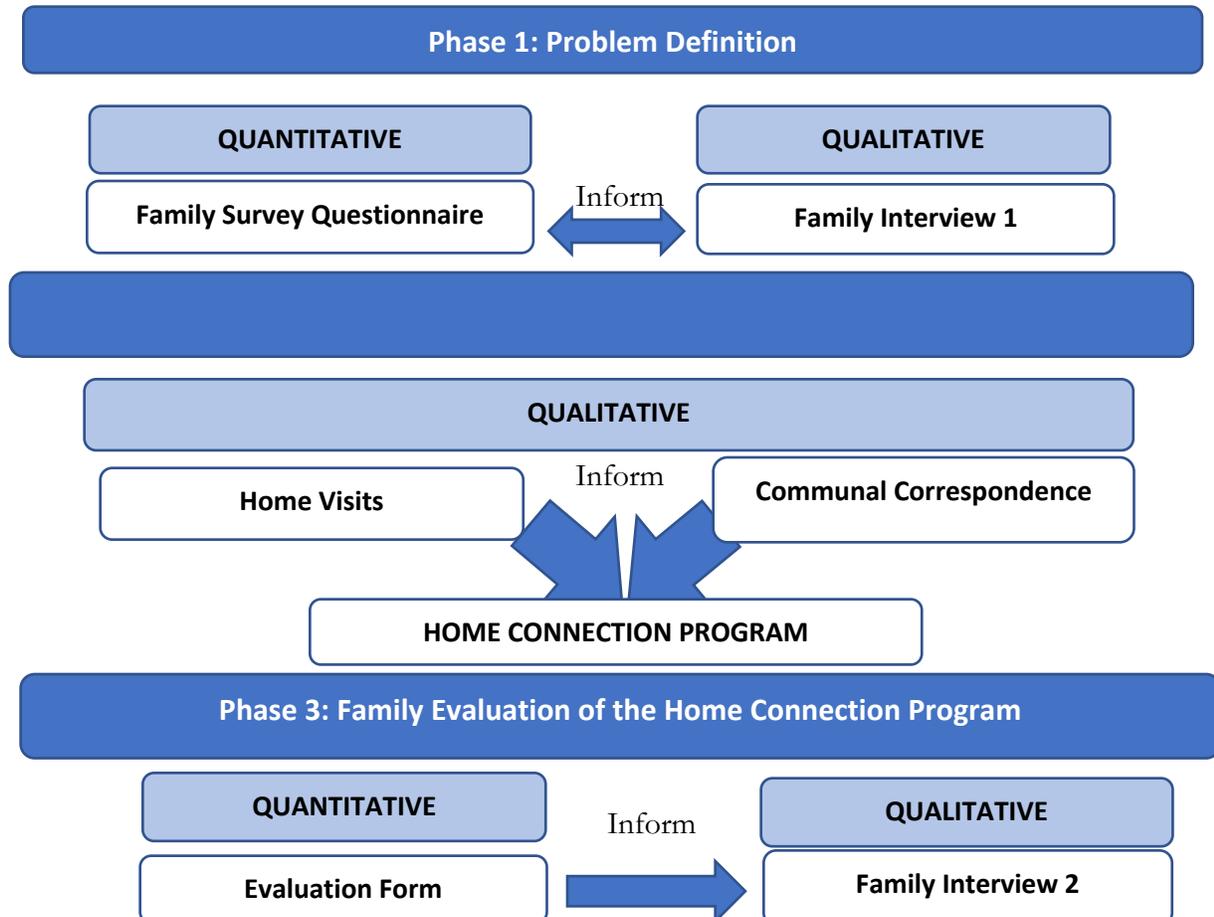
The research design of the study follows the cyclical model for transformative mixed-methods research (Mertens, 2010). Drawing from community-based participatory research, the transformative mixed methods design prioritizes community engagement throughout the entire research process, from defining the research problems based on communal needs and creating concrete social action plans to making research decisions in terms of data collection and analysis and evaluating the implementation of the solutions. The research process depends on the following:

- (i) the establishment of trusting relationships between the principal researcher and the research partners (in this case, community organizers and immigrant families);
- (ii) the co-design and development of culturally and linguistically responsive, equitable evaluation instruments; and
- (iii) awareness of power dynamics and the willingness to address them at every research phase.

For more information on the transformative research cycle, please refer to Figure 1. In this project, multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed to serve the purposes of each research phase and answer the research question. Each phase is described in more detail in later sections.

**Figure 1**

### *Transformative Mixed-Methods Model*



### **Partnering with Immigrant Families and Community Organizers**

In this study, the principal researcher collaborated closely with two community organizers, referred to as community partners, and three immigrant families, referred to as family partners. These partners helped recruit family participants and actively participated in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program. The community partners worked for two immigrant-serving community organizations located in the Metro Boston Area and had been supporting immigrant families through multiple pandemic-responsive programs. The family partners were recommended by the community partners. They included first-generation immigrants who spoke Spanish, Portuguese, and Vietnamese and had been living in their neighborhoods for a long time, which allowed them to build trusting relationships with many family participants. All family partners' children also participated in the learning activities of the Home Connection program.

### **Sampling**

Criteria-based snowball sampling was used to recruit the family participants (Parker et al., 2019). Snowball sampling is an effective recruitment method that helps connect with isolated communities under restricted conditions effected by COVID-19 and leverages existing acquaintances among families and partners (Sadler et al., 2010). The final sample included 20 immigrant families with 42 bilingual children (age range: 4–10 years old), who participated in the Home Connection program at different times. The first group of families (10 families and 15 children) participated from September–November 2020. The second group of families (10 families and 27 children) participated from January–March 2021.

### **Positionality**

This study carries certain assumptions, beliefs, and biases centered around the principal researcher's multiple roles in the research site: education researcher, early childhood educator, and immigrant mother. I am a cisgender, married Vietnamese woman with children, which places me in an advantageous position to conduct research with young children and families. For this project, my cultural and linguistic competency allowed me to communicate and collaborate more effectively with Vietnamese families who speak different dialects and had emigrated from different regions of Vietnam. To collaborate with other families with whom I did not share a linguistic background, I relied mostly on my community and family partners, language brokers within the families, and translation applications. While the cultural and language barriers posed certain challenges, I also viewed them as a learning opportunity and a realistic projection of an educator working in a multilingual or multicultural society who often needs to serve linguistically and culturally diverse populations of children and families. The barriers diminished my power as “the knower” in this context and forced me and my community/family partners to acknowledge and appreciate our interdependence in the process of co-constructing knowledge.

### **Phase 1. Problem Definition**

#### ***Family Survey Questionnaire***

All 20 family participants completed a Qualtrics survey questionnaire including 50 open-ended, multiple-choice questions (4-point and 5-point Likert scale). The questionnaire was available in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Vietnamese) and was organized into four sections: (i) Demographics (20 items), (ii) Language Practices (7 items), (iii) COVID-19 Pandemic Experience (7 items), and (iv) Remote Learning Experience (16 items). The questionnaire was sent via email to 12 families who were able to read, write, and respond to an online web-based survey. For the remaining eight families, the content of the questionnaire was orally explained in Vietnamese by the researcher

(4 families) or in Spanish by the community/family partners (4 families). These families responded to the questionnaire orally, using their home languages.

### ***Family Interview 1***

All primary caregivers, most of whom were immigrant mothers, participated in a semi-structured, 1-hour interview. This interview was collaboratively conducted by the principal researcher and the community partners before the families joined the Home Connection program. The interview had with the following goals:

- (i) to gain a deeper understanding of the families' backgrounds and their pandemic-related experiences
- (ii) to learn about the families' remote-learning experiences, especially the barriers that prevented the primary caregivers and their children from effectively engaging with remote learning provided by their school districts.

This interview was conducted online with 12 families who had access to digital devices, were familiar with the Zoom platform, and would be able to log in to Zoom with minimal technological support. For the other eight families who did not have access to devices and/or needed substantial technological support, this interview was conducted in-person during home visits with social distancing practices.

## **Phase 2. Development and Implementation of the Home Connection Program**

### ***Home Visits***

To establish trust and build relationships with the family participants, the researcher and community/family partners conducted multiple in-person and virtual home visits with the families during the program. The purposes of these visits were as follows:

- (i) to document the families' current access to resources and services
- (ii) to provide and connect families with essential services
- (iii) to provide digital devices and/or technological support as needed
- (iv) to gather the families' funds of knowledge and learn about their sociocultural and multilingual practices,
- (v) to discover the children's learning interests

During these visits, the principal researcher and community partners took field notes and photographs and used these data to inform the design of the Home Connection program.

### ***Communal Correspondence***

All social interactions and communal correspondence among the principal researcher, the community/family partners, and the family participants was documented by the principal researcher. This set of data included text messages and photographs of the families and their children's engagement with the program. The photographs of the children's learning activities and their work were taken by the primary caregivers and sent to the researcher via different platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and SMS text messages.

All data collected through Phase 1 interviews and Phase 2 home visits and correspondence were used to inform the development of the Home Connection program.

## **Phase 3. Family Evaluation of the Home Connection Program**

### ***Evaluation Form***

The family participants were asked to complete web-based evaluation forms three times during their participation in the program. The forms included five open-ended and five multiple-choice questions (5-point Likert scale). Further, the form was divided into three main sections related to (i) picture books, (ii) the learning boxes, and (iii) the online learning activities (see Appendix G. Family Evaluation Form). This form was available via Qualtrics in different languages, including Vietnamese,

Spanish, and English. Child-friendly evaluation forms with a 3-point rating scale and visual items were also sent to the families to obtain the child participants’ evaluations (see Appendix H. Child Evaluation Form).

The evaluation form was sent via email to 12 families who were able to read, write, and respond to an online web-based survey. For the remaining eight families, the hardcopy of the evaluation form was sent to the families to complete. This evaluation form was sent in Weeks 3, 6, and 10 of the program to gather the families’ feedback for each set of the learning boxes with the purpose of using the families’ suggestions to improve the program continuously.

***Family Interview 2***

The second interview was conducted at the end of the Home Connection program to learn about the families’ overall experiences with the program. By the end of the program, all adult and child participants were familiar with the Zoom platform and could troubleshoot their devices themselves. Therefore, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom. As the children’s experiences and evaluation were highly valued, both primary caregivers (most of whom were immigrant mothers) and their children were asked to participate in the second interview together. Additional interviews were conducted with three family partners and two community partners who took more active roles in the program to gather their feedback on the impact of and future directions for the program.

**Data Analyses**

**Quantitative**

***Family Survey Questionnaire***

The data were analyzed directly on Qualtrics to obtain descriptive statistics to build the family profiles (see Table 1) and determine how the families ranked different aspects of their home lives and remote learning experiences.

***Program Evaluation Forms***

Additionally, the data were analyzed directly on Qualtrics to reflect the families’ ranking of different components of the curriculum, including (i) picture books, (ii) learning boxes, and (iii) online learning sessions. The rapid feedback evaluation method (McNall et al., 2007) was employed to capture the families’ ongoing experiences. Subsequently, the researcher quickly revised each set of picture books and learning boxes and made changes to the online learning sessions according to the families’ feedback.

**Table 1**

***Family Profiles***

| Families               | Race/Ethnicity | Country of Origin | Home Languages | No. of Children/Grade Levels                             | Occupation (Mother/Father)  | Education Levels (Mother/Father)         | Household Size | Housing Arrangements | Family Income   |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Ngoc Nguyen**          | Asian          | Vietnam           | Vietnamese     | 3 (K, 1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> )                | Manicurist/Driver           | Highschool Diploma/Bachelor’s Degree     | 13             | 5-bedroom house      | \$10,000–19,999 |
| Kamila Gutierrez*<br>* | Latinx         | El Salvador       | Spanish        | 2 (Pre-K, K)                                             | Cleaner/Construction Worker | Highschool Diploma/Highschool Diploma    | 4              | 1 bedroom            | \$10,000–19,999 |
| Maria Flor**           | Latinx         | El Salvador       | Spanish        | 3 (1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> ) | Babysitter/Grocery Worker   | Some formal education/Highschool Diploma | 6              | 3-bedroom apartment  | \$10,000–19,999 |

## In Solidarity

|                   |                 |                |                       |                                                    |                                                  |                                                   |   |                        |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Carmen Dalo**     | Latinx          | Argentina      | Spanish               | 1 (1 <sup>st</sup> )                               | Cleaner/<br>Grocery<br>Worker                    | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 3 | 2-bedroom<br>apartment | \$20,000–<br>29,999   |
| Micaela Dafonte** | Latinx          | Honduras       | Spanish               | 2 (K,<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> )                         | Homemaker<br>/<br>Car Mechanic                   | Highschool<br>Diploma/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree    | 4 | 2-bedroom<br>apartment | \$20,000–<br>29,999   |
| Thu Nguyen**      | Asian           | Vietnam        | Vietnamese            | 2 (Pre-<br>K, K)                                   | Manicurist/<br>Plumber                           | Some formal<br>education/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree | 8 | 3-bedroom<br>condo     | \$20,000–<br>29,999   |
| Oscar Valdez**    | Latinx          | Venezuela      | Spanish               | 2 (1 <sup>st</sup> ,<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> )          | Construction<br>Worker/<br>Cleaner               | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 4 | 2-bedroom<br>apartment | \$20,000–<br>29,999   |
| Ngoc Tran**       | Asian           | Vietnam        | Vietnamese            | 2 (Pre-<br>K, 1 <sup>st</sup> )                    | Manicurist/<br>Factory<br>Worker                 | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 6 | 4-bedroom<br>house     | \$30,000–<br>49,999   |
| Susan Rodriguez** | Latinx          | Honduras       | Spanish               | 2 (Pre-<br>K, 1 <sup>st</sup> )                    | Restaurant<br>Worker/<br>Plumber                 | Highschool<br>Diploma/<br>Highschool<br>Diploma   | 5 | 3-bedroom<br>condo     | \$30,000–<br>49,999   |
| Mariana Lopez     | Afro-<br>Latinx | Cape<br>Verde  | Cape<br>Verdean       | 2 (1 <sup>st</sup> ,<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> )          | Patient<br>Coordinator/<br>Realtor               | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 4 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$50,000–<br>74,999   |
| Molly Morales     | Afro-<br>Latinx | Honduras       | Spanish               | 1 (3 <sup>rd</sup><br>grade)                       | Elderly<br>Caregiver                             | Bachelor's<br>Degree                              | 2 | 1 bedroom              | \$50,000–<br>74,999   |
| Carol Carneiro    | Latinx          | Brazil         | Portuguese            | 1 (1 <sup>st</sup> )                               | Homemaker<br>/<br>Music<br>Teacher               | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 3 | 4-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Penelope Marcela  | Latinx          | Colombia       | Spanish               | 2 (1 <sup>st</sup> ,<br>5 <sup>th</sup> )          | Administrato<br>r/<br>Engineer                   | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 4 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Phung Truong      | Asian           | Vietnam        | Vietnamese            | 2 (Pre-<br>K, K)                                   | Homemaker<br>/<br>Lecturer                       | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 4 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Thao Pham         | Asian           | Vietnam        | Vietnamese            | 2 (K,<br>4 <sup>th</sup> )                         | Software<br>Engineer/<br>Analytics<br>Consultant | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree     | 5 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Phuong Tran       | Asian           | Vietnam        | Vietnamese            | 3<br>(PreK,<br>K, 1 <sup>s</sup> )                 | Homemaker<br>/<br>Engineer                       | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Graduate<br>Degree       | 5 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Ellis Canaris     | Mixed           | Argentina      | Spanish,<br>English   | 2<br>(PreK,<br>1 <sup>st</sup> )                   | Book Editor/<br>Data Scientist                   | Bachelor's<br>Degree/<br>Graduate<br>Degree       | 4 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Camilla Rivera    | Latinx          | El<br>Salvador | Spanish,<br>English   | 3<br>(PreK,<br>1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> ) | Homemaker<br>/<br>Bioinformatics<br>Specialist   | Graduate<br>Degree/<br>Graduate<br>Degree         | 5 | 3-bedroom<br>house     | \$75,000–<br>99,999   |
| Carol Lim         | Asian           | Hong<br>Kong   | Cantonese,<br>English | 3<br>(Infant<br>,<br>Toddler,<br>1 <sup>st</sup> ) | Child<br>Specialist/<br>Accountant               | Graduate<br>Degree/<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree       | 5 | 4-bedroom<br>house     | \$100,000–<br>149,999 |

|              |       |       |                   |                            |                       |                                  |   |                 |                   |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Ellie Hirano | Mixed | Japan | Japanese, English | 2 (PreK, 1 <sup>st</sup> ) | Homemaker / Economist | Graduate Degree/ Graduate Degree | 4 | 3-bedroom house | \$100,000–149,999 |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------|

\*\*families with children participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program

*Note.* All family names are pseudonyms.

## Qualitative

### *Family Interview 1*

The first set of interview data collected during Phase 1: Problem Definition was transcribed, translated into English, and transferred to MAXQDA for thematic coding analysis (Saldaña, 2021). In the first cycle of coding, these interview data were deductively categorized into two main topics: (i) pandemic-related challenges and (ii) barriers to engaging with remote learning. These topics were aligned with the questions presented in the family survey questionnaire. From each transcript, recurring statements and phrases directly related to the two main topics were highlighted, extracted, and prescribed meanings (i.e., codes). In the second cycle of coding, similar codes were clustered into themes, and common themes across most transcripts were determined. Subsequently, the researcher engaged in a participants’ check process to validate the findings by selecting four focal families and confirming with them the selected statements and interpretations of the statements.

### *Family Interview 2*

The second set of interview data collected during Phase 3: Family Evaluation of the Curriculum was transcribed and translated into English. This set of data was categorized deductively to reflect the families’ evaluation of each component of the program, including (i) connection, (ii) curriculum, and (iii) community. From each transcript, recurring statements and phrases directly related to each component were highlighted, extracted, and prescribed meanings (i.e., codes). In the second cycle of coding, codes were clustered into two predetermined sub-themes: (i) affordances and (ii) constraints related to each program component. The affordances are reported in the finding section, and the constraints are reported in the limitations and future directions section.

All field notes, text messages, and photographs taken during the program were used to further illustrate how the families engaged with the program and to triangulate the research findings. The principal researcher then conducted a participants’ check with the community and family partners by presenting the preliminary findings of both the affordances and constraints of the program to validate these findings and collect the families’ suggestions and ideas on how to improve the program.

## Findings

### **Phase 1: Problem Definition**

The findings revealed that the immigrant families faced multiple challenges to sustain their home lives during the pandemic. They also struggled to gain access to and engage with school-provided remote learning. In summary, the findings showed that, when describing their pandemic-related experiences, the family participants reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed because of the following factors:

- i. job loss and financial hardship,
- ii. fear of COVID-19 infection and loss of family members,
- iii. their children’s lack of learning opportunities and excessive screen time,

iv. heightened caregiving load for immigrant mother  
 As identified by the immigrant families, they also faced multiple barriers to accessing and engaging with remote learning. These barriers were mostly related to the following categories: (i) infrastructure, (ii) curriculum and instruction, and (iii) family engagement (see Table 2).

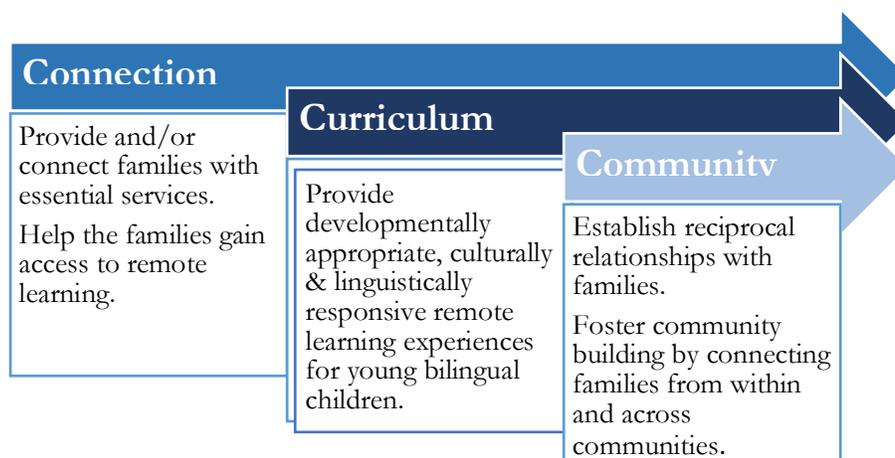
**Table 2**  
*Immigrant Families’ Barriers to Engaging with Remote Learning*

| <b>Infrastructure</b>                                                                                                 | <b>Curriculum &amp; Instruction</b>                                                                 | <b>Family (Dis)engagement</b>                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lack of electricity and high-speed internet                                                                           | Complicated learning schedule that did not consider the families’ working schedules and settings    | Lack of social connection and family engagement practices                             |
| Lack of reliable technological devices and technological support                                                      | Lack of culturally and linguistically responsive educational resources                              | Microaggressions and discriminatory practices enacted by school personnel             |
| Lack of language services, such as translation and interpretation, for families speaking languages other than English | Lack of developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical practices | Digital discipline, suspension, and punishment enacted by classroom teachers via Zoom |

**Phase II: Development and Implementation of the Home Connection Program**

After identifying the immigrant families’ pandemic-related challenges and the barriers that prevented them from successfully engaging with remote learning, the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners engaged in multiple discussions and began planning actions. We designed the Home Connection program<sup>2</sup> to include three key components (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
*The Key Components of the Home Connection Program*



<sup>2</sup> This program was funded by multiple sources including the COVID-19 Rapid Response Student Success Grant by the NEA Foundation, the Equity Grant by American Educational Research Association-Division C Teaching & Learning, and crowdfunding sources through the collective efforts of community organizers and immigrant families participating in the program.

The design of the Home Connection program was firmly grounded in the equitable collaboration framework of family engagement to build a strong partnership with the family participants. This program recognizes the crucial roles of the families as co-designers, co-educators, co-researchers, and co-evaluators. We acknowledge that the Home Connection program was not a panacea that aimed to solve all pandemic-related problems and remote learning challenges faced by these immigrant families. Considering the temporal and spatial constraints created by the pandemic, we intentionally and collectively designed this program to meet some of the basic needs of the families but focused mainly on helping the families gain access to remote learning and improving the children's remote learning experiences.

### **Connection**

To address the families' pandemic-related challenges, we partnered with two community-based organizations and one faith-based organization from red-zone neighborhoods in the Greater Boston Areas to provide and/or connect the families with basic services, including the following:

- Delivering free groceries and home-cooked meals to families infected with COVID-19
- Sending text messages in home languages to inform the families about COVID-19 vaccination
- Helping the families register for COVID-19 vaccination appointments
- Providing translation and interpretation services for families who spoke languages other than English

To remove barriers to accessing remote learning, we provided internet hotspots for two families who did not have access to high-speed internet. We also sponsored two iPads and three Chromebooks for five children who had not received school-provided devices at the beginning of the pandemic school year. The researcher-educator and the family partners helped troubleshoot school-provided devices and provided technological support in home languages to some family participants. We also provided translation and interpretation services for the families who spoke languages other than English.

### **Curriculum**

We designed a 10-week Home Connection curriculum in the form of a learning box to be delivered to each family. This integrated curriculum centralized play-based, hands-on activities suitable for young learners; celebrated the students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and fostered intergenerational learning in home settings. Each learning box included bilingual picture books, an integrated project-based home learning curriculum with detailed instructions in English and home languages, and all supplies and materials needed for all children from each household (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*Learning Boxes*



The learning activities included (i) independent, (ii) family-guided, and (iii) teacher-guided activities spanning subject matters including language arts, math, science, arts and crafts, and sensory play. Language arts and math activities comprised three levels of difficulty, K–1, 2–3, and 4–5, to fit the learning levels of the child participants. For science, arts and crafts, and sensory play, the learning activities were designed to encourage the child participants to work with their siblings and/or other family members to complete learning tasks.

To assist each family and their children with the teacher-guided activities, the researcher-educator conducted weekly online learning sessions via Zoom. Although the caregivers were encouraged to participate in the online learning sessions, it was not mandatory. Most children could independently work with the researcher-educator, as the activities were designed to suit their learning levels. For families with multiple children, all children participated in the online learning sessions together. These sessions were scheduled with flexibility to fit each family’s working schedule and home settings. Embracing a multilingual online learning space, the researcher-educator collaborated with the family partners to conduct all online learning sessions in both English and the home languages.

### ***Community***

To foster community building, the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners conducted both in-person and virtual home visits to establish trusting relationships with the families. We also ensured the occurrence of regular check-ins and used multiple methods of communication, such as social media, text messages, emails, and phone calls, to connect with the families. Our protocols included sending reminders in home languages to the families before the learning boxes were delivered and before each online learning session. We also gathered the families’ verbal feedback for each learning box and directly following each learning session.

To connect families from within and across communities, we leveraged group text messages and social media to share remote learning tips and strategies and send announcements regarding online, family-friendly events in which the families might be interested. At the end of the program, we conducted a virtual family gathering to showcase the children’s work and celebrate all the children and families for their active participation and engagement with the program.

### **Phase III: Family Evaluation**

The following section presents the findings related to the three components of the program. In general, all family participants showed a high level of participation, engagement, and interest in the Home Connection program. Of the 20 families, 19 completed all 10 weeks of the program and participated in all online learning sessions; only one family withdrew from the program after 7 weeks of participation due to COVID-19 infection. In terms of engagement, 18 of the 20 families completed all learning activities, including the independent, family-guided, and teacher-guided activities.

Most families shared that participating in the program helped them gain access to essential resources and services during the pandemic, become more confident in navigating school-provided remote learning, recognize their active roles in their children’s education, and connect more closely with other families and communities.

### ***Connection***

**Essential Services.** Most families, especially those who had members infected with the COVID-19 virus, shared their gratitude that the program directly provided and/or helped them connect with essential services, such as groceries/meals delivery, COVID-19 vaccination, online learning resources, and online family events, among others, that were much needed at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to the essential services provided by community-based or faith-based organizations, some families also volunteered to prepare groceries, cook meals, and deliver them to

other families in need (see Figure 4). Through these activities, many families became more connected to their community-based and faith-based organizations, and these connections are still being maintained.

**Figure 4.**  
*Groceries and Food Delivery Services*



**Language Support.** Recognizing the lack of translation and interpretation services in most family participants' school districts, some bilingual families and community organizers volunteered to provide translation and interpretation services, such as translating and explaining school emails, especially those related to remote learning policies and practices. The researcher-educator also supported two Vietnamese family participants during parent-teacher conferences throughout the pandemic school year. The family participants who spoke languages other than English found the translation and interpretation services extremely helpful for obtaining the latest information on the COVID-19 vaccination and communicating with their children's schools, especially with the classroom teachers, more effectively.

**Technological Support.** Some families who faced the problems of connectivity and unreliable devices shared that the program helped their children gain access and the ability to participate in school-provided remote learning without delay. Recognizing the lack of technological support in home languages, some family participants also volunteered to record instructional videos in their home languages to share with other families that would provide instructions for logging in to Zoom, accessing learning applications, and uploading their children's work through the learning applications. All these videos were shared widely through the WhatsApp group chat and Facebook group page of the program.

The results showed that the family participants were not only beneficiaries who merely received resources and services but also active agents whose participation drove the change-making process. They served in multiple roles, such as volunteers, translators, interpreters, technological support staff, and advocates whose voices and ideas helped us constantly improve the design and implementation of the program.

### *Curriculum*

All families shared that the best aspect of the program was the curriculum, which was often described in both the evaluation forms and family interviews as “fun,” “hands-on,” “engaging,” “flexible,” and “beneficial” for the children. Several themes appeared in the feedback received by families regarding the positive elements of the curriculum and the effectiveness of the program. For example, families reported that the program contained **engaging reading materials** that were entertaining and culturally and linguistically responsive. For this reason, most family participants read the books 4–5 times a week, some read them 2–3 times a week, and one family even read them more than five times a week. The families engaged with the picture books in multiple ways: (i) reading to their children, (ii) listening to their children read the books, or (iii) retelling the stories orally. If the children were old enough and knew how to read independently, some of them would read the books to their siblings and grandparents. Most families also confirmed that they used the suggested discussion questions to talk about the books with their children.

Sharing how the program had sparked her daughter’s interest in reading, Carol Carneiro, a Brazilian mother of a 6-year-old emergent bilingual, said,

*I always have a hard time catching Mimi’s attention, and she is always on the tablet, on the games. Compared to that, you know, seeing a book is kind of boring to her. But, as she got into the program, she knew that she would do the projects with the books, so she was very interested and willing to pay attention to the story and try to understand what it is about. In the first week, she saw the mini koalas, and she was very curious about them, and I told her that you would teach her how to create a house for them—she was so into it. She read the book many times and even drew some designs of the koala house. . . . She was more interested in animal stories and really loved the dragon book.*

Penelope, a Colombian mother of two bilingual children (6 years old and 9 years old) appreciated that the picture books came in different languages and embraced cultural diversity:

*We love the books. They are so diverse, beautiful stories with good lessons. The pictures are so beautiful. They love the tacos book, and the kids were like, aah, they have Spanish words. These books are both in Spanish and English. [translated from Spanish]*

Thu Nguyen, a Vietnamese mother of two, explained that having picture books in her home language encouraged her to participate more in shared reading with her children:

*Most of the time, I don’t know how to teach my kids. I don’t read to them because I am afraid of my accent. . . . my pronunciation, you know, would not be correct, but these books were in Vietnamese, and you sent us the YouTube link for the English reading, so K. got to listen to both. He really loved it, and he talked a lot about the egg book—that’s his favorite. He told his Dad about the book and asked all of the questions. [translated from Vietnamese]*

Having picture books sent directly to their homes helped the families build their home libraries and begin conducting regular shared reading sessions with their children. Having access to high-quality picture books and reading with family members, such as parents, grandparents, and siblings, created a literacy-rich environment for many young emergent bilinguals participating in the program.

Another theme related to the curriculum consisted of the families’ and children’s engagement with **hands-on relevant activities with instruction in home languages**. Commenting on the curriculum, Penelope Marcela, a Colombian mother of two, described her children’s excitement and active engagement because of the experiential learning approach and the interconnection of the picture books’ content and the learning activities:

*I think that the kids really love it. . . . every time I said it's time to go learn with Alisha . . . they were like yeah, and they are so excited, all the time. I can see that the activities are all connected to the book, the math . . . and science, and all other things. I think that's the best part of the program. . . . My kids, they love working with their hands, with the materials. I have to say, the projects, they are really cool . . . , they are fun . . . and the sessions are not too long, you know, for Ben, he is younger, and it's good that [the online session is] not too long and he can work through the whole session by himself. . . . My kids love the koalas and the tacos books, but overall, they love all the boxes. [translated from Spanish]*

Other families, such as Phuong Tran, a Vietnamese mother of two, shared that the family-guided activities had detailed instruction in home languages and a lot of visual aids that made them accessible and easy to follow:

*Mie could just look at the photos of the step-by-step instructions, and she would remind me on what to do next. I know it was a family-guided activity and you wanted the parents to help the kids, but they were so clear that Mia could even do it herself, of course with my supervision, but they were easy and fun. [translated from Vietnamese]*

Finally, the families commented on the importance and success of **interactive online learning sessions**. Evaluating the teacher-guided activities conducted through the online learning sessions, many families said that the setup of these sessions rendered them interactive and engaging. Thao Pham, a Vietnamese mother of two, shared her children's experience with the online learning sessions:

*So when they did the online sessions, they were really engaging, they focused . . . and sometimes we had some family events and we told them, oh, how about skipping a session, and they did not like it, they wanted to learn with you, and they did not want to miss the lesson, any minute of it. They loved the birthday card project because they got to give them to their dad right away that week. But they loved everything. . . . They were very excited, and they always reminded me, it's time to log in, mommy, and I am glad they remembered. [translated from Vietnamese]*

Similarly, Penelope Marcela, a Colombian mother of two, described how her son engaged with hands-on learning activities that were aligned with his learning interests:

*[The kids] are present and concentrate very well when they do the lessons with you. Sometimes for Ben, I don't think it's his strong suit. . . . When he learned in remote learning, he was not excited to learn through Zoom, he did not like the teacher lecturing, he would start finding something else to do, find something to play here and there and not paying attention. I can tell that he does not like that, you know, like, in reading and writing and math, he does not like it as much as he did with you, and I think because you connected well with him, and he got to do a lot of cool projects that he really liked. [translated from Spanish]*

The first few online learning sessions were purposely conducted with one family at a time to help the researcher-educator establish a relationship with each family and the children of each household. Many families found this setup highly effective in getting their children more engaged with remote learning. For example, Carol Carneiro, a Brazilian mother of one, shared that the one-on-one setting worked in favor of her daughter, Mimi, who was still developing both of her languages and needed more of a teacher's attention to support her participation in learning activities:

*She is very shy when she came to [school-provided] remote learning. When she was in Zoom class with schools, with other kids, and she did not talk, she was afraid she said something wrong, wrong words, wrong pronunciation, and she thought they would laugh at her. I tried to encourage her, but she needs time, and school Zoom [sessions] with a lot of kids do not work for her—they were all fighting for attention, and Mimi knew*

*that she would never get picked first. So one-on-one sessions are better for her. I could see that she changed completely when she did the program with you—she talks more, she can express herself better and learn better. I think it's a good design for kids like her.*

In the last four sessions, we began grouping the students—especially the children who did not have siblings—into small-group sessions (3–4 students max) to encourage peer learning. Some families with one child found this small group setting helpful for their children. For example, Carmen Dalo, an Argentinian mother of one, shared her daughter's experience:

*She loves to talk and to share with her friends, and she did not get a chance to talk very often during remote learning. . . . She loved the sessions with other kids. That's why she is so excited about the program; she talks about it all the time.*

During the overall evaluation, the families reported the importance of **intergenerational connections** through the program. One of the important aspects of the curriculum was that all family-guided activities were purposely designed to encourage interactive family learning in different forms: it could be parent-children interactions, siblings working together on projects, and/or grandparents-grandchildren interactions during read-aloud sessions. Some families with grandparents living in the same household recognized how the program had actively engaged all family members and fostered meaningful intergenerational connections. For example, Vietnamese caregivers like Phung Truong and Thao Pham explained how the grandmothers participated in the program:

*Grandma read for them 'The Coming Home' book, and she was surprised to see a book in Vietnamese. She was really happy, I know, and then she said it is a good program. [translated from Vietnamese]*

*Grandma likes it; she likes that the kids made a lot of stuff and . . . remember the week that they asked her about the fruits' names, and she got to help them with the Vietnamese names, and she went to the supermarket, the other week, she went to the supermarket to get the jackfruit. Then she cut it; she showed them how it looked like inside. [translated from Vietnamese]*

Observation data from the online learning sessions showed the same results. Even in families whose grandparents lived in separate homes, they were always included in some of the activities that could be done remotely, such as reading picture books via Zoom, watching how plants grow, learning fruit names in home languages, and so on. During some of the online learning sessions, the researcher-educator noticed that grandparents and other extended family members, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins, visited the households, and they were considered part of the children's learning circles. Therefore, these family members were encouraged to participate and work with the children on the projects if they were interested. Thus, the flexibility and family-focused aspect of these online learning sessions built a seamless learning environment with a high level of family engagement.

## Community

The findings showed that, as a team, including the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners, we were successful in establishing trust and reciprocal relationships with the family participants and the community members throughout the program.

Camilla, the family partner, shared in the interview,

*I think many families love the program because we really connect with them and care for their kids. They can see that we care for the education quality of the program and want it to be better. . . . And we talked to the families all the time; we texted them; we visited them; we called."*

Camilla believed that by offering a high-quality education program that engaged the children with meaningful learning experiences, we established successful relationships with the families. She

also believed that having clear communication and regular contact with the families contributed to these relationships.

Hani, the community partner, shared that frequent contact was beneficial, but treating the families with respect and actively listening to them were even more important:

*Many people came into our neighborhood, brought this and that and said they wanted to help the families, but they did not treat the families with respect, you know. Yes, we are poor; yes, we don't have these fancy houses with green lawns and white fences, but we care for our children as much as you do. Even more because some of them move earth and mountain to get the kids into schools, to get an education. . . . So when [the researcher-educator] came to us and you worked with us, we told you that same thing . . . and the families told us that you listened to them, you talked to them and listened to what they got to say about their kids' education, and that's what matters to us, you know. That's why we worked with you.*

Regular contact, respect, and reciprocity were important factors that helped establish and sustain relationships among the researcher-educator, the family/community partners, and the family participants. These relationships were maintained not only throughout the program but also after the program ended.

By participating in the program, many families connected with each other through our online gathering sessions and (mostly) through social media and group chat. Many shared their children's work through Facebook and WhatsApp and received many positive comments from other families. Some families sent gifts, donated books, and made cards for their friends who participated in the same online learning session.

Another positive impact of the program was its amplification of the family participants' voices. It encouraged some of them to become more involved with district-level discussions and assume leadership roles. For example, four families volunteered to participate in a district-wide presentation to share about their experiences with the Home Connection program and to advocate for equitable family engagement practices with immigrant families.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Although the Home Connection program successfully established reciprocal relationships with immigrant families, offered an engaging and interactive remote learning program for young bilingual children, and fostered community building, this program had certain limitations regarding each component, as explained below.

### Connection

With limited grant funding, the program could provide internet and/or devices to only eight immigrant families from two school districts, even though the actual number of immigrant families in need was much higher. Additionally, relying on family participants and community organizers to provide translation and interpretation services and technological support was a temporary solution for a systemic problem that should be addressed at the district level. Therefore, we reached out to district leaders, especially those from immigrant-serving districts, to alert them about immigrant families' linguistic rights to translation and interpretation services and how the lack of clear communication could marginalize these families and prevent them from engaging with their children's schooling. While some district leaders acknowledged the problem and promised to work toward a better solution, some families shared with us that the problem of language barriers has remained unsolved. Thus, more advocacy work is needed to keep school districts accountable and responsible for providing translation and interpretation services for immigrant families.

## Curriculum

Although the curriculum received positive evaluations from both the family and child participants, it also had some limitations. First, the design of the program was mostly determined by the input from the seed families of the first group. When the program was offered to the second family group, some modifications were made to make the program more suitable for the children's learning levels and their linguistic backgrounds. However, the central texts and learning activities remained the same. Therefore, the curriculum may have privileged the first family group's lived experiences and funds of knowledge over those of the second group. Second, due to limitations in funding and human resources, the program could not be offered for a longer period to serve more immigrant families, especially those living in under-resourced neighborhoods. Some families commented that the program should be extended to contain more sessions and should be offered more regularly (instead of one time). To some families, the 10 sessions went too quickly, and they felt that their children would benefit from more sessions. For example, one family suggested, *"I think it's such a great program that we should have it for after-school or summer programs for bilingual children. To be honest, we want it to be longer and have more sessions. My suggestion would be to have more content developed and get it connected with the school curriculum."* Considering this comment, we contacted some school districts and proposed to run the Home Connection program as an afterschool and/or summer program for young bilingual children. However, funding remains the biggest concern, and we are applying for more funding to implement and expand the program in the near future.

## Community

While we made certain progress connecting the families from within communities, especially those sharing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Hani, the community partner, explained that connecting families across communities had been challenging: *"Many families we worked with need to focus on getting back on their feet, and it will be very hard to add more to their plates, right? We understand that connecting different communities is important, but we need to take into consideration the families' situations and, of course, which community would benefit more from these activities."* Reflecting on the community component, Camilla stated, *"I know it is hard, but we have to try, and we have to keep trying, because we are living in silos. We need to keep reminding ourselves that it is important to connect with different communities and bring the program to different neighborhoods."* Although we attempted to organize online family gathering sessions to unite families, asynchronous settings, such as social media platforms, seemed to work better for most families, considering that the families had varying work schedules and other obligations. Considering that COVID-19 restrictions rapidly changed over time, we eventually decided to organize family events and group learning activities in outdoor places, such as backyard gardens or public parks, to foster community building, which remained an important component of the program.

## Discussion and Practical Implications

This paper employed the equitable collaboration framework and the transformative mixed methods model to identify collective problems and address the immediate needs of 20 immigrant families and 42 young bilingual children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first phase of the study revealed multiple unique challenges that these immigrant families faced during the pandemic and revealed structural barriers hindering the establishment of meaningful home-school connections during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the following:

- the asymmetric power relationships between school personnel and immigrant families,
- the lack of a resilient support system for immigrant families, and
- the oppressive practices of schooling for young bilingual children.

In addition to existing social and educational inequities, these immigrant families experienced schools as a hostile environment, even when moving to online learning spaces. These findings echoed other studies that documented the long history of inequitable treatments for nondominant families in general (Fennimore, 2017; Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2020) and how inequitable family disengagement practices negatively impacted the remote learning experiences of immigrant families and bilingual students during the pandemic (Cioè-Peña, 2022; Chen, 2021). While remote learning is no longer a reality of public schooling, inequitable family disengagement practices will continue to be enacted if not recognized and eliminated, which certainly threaten home-school relationships and perpetuate educational inequities.

The second and third phases of the study focused on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program. The findings from this phase demonstrated how equitable family and community engagement played a crucial role in building a resilient support system for immigrant families and enhancing the educational experiences of their young bilingual children. By prioritizing equitable and collaborative family engagement practices, the Home Connection program was positively evaluated by the family participants whose active engagement defined the success of the program. This program could be successfully implemented under the constraints of the pandemic for the following reasons: First, it was designed based on the cultural and linguistic assets and specific needs of the immigrant families and their children. Actively listening to families' ideas and gathering families' feedback were crucial, considering how the pandemic required quick adaptation and response to meet the families' changing needs. Second, it was implemented through an interconnected network consisting of the community partners, family partners, and community-based organizations. Learning from other community-based studies conducted during the pandemic, such as Wieland et al. (2022) and Washburn et al. (2022), we purposely created and sustained this network through continuous, bidirectional communication via multiple platforms (home visits, text messages, social media, etc.). This work helped cultivate a culture of shared interests *and* shared responsibilities among stakeholders.

On one hand, leveraging connections with community partners and organizations helped funnel much-needed resources to better serve immigrant families during times of crisis. On the other hand, drawing on the immigrant families' diverse experiences, skills, and knowledge helped motivate these families to step up and take control of their situations (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). The participating families contributed to all three components of the program in different ways and through different roles. After the program concluded, many families committed to sustaining the Home Connection program, maintaining their connection with other immigrant families and building stronger communities within their neighborhoods and districts through different initiatives. By actively engaging in the design, implementation, and evaluation processes of the program, these immigrant families, who have traditionally been marginalized and disempowered by discriminatory and disengaging practices, could view themselves as stakeholders whose funds of knowledge were highly valued and whose activism had a strong impact on their children's learning experiences.

## Conclusion

By documenting the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, this study presents a counter-narrative about immigrant families: these immigrant families were not mere participants in a funded research program or receivers of resources and services. They were active social agents whose hopes and dreams for their children's education certainly motivated them to find ways to collaboratively create an interactive home-based learning environment, even within the constraints of the pandemic. Seeing them as co-educators of home-based learning

transcends the idea of schooling as bounded within the classroom walls and knowledge as generated only in formal learning contexts. Although the pandemic has quickly become our shared past experiences, what we saw and learned from the pandemic will determine how we tackle educational inequities in our public schools. What remains the same is the crucial role of meaningful and equitable family and community engagement in creating a sustainable support system for immigrant families and providing equitable learning opportunities for all bilingual students.

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