

Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers' Journeys of Higher  
Education in Pursuit of the "American Dream"

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this research is to deeply explore the experiences of immigrant mothers who are striving to achieve higher education in their pursuit of the American dream while executing their parental responsibilities. It involves a thorough examination of the various challenges and obstacles that these women encounter, including difficulties with language, financial limitations, and disparities in cultural backgrounds.

By conducting this research and incorporating personal narratives into this document, I aim to shed light on the remarkable resilience and unwavering determination displayed by immigrant mothers as they overcome these hurdles for the sake of securing a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Additionally, this dissertation incorporates recommendations for policies that can enhance accessibility to higher education for immigrant mothers while simultaneously fostering diversity within academic institutions. Ultimately, the writer's goal is to raise awareness about both the hardships and successes experienced by immigrant mothers who tirelessly pursue higher education as a means of attaining an improved quality of life.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

The concept of the American Dream has always been a fundamental element of the nation's character, representing endless possibilities for economic advancement and personal satisfaction. Nevertheless, immigrant mothers face distinct hurdles in achieving this dream due to their dual responsibilities as caretakers and ambitious students (Adams, 1931). To gain a clearer understanding of the idea of the American Dream, it is crucial to define it within its sociological and historical context. From a sociological perspective, the American Dream is a nuanced and developing concept based on the belief that diligence, resolve, and fair chances can result in accomplishment, affluence, and upward social progression (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Historically speaking, this term became prominent in the mid-20th century when it embodied post-World War II optimism and aspirations for an improved life focused on property ownership, education, and financial security (Schultz, 2010). Through an exploration of these sociological and historical elements, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the multi-faceted nature of the American Dream and its relevance to immigrant mothers striving for advanced education.

Immigration to the United States is often driven by aspirations for a better life, one filled with economic stability, educational prospects, and enhanced social standing (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1998). Many immigrants view education as an essential pathway toward achieving these dreams (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Nevertheless, immigrant mothers face distinct hurdles in balancing their educational pursuits with their parental obligations (Chavez, 1992). They must confront issues such as limited financial resources, language barriers, cultural adjustments, and childcare



responsibilities - all while juggling academic commitments (Chuang & Su, 2009; Smith, 2005; Kanno & Hu, 2015).

This study aims to shed light on how these women negotiate the complexities inherent in pursuing higher education while simultaneously meeting societal expectations of motherhood by exploring this subject matter within an empirical framework focused on real-life narratives and statistical analyses drawn from various sources, such as interviews with immigrant mothers themselves.

The purpose of the study posits that through their pursuit of higher education, immigrant mothers navigate the challenges of balancing maternal responsibilities while striving for socio-economic mobility which ultimately empowers them to contribute to the realization of the American Dream. This central argument encapsulates both sides of these women's journeys, the delicate equilibrium they strive to maintain between advancing academically and nurturing their children.

By interviewing immigrant mothers, such as Hispanic or African immigrants seeking advanced degrees or Asian or European refugees attending community colleges, this research aims not only to highlight individual triumphs but also to identify systemic obstacles that impede the progress of immigrant mothers in academia.

### **Background of the Problem**

The American Dream, a foundational idea in American society since the early 20th century, embodies the belief that success and fulfillment can be attained through hard work and persistence (Adam, 1931). This idea has deeply resonated with individuals who have come to America from different parts of the world, offering them a sense of promise

and opportunity in their new land. Over the years, researchers and scholars have dedicated significant efforts to understanding how immigrants navigate their pursuit of education and aspirations within the framework of the American Dream (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009).

To fully grasp the essence of the American Dream within the scope of this research, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive framework that delves into its meaning. The American Dream encompasses a vision of attaining upward social progression, financial prosperity, and personal contentment using diligence and equitable chances. Various scholars have presented a range of interpretations regarding this intricate idea. For instance, from a sociological perspective, it is perceived as a faith in the potential for wealth and achievement through hard work and perseverance (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Historically speaking, the notion of the American Dream came into prominence following World War II, encapsulating desires for an improved lifestyle centered around property ownership, education opportunities, and economic security (Schultz, 2010).

The concept of the American Dream, as utilized in this research, encapsulates the shared conviction that immigrants can attain success, prosperity, and improved social standing in America by exhibiting commitment, resilience, and actively seeking educational prospects. The study delves into the intricate path immigrant mothers walk as they strive to harmonize their duties as caregivers with their aspirations for furthering their education to realize this cherished vision of the American Dream. Extensive research has been conducted to examine the encounters of immigrant mothers in higher education (Oerther, Lach, & Oerther, 2020). However, there is still a pressing demand for more thorough investigations that delve deeply into the distinctive situations and resilience exhibited by

this particular group. It is imperative to gain a profound understanding of the intricacies involved in their journey, as well as the strategies they employ to surmount numerous challenges. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the profound impact of their pursuit of higher education on their families. Acquiring this knowledge will play an instrumental role in formulating effective policies and support systems that facilitate their triumphs (Torres, 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The quest for advanced education among immigrant mothers in the United States, driven by their desire to achieve the American Dream, is a multifaceted and complex expedition filled with distinct obstacles. Although the American Dream represents limitless possibilities for economic advancement and personal satisfaction (Adams, 1931), immigrant mothers are confronted with the complex responsibility of balancing their roles as caretakers and ambitious students. The issue at hand revolves around comprehending the nuanced difficulties and advantages that shape the journeys of immigrant mothers in their pursuit of higher education and ultimately, the attainment of the American Dream. The problem that this proposed study addresses is that it is not known how immigrant mothers who graduated from college in the United States describe their college student experiences of raising school-aged children while enrolled in a postsecondary education degree program, simultaneously meeting the demands of raising a family while pursuing higher education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how immigrant mothers who graduated from or are currently in college in the United States, describe their college student experiences of raising school-aged children while meeting the demands of higher education. This study's methodology and design employ a phenomenological approach to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences encountered by immigrant mothers who are simultaneously pursuing or have pursued higher education and managing their maternal duties. The researcher intends to conduct extensive interviews and meticulously analyze the resulting data to identify recurring themes and sequences, with the goal being to fully comprehend the fundamental nature of the phenomenon being investigated.

### **Research Questions**

Throughout history, immigrants have continuously crossed physical and cultural boundaries in their relentless pursuit of the American Dream, driven by the desire to secure better opportunities for themselves and their loved ones. At the heart of this dream lies the belief that higher education serves as a fundamental steppingstone towards progress and prosperity (Machado, 2017).

This research aims to delve deep into the stories of immigrant mothers who have completed or are currently enrolled in post-secondary education in the United States specifically, in the Midwest. It seeks to shed light on their unique experiences of raising school-aged children while also juggling the demands of higher education. By undertaking this exploration, the researcher hopes to address a significant gap in the scholarly literature that has neglected to examine the intricate challenges faced by these

remarkable women. Through a qualitative investigation and employing a narrative methodology, this study endeavors to capture detailed and rich accounts of their journeys, providing a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of their lives.

To provide a deeper understanding and situational background for the research being conducted, this study seeks to address two core research questions:

1. How do immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences juggling maternal responsibilities while pursuing higher education?

2. How do immigrant mothers with college degrees recount their experiences coping with the demands of academic pursuits?

The researcher's inquiry into the lives of immigrant mothers, who epitomize the essence of the American Dream, is propelled by a set of queries that function as a guiding compass. These thought-provoking questions direct the researcher's path as he explores the intricate and intertwined realms of motherhood and education. With an ardent desire to delve deeper, this research attempts to unravel the various trials, victories, and intricacies inherent in this multifaceted odyssey by delving into their narratives. The researcher, by immersion in their life and education narratives, aims to comprehend better the manifold challenges, triumphant moments, and complexities that characterize this remarkable journey.

## **Significance of the Study**

The American Dream, traditionally defined as achieving financial success and material wealth (Riggio, 2021), has long been associated with the pursuit of better opportunities by immigrants who come to the United States for themselves and their families (Howard, 2017; Paulino Feliz, 2022; & Machado, 2017). However, for some immigrant mothers in particular, higher education holds the key to realizing this dream (Machado, 2017).

Despite facing unique obstacles such as language barriers and domestic responsibilities, research indicates that obtaining a college degree can significantly enhance social mobility and overall well-being (Litwicky, 2010).

Given these circumstances, it becomes evident that this study carries considerable significance. Firstly, the study aims to shed light on the specific challenges faced by immigrant mothers in their pursuit of higher education while also identifying potential opportunities. Moreover, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of how motherhood intersects with immigration and higher education. By doing so, it will enable us to discern ways in which institutions of higher education can better support the needs of immigrant mothers striving towards their version of the “American Dream”.

Furthermore, this research will make valuable contributions to both feminist theory and educational studies by delving into the experiences of immigrant mothers who are actively seeking higher education as a means of achieving their rendition of the American Dream.

## Definition of Terms

To gain a more profound insight into the journey of immigrant mothers as they navigate through higher education in their pursuit of the American Dream, it is crucial to establish a mutual comprehension of fundamental concepts that are pivotal to this study. This section presents succinct explanations and contextual frameworks for the subsequent terms:

**1. American Dream:** The American Dream refers to the notion that anyone, regardless of their background, can be successful and achieve upward social mobility through hard work. For immigrant mothers, this concept is pivotal as it frames their motivations and aspirations in the context of higher education (Adams, 1931).

**2. Higher Education:** This refers to all post-secondary education opportunities, including colleges and universities. In this study, higher education is the setting in which immigrant mothers seek to advance their qualifications and knowledge, aiming to improve their and their families' socio-economic status (Trow, 1973).

**3. Immigrant Mothers:** This term is used to describe women who have relocated from their country of origin to another country (in this case, the United States) and have children. Their identity as immigrants and mothers plays a significant role in their experiences and challenges in higher education (Chavez, 1992). To further refine the definition, the focus is on women who were born in another country and later migrated to the United States in their adulthood (preferably, age 22 and above).

**4. Immigration:** Immigration refers to the process by which individuals or groups of people move from one country or region to another, often to reside there permanently or

temporarily. This movement can be driven by various factors such as economic opportunities, political asylum, family reunification, or other personal reasons (Massey et al., 1998).

**5. Phenomenology:** Phenomenology is a philosophical and research approach that seeks to understand and describe the essence or fundamental nature of human experiences and perceptions. It emphasizes the subjective and lived experiences of individuals, aiming to explore the meaning and significance they attach to phenomena in their everyday lives. Phenomenology involves bracketing or setting aside preconceived notions and biases to examine phenomena as they are perceived by those experiencing them (Husserl, 1913).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitation**

**A. Educational motivation:** The motivation for pursuing education among immigrant mothers is believed to be deeply rooted in their intrinsic drive to achieve advanced, postsecondary educational credentials. Moreover, it is suggested that these motivations are closely aligned with the overarching principles and aspirations associated with the American Dream.

**B. Family dynamics:** The educational pursuits of immigrant mothers are greatly influenced by the dynamics within their families. It is believed that these dynamics, which encompass the relationships and interactions among family members, hold significant importance in shaping the educational journeys of these mothers. One crucial assumption is that there exists a supportive or at least neutral stance within their families when it comes to their educational aspirations. This means that the family environment either encourages and aids with their educational goals or, at the very least, refrains from



hindering their progress. The impact of these familial dynamics on immigrant mothers' pursuit of education cannot be understated as they play a pivotal role in determining their success and ability to overcome various challenges along this path.

**C. Educational institutions:** It is expected that educational institutions have established guidelines and support mechanisms to cater to the specific requirements and difficulties encountered by immigrant mothers. However, it should be noted that the range and efficacy of these support systems may differ from one institution to another.

### **Conclusion**

The initial chapter of this book focuses on the exploration of the diverse experiences encountered by immigrant mothers as they strive to attain a higher education while simultaneously performing their maternal responsibilities. I have achieved a mutual comprehension of crucial concepts, such as the American Dream, tertiary education, mothers who are immigrants, immigration, and phenomenology. These explanations serve to enhance lucidity and provide a framework for our investigation. The problem presented is the complex and distinct difficulties experienced by immigrant mothers as they strive to obtain a higher education while pursuing the American Dream. These difficulties are further complicated by their responsibilities as both caregivers and students. Certain assumptions were acknowledged in our study, including the inherent drive of immigrant mothers, the dynamics within their families, and the presence of supportive educational institutions.

I recognize the possible limitations of our investigation including biases stemming from sample selection, the study's cross-sectional design, potential response biases, and

constraints on generalizability. The parameters of my study were established by determining the extent and limitations, concentrating specifically on mothers who are immigrants residing in the United States while considering the realm of higher education. Additionally, I delineated the limitations regarding linguistic challenges, the utilization of a qualitative research method, and the sole emphasis on higher education. In the course of this study, these fundamental components will function as the mainstays on which my examination of immigrant mothers' educational paths is constructed. The ensuing sections will explore their encounters, obstacles, approaches, and the consequences of their pursuit of higher education on their families and the broader narrative of the American Dream. By bearing in mind these foundational elements, my objective is to offer a thorough comprehension of the intricate juncture between immigrant mothers' educational aspirations and their endeavors to achieve the American Dream.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

According to the most recent census data provided by the American Community Survey (ACS), immigrants constitute approximately 14% of the total population in the United States (2023). Some courageous mothers have made the difficult choice to leave their homelands in search of a brighter future for themselves and their loved ones. Their aspirations often involve pursuing higher education and achieving success within the American context.

Despite encountering numerous hurdles and obstacles along their path, immigrant mothers exhibit remarkable resilience and unwavering determination as they strive for success (Wang, 2011). The objective of this research study is to delve deeper into the unique experiences of these mothers as they navigate through America's educational system while shouldering their maternal responsibilities. These women face distinctive challenges when it comes to pursuing higher education (Baum and Flores, 2011).

Overcoming language barriers and financial constraints are just some examples of the many obstacles they must overcome to attain their goals.

Nevertheless, despite these formidable challenges, immigrant mothers continue to persevere and demonstrate an unyielding commitment to constructing a more promising future for themselves and their families. This literature review aims to provide insightful perspectives on the journey undertaken by immigrant mothers who aspire to obtain higher education in America.

## **Description**

The proposed research study is situated within a larger framework of existing studies on immigrant mothers' educational pursuits and the complex dynamics they face. This exploration aligns with previous literature that delves into the multifaceted experiences of immigrant women in the United States and their aspirations for higher education.

Previous research, exemplified by the work conducted by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008), emphasizes how education holds transformative potential for immigrant individuals. This study aims to contribute to this understanding by specifically focusing on immigrant mothers and examining their unique motivations for pursuing higher education.

The literature review by Hernandez et al. (2007), provides a foundation for the study. Also, it recognizes the obstacles these mothers encounter, including economic disparities and acculturation stress, and aims to deepen readers' understanding by exploring how they navigate these challenges while pursuing higher education.

Through research, this literature review intends to explore cultural dimensions and identity negotiation among immigrant mothers. This additional aspect will shed light on how these women reconcile their cultural backgrounds with their pursuit of higher education in a new country. By delving into this topic, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their journeys toward academic achievement amidst diverse cultural contexts.

The study being proposed expands on the existing research conducted by Smith-Doerr et al. (2017) by incorporating insights from cultural influences and identity negotiation. The primary focus is to investigate how immigrant mothers manage and navigate the

expectations of their culture while simultaneously pursuing higher education. In doing so, this research contributes to the existing body of literature that delves into the complex relationship between cultural dimensions and educational aspirations.

Furthermore, the scope of this study examines the various support systems and institutional resources available to these immigrant mothers in their pursuit of higher education. By providing a more comprehensive understanding of this subject matter, I seek to shed light on the challenges faced by immigrant mothers as they strive for personal growth and academic achievement amidst cultural expectations

By utilizing the research conducted by Lee and Bowen (2006) regarding the significance of support systems, this study seeks to make a valuable contribution to conversations surrounding the academic success of immigrant mothers. Additionally, this review aims to delve deeper into the importance of collaborative communication initiatives and institutional resources to better understand how institutions can effectively cater to the unique needs of this specific demographic.

The proposed study builds upon existing knowledge by narrowing its focus on examining the experiences of immigrant mothers as they strive for higher education within the framework of the American Dream. By aligning with and expanding upon previous research findings, this review of literature aspires to bring fresh perspectives that will enrich ongoing discussions regarding immigrant education and aspirations.

## **Theoretical Lenses**

Immigration to America has been a central aspect of the nation's history and identity, shaping its social, cultural, and economic landscape. The journey of immigrants to America involves a series of transitions and adaptations as individuals and families navigate the challenges of resettling in a new country. Scholars from various disciplines have sought to understand the complexities of the immigrant experience by applying different theoretical frameworks that provide insights into the motivations, experiences, and outcomes of migration. This study will review, analyze and ultimately be informed by some of the key theoretical perspectives that have been used to study the journey of immigrants to America.

### **Push-Pull Theory**

The Push-Pull theory of migration, rooted in classical economics, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of migration by highlighting the interplay between factors that push individuals out of their home countries and those that pull them toward new destinations (Massey et al., 1993). This theory posits that individuals are motivated to migrate due to a combination of “push” factors, which are negative conditions or circumstances in their home countries, and “pull” factors, which are the perceived opportunities and attractions in destination countries.

Push factors encompass a range of economic, political, social, and environmental conditions that create incentives for individuals to seek better opportunities elsewhere (Massey et al., 1993). Economic deprivation, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic prospects, is a prominent push factor that drives individuals to migrate in

search of employment and economic security. Political instability, conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses are also significant push factors that compel people to flee their home countries in search of safety and freedom (Massey et al., 1993).

In contrast, pull factors refer to the perceived benefits and opportunities that attract individuals to migrate to specific destination countries (Massey et al., 1993). Economic opportunities, including higher wages, better job prospects, and improved standards of living, are key pull factors that entice migrants to move to countries with stronger economies and greater prosperity. Additionally, political stability, rule of law, democratic governance, and social welfare systems are pulling factors that make destination countries more attractive to migrants seeking security, stability, and opportunities for advancement (Massey et al., 1993).

The Push-Pull theory recognizes that the decision to migrate is influenced by a complex interplay of push and pull factors, with individuals weighing the costs and benefits of migration based on their circumstances and aspirations (Massey et al., 1993). For example, an individual experiencing economic hardship and limited opportunities in their home country may be motivated to migrate to a destination country with better job prospects and higher living standards. Similarly, an individual facing political persecution or violence may seek refuge in a country that offers protection and respect for human rights.

The Push-Pull theory provides a nuanced understanding of migration dynamics by highlighting the multifaceted motivations and considerations that shape individuals' decisions to migrate. By considering both push and pull factors, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for addressing the

root causes of migration, supporting migrants' integration and adaptation in destination countries, and promoting global development and cooperation. The sociological concept of the American Dream helps expand the Push-Pull theory by illustrating how migrants' aspirations for upward mobility, economic stability, and opportunities for future generations strongly influence their decisions to migrate, thereby shaping their willingness to endure significant personal and family sacrifices in pursuit of better opportunities abroad.

### **Transnationalism**

Transnationalism theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of migrants' lives across borders and highlights how migrants maintain ties to their home countries while also participating in the social, cultural, and economic life of their host country (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). This perspective challenges the traditional view of migration as a one-way journey and instead recognizes the ongoing relationships and exchanges that occur between migrants and their places of origin and destination. Transnationalism theory underscores the importance of understanding migration as a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves multiple social and cultural contexts.

One key aspect of transnationalism is the phenomenon of transnational migration, where migrants maintain ongoing social, economic, and cultural connections with their home countries while residing in their host countries (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). This can involve regular travel back and forth between countries, remittances sent to family members in the home country, participation in transnational social networks and organizations, and engagement in cross-border economic activities such as trade and investment (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).



Transnationalism also encompasses the circulation of ideas, values, and cultural practices across borders, leading to the formation of hybrid or transnational identities and cultural expressions (Vertovec, 2001). This can manifest in various ways, such as the adoption of cultural practices from multiple cultures, the blending of languages and dialects, the fusion of culinary traditions, and the proliferation of transnational media and popular culture (Glick Schiller et al., 1995).

Furthermore, transnationalism has significant implications for issues of citizenship, belonging, and governance. Transnational migrants often navigate complex legal and political landscapes, holding multiple citizenships or legal statuses and engaging in transnational advocacy and activism to address issues affecting their communities both at home and abroad (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). This challenges traditional notions of citizenship tied to territorial boundaries and raises questions about rights, obligations, and responsibilities in an increasingly interconnected world (Guarnizo et al., 2003).

Transnationalism represents a multifaceted and dynamic process that shapes contemporary global society. By fostering interconnectedness, mobility, and hybridity across national borders, transnationalism reconfigures social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes, challenging conventional understandings of identity, belonging, and citizenship in the 21st century. Transnationalism complements our understanding of the American Dream by highlighting how immigrant mothers blend their dreams of success in the United States with ongoing obligations and relationships in their home countries, reflecting a continuous negotiation between two cultural worlds.

## **Significance of the Theoretical Lenses to the Research Topic**

The Push-Pull theory can offer valuable insights into the factors that shape immigrant mothers' decisions to pursue higher education in the United States. Push factors, such as economic prospects, access to educational opportunities, and aspirations for a brighter future for themselves and their families, may encourage immigrant mothers to seek higher education as a pathway to upward social mobility and the realization of the "American Dream." Conversely, pull factors, including the perceived advantages of higher education, such as enhanced earning capacity, career progression, and elevated social status, may attract immigrant mothers to enroll in educational programs despite the potential challenges they may encounter.

The Transnationalism perspective can elucidate how immigrant mothers navigate their academic trajectories while sustaining connections with their countries of origin and transnational communities. Immigrant mothers may partake in transnational activities, such as sending financial remittances, maintaining communication with family members overseas, and engaging in cultural and social networks that transcend national boundaries. These transnational affiliations may impact immigrant mothers' educational experiences, ambitions, and identities as they reconcile their roles as students, mothers, and members of transnational communities.

The incorporation of the Push-Pull theory and Transnationalism perspective into research on the educational journeys of immigrant mothers can facilitate an exploration of the intricate motivations, experiences, and outcomes associated with their pursuit of the "American Dream." These theoretical frameworks have the potential to situate the educational trajectories of immigrant mothers within the broader social, economic, and

cultural dynamics, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences and the obstacles they encounter in their endeavor to attain higher education.

### **Review of Research**

This section explores the significant connections between the “American Dream,” the historical context of immigration, and the educational goals of immigrant mothers in the United States. The experiences of immigrant families, motivated by aspirations for a more favorable future, take place within a country influenced by the principles of opportunity and success. As we examine these topics, there is an emphasis on the importance of education in the journey of immigrants, specifically focusing on the ambitions and difficulties encountered by immigrant parents.

### **Historical Context of Immigration**

This section of the literature review endeavors to provide readers with insights into the dynamic trends that have led waves of immigrants to the shores of America, through an examination of pivotal historical events, evolving legislative policies, and changing social attitudes towards these newcomers. By delving into these aspects, this context underscores how each component contributes to the rich tapestry of the nation's cultural diversity and economic vitality. Rather than provoking, the aim is to educate, allowing readers to enhance their understanding of immigration's historical and contemporary significance, thus clarifying uncertainties.

The immigration history of the United States is a complex and diverse tapestry, with various elements intertwined across its canvas (Teslow, 2018). Since the arrival of the first settlers on unfamiliar shores, the steady flow of newcomers has played a key role in

shaping the country's identity as a constantly evolving composition, where each new verse resonates with voices from distant lands.

The United States is commonly referred to as the "melting pot," with its population composed of individuals from various backgrounds over time (Logan, 2019).

Immigration has played a significant role in shaping the growth of the country, which continues to be a topic of discussion. According to Teslow (2018), starting from the original Native inhabitants to present-day debates surrounding border security, the history of the United States intertwines with those who chose to make it their home. These individuals have contributed extensively to its size and development. Additionally, some eras influenced immigration in the United States which will be discussed below.

**A. Colonial Period:** The history of immigration in the United States has been influenced by various factors including economic prospects, political shifts, and societal changes. Scholars have thoroughly examined this dynamic occurrence, uncovering insights into its origins and impacts. Jones (2005) stated that the origins of immigration in the United States can be traced back to the time when European settlers, primarily from England, sought solace and economic prospects during the colonial period. These initial migrants played a pivotal role in shaping America's cultural landscape (Bailyn, 2005).

The Colonial Period in the United States signifies the early influxes of immigration, mainly from England, during the 17th and 18th centuries. Norton et al. (2015) emphasized that these pioneers arrived with hopes of attaining religious freedom, financial opportunities, and a fresh start in unfamiliar territory. The establishment of the thirteen colonies throughout this era established the groundwork for America's diverse and ever-changing identity that is evident today (Norton et al., 2015).

During the Colonial Period, individuals were driven to immigrate primarily by their quest for religious freedom. In the early 17th century, Puritans arrived to escape religious persecution in England and went on to establish colonies such as Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay (Fischer, 1989). Their ultimate goal was to construct communities that adhered to their religious beliefs, and their impact proved pivotal in shaping the formative years of America.

Additionally, Fischer (1989) stated that the allure of economic prospects within the New World enticed settlers to migrate. The presence of ample land and resources served as a pull factor for individuals seeking to enhance their financial standing. Consequently, this economic facet of immigration played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of agriculture and commerce within the colonies.

The cultural implications and social environment during the Colonial Era were significantly shaped by the variety of settlers, including factions such as the Puritans, Quakers, and Anglicans (Fischer, 1989). This amalgamation of different groups led to a diverse cultural scene in America, with each faction bringing its distinct traditions, beliefs, and customs that collectively contribute to the vibrant tapestry of cultures that characterize the United States (Norton et al., 2015).

The interactions and contradictions among these various groups also laid the foundation for the emergence of an exclusively American identity (Bailyn, 2005). The notion of religious acceptance, albeit not pervasive, started to establish itself in certain colonies, influencing the values that would eventually become core to the United States (Jones, 2005).

The enduring impact of the Colonial Period on the American mentality is profound. The endeavors to achieve religious liberty, financial autonomy, and harmonious cohabitation among different cultures established core values that would be further honed in subsequent eras of American history (Jones, 2005). The colonial encounter served as a foundation for the democratic ideals that would ultimately shape the formation of the United States.

The Colonial Period was crucial in the history of immigration to the United States. The reasons, difficulties, and valuable contributions made by the first settlers laid the foundation for the varied and ever-changing nation that would arise in future centuries (Jones, 2005).

**B. Nineteenth Century:** During the nineteenth century, there was a significant rise in immigration, with Ireland and Germany being the primary sources of newcomers.

Roediger (1991) argues that economic difficulties and political turmoil in Europe were major factors that prompted this influx of immigrants who sought a better life in America.

The 19th century played a crucial role in shaping immigration patterns in the United States, characterized by substantial waves of arrivals, particularly from Ireland and Germany. This era witnessed the convergence of both push and pull factors, which influenced the immigrant experience and had a profound impact on American society's multicultural fabric (Roediger, 1991).

One noteworthy event during this period was the massive influx of Irish immigrants driven by the devastating Potato Famine of the 1840s (Roediger, 1991). Faced with widespread famine and economic collapse, millions of Irish sought refuge in the United

States. The arrival of these immigrants had far-reaching effects on American cities as Irish communities took root, contributing to the workforce and urban culture's development.

Simultaneously, German immigration during this time was motivated by economic opportunities and political unrest in Europe (Miller, 2005). Germans brought with them a strong work ethic and expertise in various trades, significantly influencing America's economic landscape (Wyman, 1993). These immigrants played a pivotal role in shaping industries, agriculture, and educational institutions, leaving an enduring impact on American society.

The growing number of immigrants during the 19th century also gave rise to social tensions and nativist sentiments (Roediger, 1991). Anti-immigrant movements like the Know-Nothing Party emerged advocating for restrictions on immigration due to concerns about its impact on American culture (Wyman, 1993). While reflecting anxiety over cultural change, these sentiments also led to the early establishment of immigration regulations.

The 19th century proved to be a transformative period characterized by resilience among Irish and German immigrants despite the adversity they faced; their contributions greatly impacted America's economic and social development.

**C. Industrialization Era:** During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period known for its rapid industrialization in the United States, there was an immense influx of immigrants. This surge in immigration was primarily driven by the growing need for

labor in expanding industries. As Higham (1955) highlights, this diverse group of immigrants played a vital role in shaping the social fabric of the nation.

The economic landscape of America experienced a profound transformation during this era as more industries emerged, resulting in an increased demand for workers. To meet this demand, immigrants from various European countries such as Italy, Poland, and Russia journeyed to America's shores (Hoerder, 2002). These newcomers became integral members of the workforce and were crucial to the growth of sectors like manufacturing, mining, and construction (Schwantes, 2014).

As these immigrant populations settled predominantly in urban areas like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, they brought with them their unique cultural practices and traditions. The infusion of these diverse influences contributed to the vibrant tapestry of cultures that defined American cities during this time (Higham, 1955). Ethnic neighborhoods began to form where individuals could celebrate their heritage while maintaining connections to their homelands. Cultural institutions sprouted up that showcased art forms from different parts of the world (Hoerder, 2002). Additionally, culinary diversity flourished as new flavors and recipes entered American kitchens.

Schwantes (2014) observed that immigrants were significant contributors to the advancement of industrialization, although they encountered various difficulties. A large number toiled under unsafe circumstances for extended periods with limited recompense. The labor uprisings and strikes during that period epitomized the immigrants' struggle for equitable pay, enhanced working environments, and acknowledgment of their labor rights, as underscored by Schwantes (2014). The industrialization era marked a pivotal moment in U.S. immigration history where immigrants made substantial contributions to



both economic prosperity and cultural development (Schwantes, 2014). Their arrival shaped American cities into cosmopolitan melting pots while simultaneously navigating obstacles posed by industrial labor exploitation.

**D. Post-World War II Era:** After the conclusion of World War II, there was a resurgence of immigration to the United States. According to Kennedy (2004), various factors including the implementation of the Refugee Act of 1980 and changes in global geopolitics had an impact on the composition of immigrants during this period.

The post-World War II era brought about a transformative period in U.S. immigration history, characterized by shifts in global dynamics, alterations to legislation, and the arrival of diverse waves of newcomers (Kennedy, 2004). This period witnessed the United States adjusting its immigration policies in response to changes in global politics and considerations for humanitarian causes.

One significant aspect that emerged during this time was refugee resettlement and the subsequent enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980 (United States Department of State, n.d.). After World War II, there was an increased focus on humanitarian efforts, leading to efforts being made towards resettling refugees. Displaced individuals from war-torn Europe sought refuge within U.S. borders, contributing to a surge in post-war immigration. The passing of the Refugee Act marked a pivotal moment as it established a more systematic and compassionate approach toward admitting refugees while prioritizing their protection against persecution.

Furthermore, the Immigration and Nationality Act enacted in 1965 resulted in a significant shift by abolishing national origins quotas (United States Department of State,

n.d.). This legislative change aimed at prioritizing family reunification and employment-based immigration, thereby broadening opportunities for immigrants from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, with the inception of the Diversity Visa Program in 1990 came an effort to enhance diversity within immigrant populations through visa allocations using a lottery system.

According to the Pew Research Center (2015), in the latter half of the 20th century, they experienced considerable waves of immigration from Latin America and Asia as well. Motivated by economic prospects, political instability, and desires for family reunification, individuals and families sought new lives within U.S. territories from these regions. The demographic composition of the United States transformed as Latin American and Asian communities grew, adding richness to the nation's cultural fabric.

However, with increased immigration during this period, debates surrounding national identity, cultural assimilation, and economic impacts were ignited (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). The United States grappled with questions regarding border security, the integration of diverse populations, and the role immigrants played within the workforce. These ongoing debates have continued to shape contemporary discussions on immigration policy.

Furthermore, in the 21st century, immigration patterns remain influenced by globalization. Advancements in technology and communication have facilitated global mobility for skilled workers and professionals who seek opportunities within U.S. borders (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012). Additionally, global events such as conflicts and natural disasters have contributed to refugee flows that prompted reassessments of U.S. approaches toward immigration and refugee resettlement.

Countless groups arriving over centuries have collectively woven together a diverse fabric that represents modern American society (Teslow, 2018). Political unrest abroad led to successive waves of newcomers seeking refuge on our shores, while aspirations for economic advancement attracted ambitious workers from around the world who brought their skills and talents to our growing nation (Adewumi, 2020).

According to Holloway et al. (2020), the United States has a long-standing tradition of welcoming immigrants from wide-ranging regions to its shores. This can be seen in the country's early communities, where people from diverse backgrounds came together to construct a new nation (Holloway, Foresti, & Leach 2020).

Levia (2023) highlighted that immigration continued to play a significant symphony in shaping America's story, with waves of immigrants arriving in search of opportunities to obtain livelihood or fleeing turmoil troubling their homelands. Leiva spotlights how these immigrant populations have greatly gifted America's expansion and evolution. Their determined diligence helped fashion industries, infrastructure, and neighborhoods across the country like iron from ore. Immigration has also performed a pivotal role in sculpting American culture, with variegated traditions and customs adding richness and range to the nation as colors to a canvas.

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Immigration Study Guide (2010) further plumbs the complexity of America's immigration past. The country's policies towards immigration have evolved over the ages, reflecting changing attitudes towards foreigners and concerns about the security of the state (Unitarian Universalist Association, 2010).

Today debates roiling along the border continue to style America's stance on immigration, perhaps a balancing act between welcome and watch. The United States'

history on the topic of immigration is multi-faceted and deeply interfused with its development as a nation. From providing scope for prosperity to contributing to cultural diversity, immigrants have played an integral part in shaping America as we experience it now.

### **The “American Dream”**

The concept of the “American Dream” has held significant influence throughout the immigration discourse, serving as a powerful driving factor in shaping immigrants’ aspirations and motivating their pursuit of a better life and greater opportunities (Adams, 1931). It encapsulates the idea that every individual, irrespective of their origins or circumstances, has the potential to attain triumph and affluence by diligently toiling towards their goals. This section of the comprehensive review of literature delves into both the historical and contemporary aspects of this profound concept, unraveling its multifaceted dimensions (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009). Furthermore, it investigates how this cherished ideal shapes and molds the experiences encountered by immigrants within the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

The origins of the American Dream can be traced back to the very beginnings of the nation (Nussbaum, 2018). From its inception, the ideals of religious freedom and economic opportunities were deeply ingrained in the minds of the Pilgrims and Puritans. Their pursuit of a better life set the stage for future generations to view America as a land of promise, where happiness could be pursued.

Nussbaum (2018) further explained that as time went on, this notion became even more prevalent as immigrants flooded into the United States in search of their version of the

American Dream. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, waves of immigrants from countries like Ireland, Germany, and other parts of Europe arrived with hopes for economic prosperity and a brighter future. However, it is important to note that their experiences were far from uniform.

These newcomers faced numerous challenges along their journey toward achieving their dreams (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). The authors emphasized that discrimination and harsh working conditions served as obstacles that complicated their immigrant experience. Despite these difficulties, they persevered in their pursuit, driven by an unwavering determination to build a better life for themselves and future generations (Adams, 1931). Immigrants often view the United States as a gateway to improve their economic standing (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009).

The prospect of upward social and economic mobility serves as a driving force for many who embark on this journey to secure a brighter future for themselves and their loved ones (Hirschman, 2005). The pursuit of financial stability and the desire to enhance one's socioeconomic status are fundamental aspirations within the American Dream, motivating immigrants to seek better opportunities in their new homeland (Hirschman, 2005).

In Hirschman's (2005) research, he delves deeply into the intricate connection between immigration and economic mobility, shedding light on both the obstacles and possibilities that immigrants encounter along their journey. It is important to recognize that achieving economic success is not guaranteed, as immigrants may face various challenges such as language barriers, discrimination in employment opportunities, and limited access to

educational resources. These hurdles can significantly impede an immigrant's progress toward attaining financial prosperity and improving their overall socioeconomic position.

The immigrant experience is often characterized by navigating a complex terrain of cultural adaptation. Immigrants frequently find themselves in a delicate balancing act as they try to preserve their cultural identity while simultaneously assimilating into American society (Portes, & Rumbaur, 2006). This intersectionality becomes increasingly intricate when considering factors such as ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status, all of which contribute additional layers of complexity to the pursuit of the American Dream.

The concept of the American Dream goes beyond mere economic goals; it encompasses cultural ideals as well. Immigrants who come to America not only strive for social integration but also wish to preserve their own cultural identity (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2011). They delved into the various cultural aspects of the immigrant experience and emphasized the importance of nurturing these cultural ties in pursuit of the American Dream. The assimilation of immigrants into American society has a long and sometimes contentious history. In his work "The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society" (1992), Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. espoused the belief that immigrants should aspire to become "Americanized," perceiving American culture as relatively traditional and static (Schlesinger, 1992). He wrote that immigrants should assimilate themselves into the American identity, become part of the mainstream, and relinquish their previous identities (Schlesinger, 1992). Conversely, other scholars disagree with Schlesinger and have viewed immigration as an opportunity for cultural exchange, growth, and change, considering American culture as dynamic and evolving. This perspective, which suggests that cultural differences should be nurtured, is best

exemplified by the work of scholars like James Banks on Multicultural Education (Banks, 2019).

Immigrants must have the opportunity to express their individuality and maintain connections with their cultural roots throughout their journey (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). The cultural dimensions of the American Dream extend far beyond achieving financial success; they also involve having the freedom to embrace and celebrate one's heritage (Adam, 1931). Immigrants bring a rich tapestry of traditions and perspectives that contribute to the diverse fabric of American culture, ultimately enriching the nation as a whole (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009).

In the modern era, the concept of the American Dream has undergone significant transformations as a result of shifting demographics and global dynamics (Chakravartty, & Roy, 2013). They contend that this idea is not static, but rather dynamic, adapting to the changing desires and goals of a diverse population of immigrants. The traditional notions of acquiring a home and achieving economic success no longer solely define this dream.

Today, immigrants are reshaping the American Dream by placing greater emphasis on education, innovation, and social justice (Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Rather than focusing solely on individual accomplishments, there is now an increasing recognition of the importance of collective well-being. This broader understanding acknowledges that material achievements are not everything; instead, it highlights the interconnectedness between different communities and their shared aspirations for a brighter future.

Higham (1988) claims the “American Dream” remains an influential force shaping the immigrant experience in America during this century. Its historical roots, economic motivations, cultural dimensions, and evolving interpretations all contribute to creating a rich tapestry defining the journey of immigrants. Despite the challenges and complex realities faced along the way, this dream continues to serve as a beacon of hope for generations of immigrants who strive to build better lives for themselves while adding their unique perspectives to enrich America’s diverse narrative.

Immigrant mothers, in their quest for the “American Dream”, have exhibited remarkable resilience and unwavering determination on their path toward attaining higher education (Hernandez, et al., 2007). Despite encountering a multitude of challenges and obstacles, these women have not only endured but also relentlessly pursued academic success.

According to Erisman and Looney (2007), immigrant mothers are propelled by an ardent aspiration to secure a brighter future for their families. This fervor has propelled them forward in the pursuit of higher education, despite the myriad difficulties they confront. Sanchez (2016) further underscores this point by shedding light on the “unseen” support provided by these mothers’ parents – encompassing a foundation built upon hard work, values, optimism, and tenacity. These intrinsic values were instilled in immigrant mothers since childhood and continue to shape their educational journey.

Throughout this arduous voyage, immigrant mothers have drawn strength from both their ancestral heritage and personal resilience (Davis, 2020). The writers acknowledge the sacrifices made by those who came before them and employ it as inspiration to surmount any obstacles that cross their path. This indomitable determination is vividly evident in their relentless pursuit of academic excellence. The unwavering resolve demonstrated by



these women serves as an extraordinary source of inspiration for others endeavoring through similar trials. Despite confronting countless barriers, these resilient individuals persevere undeterred – epitomizing that with perseverance and dedication, one can overcome any obstacle.

Despite the many trials faced by immigrant mothers on their journey toward higher education, they remain remarkably resolute and undeterred in achieving their goals (Davis, 2020). Their unyielding persistence stands testament to the power of the American Dream – a driving force motivating individuals from all walks of life to aspire for a better future for themselves and their loved ones.

### **Higher Education and Immigrants**

In the United States, higher education serves as a fundamental pillar for upward social mobility and economic prosperity (Adams, 1931). Immigrants, who greatly impact the landscape of American colleges and universities, hold a vital position in this regard (Portes, & Rumbaut, 2006). This comprehensive review delves into the multitude of challenges faced by immigrant populations in higher education, while also highlighting the unique opportunities they bring forth (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009). Moreover, it thoroughly explores the significant contributions that immigrants make to shape and advance the realm of higher education in America (Portes, & Rumbaut, 2006).

The landscape of higher education access for immigrants in the United States is a multifaceted and intricate terrain, characterized by various hurdles including legal, financial, and awareness obstacles (Gándara, & Rumberger, 2009). The writers further shed light on the immense difficulties faced by both documented and undocumented

immigrants, emphasizing the significance of comprehending the factors that impede their entry into higher education. These challenges arise from a combination of legal restrictions, financial limitations, and a lack of knowledge regarding available resources, all contributing to an unequal playing field.

Gándara and Rumberger's (2009) study emphasizes the crucial nature of understanding these barriers to establishing inclusive policies and support systems. It underscores the imperative for universities and policymakers to address not only financial hindrances but also systemic issues related to documentation status that profoundly impact immigrants' ability to pursue higher education. Recognizing these complexities is essential in paving the way for a more equitable educational environment.

The challenges faced by immigrant students in higher education are complex and varied (Zhou, 2004). Zhou reveals that these challenges encompass a wide range of issues, such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, and the difficult task of balancing academic pursuits with familial responsibilities. For undocumented immigrant students, there is an additional layer of complexity due to legal uncertainties (Teranishi, et al., 2011).

Zhou's study emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems within higher education institutions to address these challenges. It is crucial to provide resources for overcoming language barriers and promoting cultural competency. Recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of immigrant students is also essential for creating an inclusive environment. Moreover, Teranishi et al. (2011) argue for policy changes that can alleviate the legal uncertainties faced by undocumented students, highlighting the role of higher education in advocating for fair and just immigration policies.

The contributions made by immigrant scholars to American higher education are significant and multifaceted (Altbach, 2012). His exploration underscores their impact on research, innovation, and intellectual diversity within academia. Immigrant scholars bring unique perspectives, diverse research methodologies, and a global understanding that enriches the overall academic discourse.

Altbach's (2012) work emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing these contributions to foster a dynamic and globally competitive higher education environment. This recognition should translate into policies that actively promote the recruitment and retention of immigrant scholars. By doing so, American universities can ensure they remain at the forefront of research advancements and innovative ideas.

According to Stich (2007), the presence of cultural diversity in higher education, which is partly driven by immigrant students, plays a significant role in creating a dynamic and all-inclusive learning environment. Examining the political realities surrounding race, ethnicity, and gender diversity, as highlighted by Stich (2007), underscores the crucial importance of cultivating a diverse faculty and student body. The integration of cultural diversity enriches the educational journey for all students, fostering cultural competence and equipping graduates with the skills essential for success in an interconnected global world. Stich's (2007) research findings underscore the urgency for higher education institutions to prioritize diversity throughout their recruitment and admissions procedures. It is imperative to establish an atmosphere that not only embraces but also celebrates cultural diversity, as this contributes not only to enhancing the educational experience but also to providing broader societal benefits by producing well-rounded individuals who are culturally aware.

## **Immigrant Parents and Higher Education**

The success of immigrant students' education is greatly influenced by the support systems that are in place for their parents (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009). This comprehensive review of existing literature delves into an exploration of the multitude of support systems that have been established to aid immigrant parents in navigating the complex realm of higher education. These support systems aim to tackle the various challenges faced by immigrant parents, facilitate effective communication between parents and educational institutions, and ultimately contribute to enhancing the academic achievements of their children (Portes, & Rumbaut, 2006).

Understanding the difficulties encountered by immigrant parents is of utmost importance when it comes to establishing effective support networks (Hernandez et al., 2007).

Economic struggles, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with the American education system are persistent obstacles that these parents face. It is imperative to develop support systems that specifically address these challenges by offering tailored resources and assistance to immigrant families.

The research conducted by Hernandez et al. (2007) emphasizes the vital need for support systems that acknowledge and cater to the unique hurdles faced by immigrant parents.

Institutions and community organizations have a crucial role in designing initiatives that provide linguistic and informational aid, ultimately empowering parents to actively participate in their children's educational journeys. Hernandez et al. (2007) emphasized that these efforts aim to bridge the gap between immigrant families and the educational opportunities available in their new country. By recognizing and addressing their specific

needs, support systems can help immigrant parents navigate through economic hardships, language barriers, and the complexities of a foreign education system more effectively.

Culturally responsive support systems are necessary in immigrant communities due to the cultural diversity within these populations (Tardif, & Geva, 2006). It is crucial to tailor resources and services to align with the specific cultural values, languages, and expectations of immigrant parents to establish trust and effective communication. This not only helps address challenges faced by these parents but also empowers them to actively engage in their children's pursuit of higher education.

The research conducted by Tardif and Geva (2006) underscores the significance of acknowledging and respecting the cultural dynamics that influence the expectations held by immigrant parents. By incorporating cultural competency training for educators and administrators, support systems can contribute to creating inclusive environments that value and celebrate the diversity of immigrant families.

Effective communication between higher education institutions and immigrant parents is crucial for the development of strong support systems (Lee, & Bowen, 2006). According to them, it is essential to establish collaborative communication initiatives that not only bridge language barriers but also cultural differences. One way to achieve this is through the implementation of bilingual workshops, which allow parents to receive information in their native language. Additionally, Lee and Bowen (2006) opined that providing culturally sensitive informational materials ensures that parents feel understood and included in the educational process.

Moreover, Lee and Bowen (2006) explained that accessible communication channels play a significant role in fostering partnerships between institutions and parents. These channels facilitate an open line of dialogue where both parties can exchange thoughts and ideas. By actively involving immigrant parents in decision-making processes, their voices are heard, thus creating a sense of belonging within the higher education community.

Successful support systems rely on effective communication initiatives that go beyond simply providing information (Suizzo, & Stapleton, 2007). These initiatives must actively engage immigrant parents by inviting their participation and ensuring that their unique perspectives are valued. By implementing bilingual workshops, culturally sensitive materials, and accessible communication channels, higher education institutions can build stronger relationships with immigrant families and create a more inclusive environment for all involved parties.

Education and resource programs for parents should be provided to support immigrant families (Valdés, & Figueroa, 1994). These programs aim to empower parents by giving them the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the complexities of higher education. By offering workshops on topics such as college admissions processes, financial aid, and available academic resources, these programs can help demystify the higher education system.

According to the research conducted by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008), parental education programs have a positive impact on immigrant families. Not only do these programs provide parents with practical information, but they also boost their confidence and sense of agency. With this newfound confidence, parents are better equipped to actively advocate for their children within the educational system.

By expanding upon parental education and resource programs, we can ensure that immigrant parents have access to a comprehensive support system (Hernandez et al., 2007). These programs contribute to informed decision-making by arming parents with important knowledge about the higher education process. Additionally, they encourage increased parental involvement in their children's educational journeys.

We must recognize the importance of these educational initiatives in empowering immigrant families (Suizzo, & Stapleton, 2007). By equipping parents with valuable resources and information, we are enabling them to play an active role in shaping their children's future within the educational system.

Support systems for immigrant parents go beyond just individual efforts and include institutional policies and advocacy (Valdés, & Figueroa, 1994). It is important for institutions to actively engage in policy advocacy to address the systemic barriers that immigrant families face. This means advocating for admissions policies that are inclusive, providing financial aid opportunities, and offering legal support for undocumented parents. According to Valdés and Figueroa (1994), by implementing comprehensive institutional policies, we can create an environment that promotes equity and accessibility.

According to Pérez Huber's research in 2015, institutions have a significant role not only in providing direct support but also in influencing larger systemic changes. By actively participating in advocacy efforts, higher education institutions can help break down barriers and foster a more inclusive educational landscape for immigrant families (Huber, 2015).

The success of immigrant children in higher education heavily relies on the existence of comprehensive support systems for their parents (Huber, 2015). He further added that by tackling the obstacles faced by immigrant parents, implementing culturally sensitive initiatives, promoting effective communication channels, offering educational programs tailored to their needs, and advocating for their rights, we can collectively create an environment where immigrant parents not only receive support but also actively participate in their children's educational pathways. The establishment and improvement of these support systems play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and empowering immigrant families within the higher education system (Huber, 2015).

### **Immigrant Mothers in the United States**

This extensive literature review explores the multifaceted dimensions of immigrant motherhood, illuminating their pivotal role in the migration journey and the subsequent adaptation of their families in a new host country. Through an examination of the hurdles, they encounter, their noteworthy contributions, and the profound effects of immigration on their overall welfare, this study endeavors to offer a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding immigrant mothers.

#### **Challenges Faced by Immigrant Mothers**

**A. Cultural Adjustment:** Immigrant mothers frequently face substantial obstacles when it comes to adjusting to a fresh culture and the parenting practices that come with it (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This process of cultural adaptation may entail navigating disparities in disciplinary methods, societal norms, and family dynamics, thereby leading to acculturative stress (Berry, 1997). These mothers find themselves



grappling with the challenge of reconciling their values and customs with those of their new surroundings. As a result, they experience significant stress as they strive to find a balance between their native upbringing and the expectations of their adopted society.

**B. Language Barrier:** Immigrant mothers often face significant challenges in their day-to-day lives due to language barriers (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). These obstacles not only affect their ability to communicate effectively with their children but also hinder their engagement with the broader community they live in. When they struggle with limited English proficiency, it becomes even more difficult for them to actively participate in their children's education or access essential services that could greatly benefit their families (Harker, 2001). Such language barriers can create a sense of isolation and limit these mothers' opportunities for social interaction and integration within their new society. Consequently, finding effective ways to overcome these linguistic obstacles is crucial in empowering immigrant mothers and fostering inclusivity.

**C. Economic Struggles:** Immigrant mothers often confront significant economic difficulties because of various factors like a scarcity of employment options, disparities in wages, and pervasive discrimination (Hernandez et al., 2013). These financial obstacles can profoundly affect their capacity to support their families and obtain necessary resources crucial for their well-being (Hernandez et al., 2013).

**D. Legal Status:** Undocumented immigrant mothers face a formidable obstacle in their quest to achieve the American Dream due to their lack of legal status (Dreby, 2015). The ever-present threat of deportation looms over them, wreaking havoc on their family dynamics and obstructing their efforts to attain economic security and social advancement. With this constant fear hanging over their heads, these brave women find

themselves trapped in a state of uncertainty, unable to fully embrace the opportunities that the United States has to offer.

**E. Acculturation Stress:** Berry (1997) hinted that when immigrant mothers come to a new country like the United States, they often face the challenges of acculturation stress. This stress arises from the intricate process of trying to blend into American society while still holding onto their cultural background (Berry, 1997). As a result, their overall well-being may be affected, and they may encounter difficulties in effectively guiding their children through this transformative experience.

### **Contributions of Immigrant Mothers**

**A. Family Resilience:** According to Gupta (2007), immigrant mothers frequently demonstrate extraordinary strength and fortitude when confronted with difficult circumstances. Their unwavering resolve and ingenuity play a vital role in the family's ability to adjust and thrive, ultimately enabling them to surmount the obstacles that come with the process of immigration (Bernal & Knight, 1993).

**B. Cultural Transmission:** Immigrant mothers play an essential role as cultural intermediaries, effectively bridging the gap between their native culture and the new culture in which they find themselves (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In this role, they hold significant influence over the transmission of invaluable cultural values, cherished traditions, and even language to their children. This act of preserving and passing down cultural heritage becomes paramount in ensuring that the immigrant family maintains a strong sense of identity and belonging within their new community (Phinney, 1990). Through their efforts as cultural brokers, these mothers lay the foundation for a

thriving intergenerational transfer of customs and beliefs that not only fosters a deeper connection to one's roots but also helps to forge a solid bond among family members amid the challenges of immigration.

While immigrant mothers serve as vital cultural intermediaries, facilitating the transmission of values and traditions across generations, their efforts intersect with the divergent viewpoints of scholars such as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and James Banks. Schlesinger advocated for a vision of assimilation, wherein immigrants shed their former identities and assimilate into the American mainstream (Schlesinger, 1992). In contrast, Banks emphasized the importance of multicultural education and the nurturing of cultural diversity (Banks & Banks, 2019). By recognizing this ideological divergence, we can appreciate the nuanced dynamics at play as immigrant mothers navigate the balance between preserving their cultural heritage and embracing their new cultural context.

**C. Community Building:** Immigrant mothers frequently participate in various community-building endeavors, such as organizing events and establishing connections with fellow residents, which ultimately aids in the development of support networks and strengthens the social framework of their newfound communities (Marrow, 2011). By actively engaging, these mothers actively contribute to the promotion of social cohesion and integration within their neighborhoods, leading to mutual advantages for both their families and the wider community at large (Chuang & Su, 2009).

## **Impact on Immigrant Mothers' Well-being**

**A. Mental Health:** Immigrant mothers often face numerous challenges and pressures that can profoundly affect their mental well-being, as highlighted by Abraído-Lanza et al. (2006). The stressors linked to immigration can have a tremendous impact on these mothers, sometimes leading them to grapple with symptoms of anxiety and depression (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2006). Consequently, this emotional burden not only influences their overall happiness but also has implications for their parenting abilities. Indeed, the research conducted by Garcia-Coll et al. (1996) emphasizes how these psychological struggles may hamper immigrant mothers' capacity to provide effective care for their children.

**B. Social Isolation:** Immigrant mothers often find themselves experiencing social isolation, especially when they are separated from their extended families and the communities they come from (Hernandez et al., 2013). This sense of isolation can have a profound impact on their emotional well-being, leading to feelings of loneliness that can greatly affect their overall mental health and happiness. Being physically distanced from familiar support networks and cultural connections can create a void in their lives, making it harder for them to establish meaningful relationships and find a sense of belonging in their new environment. As a result, these mothers may struggle to navigate the challenges of motherhood without the guidance and support system that they had relied upon previously. Matsumoto et al. (2001) cited that the emotional toll of this isolation should not be underestimated, as it has been shown to have long-lasting effects on immigrant mothers' overall happiness and ability to thrive in their new homes. Therefore, society must recognize the unique struggles these individuals face and provide

them with adequate resources and support systems that can help alleviate the burden of social isolation.

**C. Parenting and Identity:** The process of reconciling the rich tapestry of their cultural heritage with the unfamiliar landscape of the new host culture can prove to be an intricate and multifaceted journey for immigrant mothers, ultimately leaving a profound impact on their sense of parenting identity (Gupta, 2007). These courageous women often find themselves grappling with a myriad of questions and dilemmas, as they navigate through the delicate balance between preserving their cherished cultural traditions and adhering to the expectations and societal norms of their adopted country (Chao, 2006).

### **Aspirations of Immigrant Mothers**

**A. Economic Mobility:** Immigrant mothers frequently come to the United States with a strong desire to attain economic stability and upward mobility for their families (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). They perceive the American Dream as a pathway towards securing a more prosperous future for their children, often accepting low-paying employment, and making significant sacrifices in pursuit of this objective (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

According to Lopez and Stanton-Salazar (2001), these resilient women are driven by an unwavering determination to overcome adversity and create better opportunities for their loved ones. They recognize that through hard work and perseverance, they can achieve financial security and provide their children with improved prospects for success (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

**B. Education for their Children:** Education holds a crucial position within the aspirations of countless immigrant mothers in pursuit of the American Dream (Kao, 2004). These determined women place immense importance on providing their children with access to an outstanding education, recognizing its potential to pave the way for a prosperous future. Motivated by their unwavering commitment, they relentlessly endeavor to bolster their children's academic achievements, frequently setting lofty standards and nurturing high hopes for their success (Crosnoe, 2007).

### **Impact on Immigrant Mothers and their Families**

**A. Family Sacrifices:** Immigrant mothers frequently make substantial sacrifices in their pursuit of the American Dream (Chavez, 2008). These sacrifices entail dedicating extensive hours to their work and enduring separation from their loved ones (Chavez, 2008). Consequently, these selfless acts can have a profound impact on both their physical and emotional well-being, as well as the dynamics within the parent-child relationship (Chavez, 2008).

**B. Inter-generational Differences:** According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), immigrant mothers often face inter-generational disparities as their children assimilate into American society at a faster pace. This phenomenon can give rise to various conflicts and difficulties when it comes to upholding cultural values and traditions within the family unit.

The process of acculturation may create a divide between the older generation, who cling strongly to their native customs, and the younger generation, who readily embrace the norms of their adopted country. Consequently, these divergences in cultural adaptation

can pose significant challenges for immigrant mothers as they grapple with navigating through the complexities of raising children in a new cultural milieu while striving to preserve their heritage (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

### **Challenges Faced by Immigrant Mothers in Higher Education**

**A. Family Responsibilities:** Immigrant mothers frequently bear substantial family obligations, which encompass caring for their children and managing household tasks (Smith, 2005). The task of juggling these responsibilities alongside the pursuit of higher education can present considerable challenges, potentially resulting in heightened levels of stress and time limitations (Torres, 2019).

**B. Economic Barriers:** Immigrant mothers often encounter financial limitations that pose challenges to their pursuit of higher education (Kanno & Hu, 2015). The restricted availability of financial assistance, coupled with the expenses associated with both tuition and living costs, presents significant obstacles to their ability to enroll in and complete educational programs (Brunsma et al., 2017). This financial predicament places a considerable burden on these mothers, hindering their aspirations for personal growth and career advancement (Brunsma et al., 2017).

**C. Language Proficiency:** Having a strong command of the language is an essential aspect that greatly influences one's academic achievements, and immigrant mothers striving to pursue higher education, may confront various obstacles due to language barriers (Kim, 2011).

Additionally, Kim (2011) explained that when faced with limited English proficiency, these individuals may encounter difficulties in actively participating in their coursework

and accessing important academic resources. This lack of fluency can impede their engagement with the material and hinder their overall academic progress. Consequently, it becomes crucial to address these language barriers and provide support for immigrant mothers seeking educational advancement.

### **Immigrant Mothers' Support Systems and Coping Strategies**

**A. Community and Family Support:** Immigrant mothers frequently depend on their families and local communities for assistance, according to Villenas (2001). These strong bonds within family and community networks play a crucial role in offering both emotional and practical support, thereby empowering these mothers to successfully overcome the various obstacles they encounter while pursuing higher education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

**B. Mentoring Programs:** Research conducted by Solórzano et al. (2016) has demonstrated the effectiveness of mentorship programs that are specifically designed to cater to the needs of immigrant mothers. These programs have proven to be successful in offering valuable guidance and support to this particular group. By connecting immigrant mothers with mentors who possess a deep understanding of their distinctive challenges, these initiatives create an environment where they can receive the necessary assistance and encouragement to overcome obstacles and thrive.

**C. Cultural Capital:** Immigrant mothers, with their unique cultural backgrounds and experiences, possess a treasure trove of valuable cultural capital that can greatly enrich and enhance their educational journey (Yosso, 2005). In the realm of academia, these mothers have the opportunity to tap into their rich heritage and draw upon it as a source



of inspiration for their research endeavors. Moreover, by infusing diversity into academic settings through their contributions, they bring much-needed perspectives and insights that broaden the horizons of knowledge.

### **Immigrant Mothers' Impact on Academic and Career Trajectories**

**A. Academic Achievement:** Some immigrant mothers can overcome the obstacles that they encounter and achieve remarkable academic success. It is their unwavering commitment and ability to bounce back from setbacks that play a significant role in their educational achievements (Torres, 2019). These resilient individuals often excel in areas of study that are closely connected to their personal experiences as immigrants. Their unique backgrounds not only shape their academic paths but also empower them to thrive in fields where they can make meaningful contributions based on their own lived experiences (Contreras & Villarreal, 2018).

**B. Career Aspirations:** Engaging in advanced education holds the transformative potential to significantly expand the horizons of immigrant mothers, presenting them with enhanced career prospects and instilling a newfound sense of empowerment (Byun et al., 2012). It is a prevailing trend among these women to nurture aspirations for professions that not only align with their personal growth but also enable them to make substantial contributions to their communities or become advocates for positive societal transformation (Chavez, 2008). Pursuing advanced education thus becomes a key avenue for immigrant mothers to not only fulfill personal and professional aspirations but also play active roles in shaping and positively impacting the broader social landscape.

## **Summary**

The comprehensive literature review serves as a robust cornerstone for the proposed study, establishing a nuanced comprehension of the existing research landscape and illuminating areas that warrant deeper exploration. Beyond merely laying the groundwork, the literature review not only underscores the distinctive contribution of the proposed study but also meticulously delves into the intricate experiences of immigrant mothers within the framework of the American Dream.

Furthermore, it strategically positions the study within the broader context of immigrant women's educational endeavors, emphasizing its unique focus on the narratives of immigrant mothers. By doing so, it not only contributes to the broader discourse surrounding immigrant women's educational pursuits but also brings into sharp focus the multifaceted journeys these mothers undertake in their pursuit of higher education within the overarching narrative of the American Dream. This contextualization within a larger framework amplifies the significance of the study and its potential to provide meaningful insights into the intersectionality of immigrant motherhood, education, and the pursuit of the American Dream.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In the pursuit of understanding the intricate journey of immigrant mothers seeking higher education in the United States, this study aims to shed light on the challenges and triumphs they experience while balancing maternal responsibilities and academic pursuits. The initial categories that guide this exploration have been meticulously defined to capture the essence of the research questions. The initial categories are:

**A. Narratives of Juggling Maternal Responsibilities and Higher Education:** This category delves into the multifaceted narratives of immigrant mothers actively engaged in college programs. By listening to their voices, I seek to unravel the intricacies of their experiences, including the challenges faced and the successes achieved in navigating the delicate balance between being mothers and pursuing higher education.

**B. Coping Strategies of Immigrant Mothers with College Degrees:** Here, I concentrate on understanding the coping mechanisms employed by immigrant mothers who have completed college degrees. Through an exploration of their personal stories, I aim to uncover the various strategies they employed to effectively manage the demands of academic pursuits while fulfilling their roles as dedicated mothers.

**C. Challenges and Opportunities in the American Society:** This overarching category serves as a lens through which I analyze the broader socio-cultural landscape. By critically examining participant responses, I aim to unveil the myriad challenges faced by immigrant mothers and explore the opportunities that arise as they navigate and contribute to American society.

Through these meticulously defined categories, this research aspires to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of immigrant mothers as they embark on their educational journeys in pursuit of the American Dream.

### **Research Questions**

Considering existing literature exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by immigrant mothers pursuing higher education, I acknowledge the insightful findings on the impact of cultural expectations and the role of institutional support. However, a notable gap remains in my understanding of the specific strategies employed by immigrant mothers to navigate these challenges. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to and expand upon the existing body of literature by delving into two critical research questions:

1. How do immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences juggling maternal responsibilities while pursuing higher education?
2. How do immigrant mothers with college degrees recount their experiences coping with the demands of academic pursuits?

By rigorously analyzing participant responses and drawing upon relevant data sources, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by immigrant mothers. Through this exploration, I aim to fill the existing gap in the literature and provide valuable insights into the intersection of parenthood and scholarly endeavors within the context of American society

## **Method**

Phenomenology was employed for this study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a phenomenological study pertains to a qualitative research technique, which concentrates on delving into the subjective encounters of individuals as well as the connotation that they attribute to those experiences.

Phenomenology, a robust philosophical and methodological framework, presents an influential perspective that enables researchers to deeply investigate the intricate realm of individuals' lived experiences. By employing this lens, one can investigate the core of human consciousness and perception (Husserl, 1970). Particularly when exploring the journey of immigrant mothers in higher education, phenomenology showcases its versatility and richness as an approach that surpasses mere superficial observations. Instead, it allows researchers to unravel the profound meanings, intricate structures, and recurring patterns that are embedded within their unique experiences.

Developed by Edmund Husserl (1970), this philosophical approach seeks to understand the ocean of human perception and how we construct meaning from the droplets of our daily lives. With roots in philosophy, phenomenology's waves have significantly impacted fields such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Husserl, 1977).

Phenomenology delves into our subjective experiences. It encourages exploring perceptions and interpretations. This branch seeks to understand the level of subjective reality, providing a framework for examining unique experiences. Qutoshi (2018) states that phenomenology provides a guideline to understand phenomena subjectively. By focusing on perspectives, phenomenology allows comprehending how the world shapes our understanding of ourselves.

Additionally, phenomenology encourages exploring the intricate ebbs and flows of how we make sense of the world around us (Qutoshi, 2018). This branch seeks not only to chart the topography of our perceptions but also to fathom the depths of interpretations. Phenomenology has become a prominent approach.

The impact of phenomenology is such that it has been integrated into various academic disciplines, serving as a valuable methodological approach to delve into the realms of human consciousness and behavior. As Soule and Freeman (2019) explain, phenomenology is not only used as a philosophical approach but also as a methodological one. This can be seen in the way researchers use the post-intentional phenomenological approach to gain insights into their subjects' lived experiences. It allows individuals to deeply explore their perceptions and interpretations of the world around them, rather than relying on preconceived ideas or assumptions. Phenomenology lifts the veil of ignorance to reveal humanity in its essence, unrestricted by superficial judgments or constrained by limitations of perception. By incorporating this unique perspective into research practices, we can gain a deeper understanding of human nature and behavior. Therefore, it is clear that phenomenology plays an essential role in shaping our understanding of various aspects of humanity.

The significance of phenomenology lies in its focus on the personal encounters and experiences of individuals, providing researchers with an opportunity to delve into the intricate nuances of lived experiences from the standpoint of those intimately involved (Moustakas, 1994). Immigrant mothers, who actively engage in the pursuit of higher education, offer a distinctive array of viewpoints influenced by their cultural heritage, familial obligations, and individual ambitions. By examining these subjective

dimensions, researchers can gain a richer understanding of the multifaceted realities faced by immigrant mothers as they navigate their educational journeys.

Exploring the experiences of immigrant mothers, phenomenology proves highly beneficial in capturing the intricate cultural context that surrounds their lives. This research approach promotes a thorough examination of one's assumptions and preconceived notions, thus paving the way for a genuine comprehension of the subjective significance that immigrant mothers assign to their educational endeavors (Giorgi, 2009). By putting aside personal biases, researchers can delve into the exploration of cultural subtleties, societal demands, and how individual aspirations intertwine with broader cultural influences. Through this methodological lens, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of immigrant mothers' experiences can be achieved.

Additionally, phenomenology places great importance on the investigation of the fundamental nature and significance of human experiences. Specifically, when it comes to immigrant mothers who are pursuing higher education, there is a complex interplay between their aspirations and the obligations they have toward their families (Lee, & Bowen, 2006).

In the exploration of the experiences of immigrant mothers, it is imperative to embrace reflexivity and adopt a phenomenological lens. Within this approach, researchers are keenly aware of their subjectivity and preconceived notions, understanding that these factors influence their interpretations (Finlay, 2002). This reflexive stance not only enriches the study but also recognizes the significant role that researchers play in collaboratively constructing meaning alongside participants. In doing so, it bolsters the credibility of the research (Finlay, 2002). By delving into reflexivity and employing a

phenomenological framework, researchers gain a deeper understanding of immigrant mothers' journeys while acknowledging their impact on shaping knowledge in this field.

The study of immigrant mothers' experiences in higher education within the context of the "American Dream" benefits greatly from the application of phenomenology. This approach allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the complex dynamics between personal encounters, cultural factors, and aspirations amidst familial obligations.

Phenomenology's inherent adaptability and profound insights make it an essential resource for unraveling the essence and significance of these journeys, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive comprehension of the intricate challenges faced by immigrant mothers as they strive for both higher education and the realization of the American Dream. A qualitative approach will be employed to gain an in-depth understanding of these women's lived experiences. Participants will be recruited through purposive sampling, targeting immigrant mothers in Midwest who are currently enrolled in or have graduated from post-secondary institutions in the United States. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant before their involvement in the study.

### **Participants**

The research investigated the experiences of immigrant mothers who are presently living in the United States while simultaneously undertaking higher education and taking care of their maternal responsibilities. To ensure a broad and all-encompassing analysis, purposive sampling was employed in selecting the participants. This method allowed for a diverse representation that incorporates differences in nationality, age, socioeconomic status, and family composition. Participants in this research were defined by the fact that they were raising children while pursuing higher education. I believe that this wide range



of diversity facilitated an extensive examination of these mothers' experiences as they navigate through unique challenges related to pursuing higher education while simultaneously caring for their children and managing household responsibilities.

### **Role of Researcher**

In my capacity as a researcher, I am fully aware that my affiliation with the immigrant community may potentially influence the research process. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, I employed purposive sampling in selecting participants, drawing from my network in Midwest U.S. It is possible that my personal experiences and perspectives could lead to certain biases that may inadvertently impact the results of the study.

To address this concern and minimize bias in the research process, I adopted a comprehensive approach that includes triangulation and member checks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition to maintaining a thorough reflexive journal, I incorporated these strategies to enhance the reliability and validity of my findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involves cross-verifying data from multiple sources or perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which ensures that the conclusions drawn are well-grounded and not influenced by a single viewpoint. This was particularly important when analyzing the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers.

Member checks, on the other hand, involve seeking feedback and validation from the participants themselves (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This step allows me to confirm that my interpretations align with the participants' understanding of their experiences. It also promotes transparency and participant involvement in the research process (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2018). By combining these strategies with my reflexive journal, I aim to create a robust framework that actively addresses and minimizes potential biases. This commitment to methodological rigor contributed to the overall quality and trustworthiness of the study's findings (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Collection/Instruments**

To gather information on immigrant mothers' pursuit of higher education, a multi-faceted approach was taken. The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews with immigrant mothers and document analysis of relevant materials, such as educational policies, and support programs. By implementing this diverse range of research methods, the study was able to capture the subjective experiences of immigrant mothers as well as identify contextual factors that could potentially influence their educational aspirations and maternal responsibilities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Such an inclusive methodology ensures that all aspects of the topic are covered in-depth and accurately (Yin, 2018).

The interviews were structured to align with the initial research categories outlined in the study. To compose the sample, I initially reached out to potential participants through various channels, including community organizations, educational institutions, and social media platforms targeting immigrant communities in the Midwest. I solicited their participation by explaining the purpose and significance of the research, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, and highlighting the opportunity to share their unique experiences.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on the preference and availability of the participants. For face-to-face interviews, arrangements were made to meet at convenient locations for the participants, such as community centers or public libraries, ensuring comfort and privacy. Alternatively, remote interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms like Zoom or Skype, providing flexibility for participants who may have time constraints or transportation barriers.

In terms of document analysis, some of the documents I used include educational policy documents from relevant higher education institutions, program guidelines, and any publications or reports that pertain to the educational experiences of immigrant mothers. These documents served as valuable sources of information to complement the insights gained from interviews. Examples of the types of documents this research examined include Community Needs Assessments, which highlight challenges faced by immigrant communities in accessing essential services and offer insights into the specific needs and barriers encountered by immigrant mothers in the Midwest.

Additionally, reports from local educational institutions provided valuable data on the enrollment, retention, and academic outcomes of immigrant mothers and their children, shedding light on available educational opportunities and support services. Non-profit organization reports serving immigrant populations documented programs, services, and outreach efforts, offering testimonials, case studies, and statistical data relevant to the experiences of immigrant mothers, including their access to resources and support networks.

Furthermore, government reports from national, state, and municipal agencies provided contextual information on immigration trends, demographic shifts, and policy initiatives

affecting immigrant communities, offering insights into the socioeconomic status, employment opportunities, and legal rights of immigrant mothers in Midwest. This multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and challenges faced by immigrant mothers in their pursuit of higher education and their roles as caregivers, thereby enhancing the richness and validity of the study's findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection. These interviews allowed participants to share their narratives and perspectives on navigating the American Dream while balancing educational pursuits and motherhood responsibilities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The use of open-ended questions promoted rich and detailed responses.

Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns and themes within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This involves a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and organizing relevant information derived from interview transcripts. Additionally, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate the coding and thematic analysis process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in the participants' own words and experiences.

To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of findings, member checking was implemented by providing participants with summaries or excerpts from their respective interviews for

validation purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This iterative process helped ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

### **Validity/Limitations**

To ensure that the research is credible and trustworthy, several measures can be taken.

One such measure is member checking, which involves sharing initial findings with participants and gathering their feedback. This allows for a more collaborative approach to the research process, as well as providing an opportunity for participants to contribute their own perspectives and interpretations.

Additionally, peer debriefing is another valuable technique that can be used to bolster the rigor of the study. This involves seeking out feedback and guidance from other researchers or experts in the field, who can provide critical analysis and suggest potential areas for improvement.

Finally, it is important to establish an audit trail throughout the research process, which ensures that all steps are documented and transparent. This not only strengthens the validity of the research but also provides a clear record of all decisions and actions taken during the study.

While these techniques can be effective in enhancing research validity, it is essential to remain aware of potential limitations or challenges. For example, researchers may face obstacles related to their outsider status or cultural differences between themselves and participants. Additionally, participant self-selection bias may occur if individuals who are more interested in participating are overrepresented compared to others who may decline

involvement. Therefore, researchers must acknowledge these possibilities while taking steps toward minimizing their impact on study outcomes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To uphold ethical standards, several important factors were considered. These considerations encompass obtaining explicit informed consent from the individuals who participated in the study, safeguarding the confidentiality of their personal information, and placing a high value on their overall well-being throughout the entire research process. To achieve these goals, the researcher implemented specific measures such as providing participants with comprehensive consent forms that outline the study's purpose and potential risks involved and informing participants that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Additionally, I ensured that all participants were fully aware of their rights and have a clear understanding of what they can expect from their involvement. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were utilized instead of real names whenever any information was shared or discussed about the study. By implementing these ethical considerations, the researcher created an environment where participants felt respected and protected while also paving the way for meaningful and reliable research outcomes. Collected data were securely stored and destroyed after three years.

## **Interview Protocol**

This interview procedure has been formulated to provide direction for the research process in gathering information from immigrant mothers about their endeavors to pursue higher education while managing their responsibilities as mothers. The protocol encompasses crucial ethical aspects, such as acquiring informed consent, safeguarding the identities of participants, ensuring data security, and properly disposing of collected data.

### **1. Informed Consent:**

- a. **Obtaining Informed Consent:** Participants received an extensive informed consent document before the interviews are conducted. This document detailed the objectives of the study, the characteristics of the interviews, and the possible applications of the collected data. Participants were requested to grant their written consent before engaging in the interview process.
- b. **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval:** Approval was acquired by the research team from YSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB), guaranteeing adherence to ethical and legal protocols.

### **2. Protecting Participant identities.**

- a. **Anonymity:** To safeguard the privacy of the participants, fictitious names were employed instead of actual identities when sharing or discussing any information about the research.

- b. Video recordings: Interviews were recorded on Zoom with the explicit permission of the participants to ensure precision and for further study. The recordings were securely stored and limited in accessibility solely to the researcher and the dissertation committee.

3. Securing/Storage of Data:

- a. Data Encryption: Digital information, such as sound recordings, was safeguarded on devices that require a password for access and shall be encoded to ensure security.
- b. Secure Location: Physical research documents, consent forms, and hard copies of data were stored in a secure facility with restricted entry.

4. Data Disposal:

- a. Retention Period: The data will be stored for the designated duration as mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and by YSU's policies on data retention.
- b. Secure Disposal: After the designated period, all tangible and electronic information will be completely and securely eliminated to safeguard the confidentiality of the participants.



## **Interview Questions**

### **Demographic Questions:**

1. Can you tell me about your background, including your nationality, age, socioeconomic status, and family composition?
2. What motivated you to pursue higher education in the United States while also taking care of your maternal responsibilities?

### **Experiences and Challenges:**

3. How would you describe your experiences in balancing the demands of motherhood and higher education?
4. Can you share specific challenges you have encountered while pursuing higher education as an immigrant mother?
5. Could you share a pivotal moment or experience that epitomizes your journey of juggling maternal responsibilities and higher education?

### **Support and Coping Mechanisms:**

6. Have you received any support from educational institutions or community resources to help you manage both roles effectively?
7. What coping mechanisms have you developed to navigate the challenges of pursuing higher education and being a mother?
8. How have you adapted your coping strategies over time as you progressed in your educational journey?

**Educational Aspirations:**

9. How do you perceive the relationship between higher education and your aspirations for the American Dream?
10. What advice would you give to other immigrant mothers considering higher education in the United States?
11. In what ways do you perceive the challenges you've faced as opportunities for personal growth and empowerment within American society?

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the methodology implemented in my research efforts. It has placed significant emphasis on the selection of phenomenological research as the most optimal approach for comprehending and examining the unique experiences encountered by immigrant mothers who are actively engaging or have engaged in pursuing higher education while simultaneously fulfilling their maternal responsibilities. Moving forward, subsequent chapters will effectively employ this meticulously chosen methodology to effectively address and respond to the research inquiries at hand, ultimately making valuable contributions towards achieving the overarching objectives of this study.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the comprehensive results of a research study aimed at understanding immigrant mothers' experiences as they strive to balance academic work with family responsibilities. The investigation is anchored by two primary research questions, providing a thorough exploration of the challenges these women encounter, the coping mechanisms they employ, their personal growth, and the support systems they utilize. The findings are derived from in-depth interviews with the participants, offering rich, qualitative insights into their unique journeys.

The study meticulously examines the myriad challenges faced by immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the United States. It delves into how these women manage to navigate their academic commitments while fulfilling their roles as primary caregivers. Through the detailed narratives provided by the participants, the study reveals the intricate balancing act required to juggle these dual responsibilities.

A significant aspect of the research focuses on the coping strategies developed by these mothers. The interviews shed light on the diverse methods they employ to manage stress, maintain their academic performance, and ensure the well-being of their families. These coping mechanisms are crucial in helping them sustain their academic pursuits despite the numerous hurdles they face. Personal growth emerges as a recurring theme throughout the study. The participants recount their journeys of self-discovery and empowerment, highlighting how overcoming challenges has contributed to their development. Their stories illustrate the transformative impact of pursuing higher education while managing

familial obligations, underscoring the resilience and determination inherent in their experiences.

Support systems play a pivotal role in the lives of these immigrant mothers. The study explores the various forms of support they receive from their families, communities, and educational institutions. It emphasizes the importance of these networks in providing the emotional, practical, and sometimes financial assistance necessary for them to succeed in their academic endeavors.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample for this study consists of ten immigrant mothers residing in the Midwest region of the United States, selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of balancing academic responsibilities with family obligations within the context of higher education. These participants were carefully chosen to reflect a range of cultural backgrounds and immigration statuses, ensuring a rich diversity of perspectives and experiences.

## **Demographic Overview**

The participants interviewed in this study represent three countries of origin: Ghana, China, and India. This cultural diversity is essential for capturing the varied experiences and challenges immigrant mothers face as they pursue higher education in the U.S.

### **Immigration Status**

The participants' immigration statuses vary, which adds depth to the study by exploring how legal and social factors influence their academic and family lives. The immigration statuses include:

1. U.S. Citizens: Some participants have obtained U.S. citizenship, allowing them to fully participate in the workforce and access educational resources without the restrictions faced by those on visas.
2. Permanent Residents: Participants with permanent resident status (Green Card holders) enjoy a degree of stability but still face challenges related to their immigrant status.
3. Student Visas: Those on student visas face unique challenges, including financial constraints, work restrictions, and the pressure of maintaining visa status while balancing academic and familial responsibilities.

### **Marital Status**

The sample includes divorced, married and single mothers, which plays a significant role in the support systems available to them and the challenges they encounter in balancing their roles as students and caregivers.

<b>ID</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>VISA STATUS</b>	<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>	<b>NO. OF CHILDREN</b>	<b>REASON FOR COMING</b>	<b>DEGREE PROGRAM</b>
Participant 1	N/A	Ghana	Green Card	Married	3	To study/work	Masters
Participant 2	N/A	Ghana	US Citizen	Married	3	To study	PhD (Chemistry)
Participant 3	N/A	Ghana	Green card	Married	2	To study	Nursing
Participant 4	N/A	India	Green card	Married	3	To work	M.S. Nursing
Participant 5	N/A	Ghana	F-1 visa	Fiancé	1	To pursue a chosen career	Masters (International studies)
Participant 6	32	China	F-1 visa	Married (U.S. Citizen)	1	Interest in U.S. education system.	PhD (Educ. Tech)
Participant 7	36	India	J-1 visa	Married	1	To learn new techniques	Medical School
Participant 8	44	Ghana	Dual citizen (U.S.&Ghana)	Divorced	1	Wanted a higher degree	PhD (Educ Admin)

Participant 9	35	Ghana	F-1 visa	Married	1	To be tenured	PhD (Statistics)
Participant 10	41	Ghana	F-1 visa	Married	3	To acquire license to teach in the US	Masters (ECE)

### **Number of Children**

Participants in the study have between one and three children. The number of children influences the extent of caregiving responsibilities, and the strategies participants use to manage their academic commitments alongside family duties.

### **Length of Stay in the U.S.**

The participants have lived in the United States for varying lengths of time, ranging from a year to over a decade. This variation provides insights into how the length of stay in the U.S. impacts their adaptation to the educational system and their ability to balance academic and family responsibilities.

### **Participant Demographics**

The participants in this study represent a diverse group of immigrant mothers who are or were once enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States. Their varied backgrounds, visa statuses, and family compositions provide a comprehensive view of

the unique challenges and experiences they face as they juggle the demands of motherhood and academic pursuits.

Participant 1 is a Ghanaian immigrant mother who holds a green card and is married with three children. She came to the United States primarily to study and work and is enrolled in a master's program. Her background reflects a common pattern among participants who migrated not only to further their education but also to secure economic stability for their families. Juggling the demands of a graduate program with raising three children required significant organizational skills, especially in the absence of extended family support systems commonly available in her country of origin.

Participant 2, also from Ghana, is a U.S. citizen, married, and a mother of three. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry. Her citizenship status affords her more access to resources compared to other international students; however, the complexity of her doctoral program and family responsibilities still presented unique challenges. Her story underscores how even those with legal and institutional privileges navigate academic motherhood with significant demands on their time and energy.

Participant 3 is another Ghanaian mother who holds a green card. She is married with two children and is pursuing a nursing degree. Her motivation for immigrating was centered on educational opportunity. Like others in the study, her role as a parent often collided with the intense demands of healthcare education, a field known for rigid schedules and clinical requirements. Her experience sheds light on how structured programs can compound the struggles of parenting while studying.



Participant 4, originally from India, holds a green card, is married, and has three children. She is enrolled in a Master of Science in Nursing program and came to the U.S. to work. Her decision to pursue education after entering the workforce highlights the non-linear educational paths many immigrant mothers take. With a strong focus on improving professional opportunities and contributing to her family's economic wellbeing, her profile exemplifies those balancing full-time caregiving with career transitions.

Participant 5, a Ghanaian on an F-1 student visa, is engaged and has one child. She is pursuing a master's degree in international studies. Her experience as a visa-dependent student and a new mother posed multiple challenges — including financial constraints, limited work authorization, and cultural adjustment. Her status as a fiancé further complicated her access to family-based institutional support, underscoring how immigration categories intersect with academic and personal lives.

Participant 6, a 32-year-old mother from China, is studying for a Ph.D. in Educational Technology while on an F-1 visa. She is married to a U.S. citizen and recently had her first child. Her narrative reveals both the emotional weight of parenting without familial support nearby and the motivational force of education. She described feeling torn between academic ambition and maternal guilt, a theme echoed by several participants.

Participant 7 is a 36-year-old from India on a J-1 visa, married with one child, and enrolled in medical school. Her primary reason for coming to the U.S. was to learn new medical techniques. Her visa type adds a unique layer of complexity, given its restrictions on spousal employment and the expectation of return to the home country after completion. Her experience demonstrates how educational, and immigration pathways shape the sacrifices and expectations placed on immigrant mothers.

Participant 8, a dual citizen of the U.S. and Ghana, is a 44-year-old single mother of one. She completed a Ph.D. in Educational Administration. Although not constrained by visa limitations, her identity as an immigrant and a single parent revealed deep challenges related to navigating institutional support and racial bias. Her experience draws attention to how legal status does not eliminate barriers when other intersectional identities — such as race and gender — are at play.

Participant 9, a 35-year-old Ghanaian on an F-1 visa, is married with one child and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Statistics. Her narrative highlighted the absence of maternity leave provisions for international students and the emotional burden of returning to work and research shortly after childbirth. She discussed shifting her academic schedule to nighttime hours, illustrating how motherhood often forces immigrant scholars into invisible labor patterns.

Participant 10, a 41-year-old Ghanaian mother on an F-1 visa, is married with three children and pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education. Her decision to study in the U.S. was driven by her aspiration to acquire a teaching license and return to Ghana to enhance early childhood education. Her experience of postpartum depression and delayed academic progress due to childcare demands exemplifies the emotional and psychological toll this balancing act can impose.

Among the immigrant mothers in this study, marital status emerged as a critical—though often underestimated—factor influencing how participants managed stress and navigated academic responsibilities. While a supportive partner is often assumed to alleviate the burdens of student-parenthood, the narratives in this study reveal a more complex reality:

being married did not always translate into reduced stress, and in some cases, it created additional emotional or logistical tension.

Married participants frequently noted the expectation of shared responsibilities but expressed frustration when those expectations were not met. For instance, one participant mentioned that although her husband was physically present, his long work hours and limited understanding of her academic schedule left her solely responsible for the children during peak study times. This mismatch between perceived and actual support often resulted in heightened stress and emotional exhaustion. Another participant, also married, shared that she often refrained from expressing academic struggles at home to avoid burdening her spouse, thereby compounding her internalized pressure to perform well in both roles.

In contrast, single and divorced participants approached their roles with a different psychological framing. A divorced mother noted, “I knew from the beginning that I was alone in this, so I had no option but to plan ahead every single week. There was no one to call last minute.” This lack of a fallback system created significant pressure but also cultivated a form of resilience and foresight. Single mothers in this study were often more deliberate in building external support systems, such as friendships with other student-parents or church communities. While they experienced profound fatigue, especially around childcare and financial stress, they also demonstrated high levels of agency and adaptability.

Participants with ambiguous relationship statuses—such as being engaged or in long-distance partnerships—encountered yet another layer of strain. One participant, who was on an F-1 visa and engaged to be married, reflected on the emotional ambiguity of not

having a legal spouse in the U.S., which affected not only her psychological wellbeing but also her eligibility for spousal support services. She often felt caught between planning for a shared future and managing immediate needs alone, all while navigating immigration restrictions.

What emerges from these accounts is a nuanced understanding of marital status as a multidimensional factor in academic stress. It is not merely a demographic label but a dynamic context that shapes access to support, emotional resilience, and time management strategies. Married participants did not uniformly experience less stress; in fact, unmet expectations often increased their mental load. Meanwhile, single or divorced participants, though more exposed to isolation, displayed a proactive orientation toward building sustainable routines and support systems.

These findings suggest that higher education institutions must move beyond binary assumptions about student-mothers' support systems based on marital status. Academic advising and student services should account for the quality and reliability of support, not just the existence of a partner. Policies that recognize the complexity of family structures can help create more inclusive and responsive environments for all student-parents, regardless of their marital status.

### **Why Participants' Backgrounds Matter**

The demographic characteristics of the women who participated in this study are not peripheral to the research; they are integral to understanding the complexities, tensions, and insights that emerge from their lived experiences. These participants occupy a unique intersectional space—immigrant, mother, and student—each of which carries its own set

of expectations, limitations, and possibilities. Their diverse backgrounds shape not only their personal journeys but also the meaning and richness of the study's findings.

As established in Chapter 1, this research centers on how immigrant mothers navigate the dual responsibilities of motherhood and academic life in a higher education system often ill-equipped to support them. Their positionality, therefore, is not simply descriptive; it informs their strategies, frustrations, and triumphs. In Chapter 2, the review of literature highlighted how immigrant student mothers are rarely the central focus of educational inquiry. Most existing studies consider either international students or student parents, but seldom both. This oversight creates a critical gap in understanding the unique challenges these women face. The participants in this study not only fill that gap—they redefine the narrative.

Immigration status emerged as a fundamental determinant of how these women experienced and navigated higher education. Participants holding F-1 or J-1 visas contended with restrictions that dictated nearly every aspect of their academic and personal lives, including course enrollment, work eligibility, and access to healthcare and childcare services. For instance, one participant was required to register for unnecessary in-person classes simply to maintain visa compliance, despite the toll it took on her ability to manage childcare and academic demands.

This kind of rigid oversight does not apply to domestic students and thus illustrates how immigration policy can intensify academic stress and interfere with progress. The pressure to remain in compliance, combined with limited financial aid and prohibitions against employment, placed many participants in precarious positions that tested their endurance and resolve.

These institutional and policy-based challenges were compounded by cultural expectations and the absence of extended family networks. Many of the participants came from cultures where motherhood is communal and supported by extended family members. In contrast, their U.S. experiences were often isolating. Without grandmothers, aunts, or cousins nearby, they became sole caregivers, managing demanding schedules without the informal support that is typically essential in their home countries. One participant from Ghana, for instance, spoke about suffering postpartum depression due to a lack of sleep and the overwhelming nature of balancing a newborn with graduate-level coursework. Her emotional experience is emblematic of the hidden labor and psychological burden that many immigrant mothers endure in silence.

This cultural dissonance also extended into their academic environments. Even participants with permanent residency or citizenship reported institutional indifference to their lived realities. One participant, a dual U.S.-Ghanaian citizen, recounted how her academic advisor favored white students and left her to navigate her doctoral program independently. In such cases, even legal status could not shield these women from the intersecting barriers of race, gender, and motherhood. Their backgrounds shaped not only the challenges they faced but also the coping mechanisms they developed—relying on peer networks, maintaining strategic routines, and in many cases, enduring with extraordinary personal resilience.

What distinguishes these participants from the general population of student mothers is not only their legal and cultural barriers but also the broader vision that fueled their educational pursuits. Many were driven not merely by personal advancement but by a sense of transnational responsibility. Some mothers pursued advanced degrees to return

and reform sectors in their countries of origin, such as early childhood education or health care. Others hoped to pave the way for their children's futures in a new cultural context. Their motivations were grounded in both hope and obligation, stretching across continents and generations. This sense of duty—to family, to community, to self—is a powerful theme that surfaced repeatedly and differentiates their narratives from mainstream portrayals of academic motherhood.

Moreover, the invisible labor these mothers performed—studying during midnight hours, managing illnesses without insurance, navigating cultural misunderstandings with professors or peers—is rarely acknowledged in discussions of student success. Their ability to persist, to adapt, and to find meaning amid systemic and personal barriers, reflects a kind of strength that challenges conventional metrics of academic achievement. Success for these women cannot be measured solely by GPA or time-to-degree; rather, it must be understood as the act of remaining in motion under pressure, of dreaming despite fatigue, and of building futures in environments not designed with them in mind.

In many ways, these participants represent the future of globalized academia. They are multilingual, multidimensional, and mission driven. Their backgrounds do not complicate the study—they elevate it. Their voices not only deserve a place in the scholarly conversation but command attention, challenging us to think differently about resilience, success, and what it means to learn and lead in a world marked by mobility, motherhood, and migration.

## **Recruitment Process**

The recruitment process for this study was carefully designed to identify and select participants who could provide in-depth insights into the experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the United States. Given the focus on specific cultural groups and geographic locations, a purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that the participants met the study's inclusion criteria and could offer rich, relevant data.

The participants who agreed to be interviewed represented these countries: Ghana, China, and India. This focus was chosen to explore the unique challenges and coping strategies employed by mothers from these distinct cultural backgrounds. Immigration status was also a key criterion, with participants ranging from U.S. citizens to those on student visas and permanent residents.

## **Outreach and Initial Contact**

To reach potential participants, several outreach strategies were employed:

1. **Community Organizations:** Contacts were established with community organizations, cultural associations, and support groups serving Midwest immigrant populations. These organizations helped identify potential participants who fit the study's criteria.
2. **University Networks:** Collaboration with universities and colleges in the Midwest was another key strategy. Academic advisors, international student offices, and student support services were informed about the study and asked to disseminate information to immigrant mothers who might be interested in participating.



3. Social media and Online Platforms: Recruitment efforts also included posting announcements on social media platforms and online forums frequented by immigrant communities. These platforms allowed the study to reach a wider audience and connect with potential participants who might not have been reached through traditional methods.

### **Interview Scheduling and Follow-Up**

The interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability, with options for in-person, phone, or video-call interviews to accommodate different preferences and circumstances. Following the interviews, participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the study, and follow-up contact was maintained as needed for any clarifications or additional questions.

### **Document Analysis**

The analysis of educational policy documents from institutions such as the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Ohio State University (OSU), University of Minnesota, and University of Wisconsin-Madison reveals the strategic priorities and institutional commitments to supporting immigrant students, including mothers. This information often outlines the broader goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are operationalized through various offices and programs dedicated to assisting students with families.

For instance, policies guiding the Office of International Services (OIS) at UIC and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) at OSU demonstrate how these institutions address the needs of immigrant mothers by providing tailored support services such as

visa assistance, legal advice, and culturally competent counseling. These policies are critical in understanding the institutional responses to the challenges faced by immigrant mothers, as highlighted in broader educational guidelines.

Program guidelines from specific university initiatives offer detailed insights into the support mechanisms available to immigrant mothers. Analyzing the guidelines from programs such as the Student Parent HELP Center at the University of Minnesota and the Child Care and Family Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Madison provides concrete examples of how institutional policies are translated into actionable support services. These guidelines typically outline the eligibility criteria, services offered, and the intended outcomes of the programs. For example, the guidelines for the Family Resource Center at UIC likely detail the types of parenting workshops, childcare resources, and networking opportunities provided to student parents. By analyzing these documents, the research can assess how effectively these programs address the specific needs of immigrant mothers, as identified in the interviews.

Furthermore, a document analysis related to the support systems for immigrant mothers in the Midwest United States can draw on various sources from government reports and statistics to provide a comprehensive view of the socio-economic and legal frameworks that impact this demographic. For instance, data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provide crucial insights into the legal immigration processes that immigrant mothers must navigate.

The DHS regularly publishes the “Legal Immigration and Adjustment of Status Report,” which details the number of immigrants adjusting their status, including those moving from temporary to permanent residency or citizenship. This report highlights the

complexities of immigration processes, including the challenges faced by immigrant mothers who are often managing family responsibilities alongside these legal transitions. Understanding these immigration pathways is vital for universities and community organizations in the Midwest as they develop targeted support systems for immigrant mothers.

Additionally, the USCIS offers various services that are essential for immigrant mothers, such as visa applications, legal status adjustments, and access to work authorization. These services are critical in enabling immigrant mothers to secure stable legal status, which in turn affects their ability to access education, employment, and social services. For immigrant mothers pursuing higher education, the ability to maintain legal residency or adjust their status can directly impact their ability to complete their studies and provide for their families.

### **Summary of Data**

#### **Coding and Category Creation**

The process of coding and category creation was a critical step in the analysis of the qualitative data collected through interviews with immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the Midwest United States. This process involved systematically organizing and interpreting the data to uncover patterns, themes, and insights that address the research questions.

The initial coding phase began with a thorough review of the interview transcripts. Each transcript was read multiple times to ensure a deep understanding of the participants' narratives and to begin identifying significant segments of text that were relevant to the

research questions. During this phase, open coding was employed, where codes were generated directly from the data without the imposition of pre-existing categories or theories. Each segment of the text was assigned a code that captured the essence of the information it conveyed. These codes were descriptive and aimed at summarizing the content of the segments. For instance, a statement about the difficulties in balancing study time with childcare might be coded as “time management challenges,” while a segment discussing the reliance on extended family for support might be coded as “family support systems.”

After the initial coding was completed, the next step involved refining the codes. This process included merging similar codes, eliminating redundant ones, and ensuring that the codes accurately reflected the data. For example, codes such as “financial stress” and “economic challenges” might be combined under a single, more comprehensive code like “financial constraints.”

Once the codes were refined, the process of category creation began. Categories were developed by grouping related codes under broader, more abstract labels that represented significant themes in the data. This step involved both inductive reasoning, where categories emerged naturally from the data, and deductive reasoning, where existing literature and theoretical frameworks guided the categorization. For example, codes related to managing academic responsibilities alongside family obligations, such as “time management challenges,” “childcare responsibilities,” and “balancing roles,” were grouped under the broader category of “Balancing Academic and Family Responsibilities.”

### **Developing Thematic Categories**

The categories created during the coding process were then analyzed to identify overarching themes that addressed the study's research questions. Thematic categories are broader than the initial categories and encapsulate the main ideas that emerged from the data.

For instance, one of the thematic categories identified was "Coping Mechanisms," which encompassed several sub-categories such as "Time Management Techniques," "Social Support Networks," and "Use of Institutional Resources." These thematic categories provided a structured way to present the findings, ensuring that the analysis was coherent and aligned with the research objectives.

### **Linking Categories to Research Questions**

The final step in the coding and category creation process involved linking the developed categories and themes back to the research questions. This step ensured that the analysis was directly related to the study's objectives and that the findings were presented in a way that addressed the research questions. For example, categories like "Balancing Academic and Family Responsibilities" and "Cultural Adjustments" were directly related to the first research question, which focused on the challenges faced by immigrant mothers. Meanwhile, categories like "Coping Mechanisms" and "Utilizing University Resources" were linked to the second research question, which explored the strategies employed by these mothers to manage their dual roles.

## **Member Checking**

In some cases, participants were consulted to confirm that the codes and categories accurately represented their experiences. This feedback helped refine the analysis and ensure that the participants' voices were authentically captured.

## **Use of Software Tools**

Qualitative data analysis software, such as Atlas.ti, was employed to facilitate the coding process. These tools allowed for efficient organization, retrieval, and analysis of large amounts of qualitative data. The software also provided features such as word frequency queries and coding comparisons, which supported the identification of patterns and the refinement of categories.

## **Resulting Themes**

### **Theme 1: Academic Demands and Time Management**

Immigrant mothers in college face significant academic pressures, and the ability to manage time effectively is critical to their success. Balancing academic demands with personal responsibilities was a recurrent theme for all participants. Participant 1 expressed the challenges she faced in managing her time, particularly when it came to finding care for her baby: *"It was hard leaving the baby and going to lectures... Time was a big challenge for me."* Similarly, Participant 9 shared her strategy for coping with these demands: *"I had to be very strict with my time. I created a detailed schedule and stuck to it as much as possible. It was the only way to keep everything from falling apart."*

Other participants echoed these sentiments, highlighting the critical importance of effective time management. Participant 3 described how balancing study, work, and family required strict scheduling: *“Time management was key. I had to carve out specific times for studying, working, and taking care of my family. It was exhausting but necessary.”* Participant 4, who also faced financial struggles, noted, *“Having to juggle multiple part-time jobs to support my family while keeping up with assignments meant that I was always sleep-deprived and rushing.”* The recurring theme of time scarcity was apparent across the experiences of all the participants, whether their specific challenges were related to childcare, academic workload, or external responsibilities like employment.

As Participant 5 put it, *“Every hour had to be accounted for.”* These women’s ability to manage their time was not just about succeeding academically—it was often about survival. Participant 8 pointed out that time management was essential for maintaining both her academic responsibilities and her personal life: *“Between working, attending classes, and looking after my children, there wasn’t a second to waste.”*

## **Theme 2: Balancing Multiple Responsibilities**

Balancing multiple roles—mother, student, and sometimes employee—was another key aspect of the participants’ experiences. The demands of these multiple roles created constant pressure and a need for adaptability. Participant 3 described this as *“walking a tightrope,”* reflecting the difficulty of meeting academic demands while also caring for children and, in some cases, working.

Participant 9 provided further insight into how she and her partner divided responsibilities in their household to manage these demands: *“We sort of shared the role between ourselves, who is going to take care of our son at what point...so I can stay up later at night to work on my dissertation.”* Participant 6 acknowledged that *“finding reliable childcare”* added another layer of difficulty, while Participant 5 discussed the need to make constant compromises between study time and family time, acknowledging that *“there was always a trade-off.”*

For these mothers, balance was not always achievable, and they had to adapt continuously. Participant 7 shared that *“I had to learn quickly how to prioritize. When exams were close, I had to rely on my spouse to take over all household responsibilities.”* This constant juggling act left many participants feeling as though they could never fully meet the demands placed upon them, yet they continued to find ways to adapt. Participant 8 summed up the experience, saying, *“Sometimes, something had to give. I learned to accept that I couldn’t do it all perfectly, and that was okay.”*

### **Theme 3: Support Systems and Coping Strategies**

Support systems were vital to the participants’ success, with both formal and informal support networks playing crucial roles in helping these mothers manage the demands of motherhood and higher education. Participant 10 praised the institutional support available through counseling services: *“There’s this center...Hope Center...I always go there for counseling.”* She was not alone in her reliance on institutional resources—Participant 3 found similar help through childcare services at her school: *“The school’s childcare services were a big help, especially during finals.”*



Community-based support was also essential. Participant 8 emphasized the importance of finding support within the community: *“Find a church, find a community that will support you in what you’re doing because that’s the best way of surviving.”* The significance of informal support networks, such as friends and family, was highlighted by Participant 1, who relied on her family to help care for her children while she focused on her studies.

For many participants, asking for help was a learned skill. Participant 2 mentioned that she initially struggled with reaching out, but once she did, it made a world of difference: *“I had friends I could lean on. They were my lifeline when things got tough.”* In the same vein, Participant 5 turned to her church for moral and spiritual support, which helped her stay grounded: *“My church provided a lot of moral and spiritual support. It was a safe space where I could vent and get advice.”* Others focused on adjusting their expectations to reduce stress. Participant 6 noted: *“After having my baby, I lowered my academic expectations. I realized I didn’t need an A in every course, and that helped me cope.”*

#### **Theme 4: Challenges (Legal, Financial, and Cultural)**

The challenges faced by immigrant mothers in higher education were numerous, including legal, financial, and cultural barriers that compounded the already heavy burden of academic work and motherhood. Financial constraints were a major concern for many participants, with Participant 4 stating, *“The cost of education, childcare, and living expenses was overwhelming.”* Similarly, Participant 10 explained how visa restrictions limited her ability to work and support her family: *“Being on a student visa meant that I couldn’t work more than 20 hours a week... I was constantly worried about money.”*

Cultural differences also presented challenges, particularly for participants who had to navigate new social norms and systems. Participant 6, originally from China, described: *“In my culture, extended family helps raise the child, but here, I had to handle everything on my own.”* A participant struggled with language and communication differences in academic settings. Participant 3 explained: *“Understanding academic English was a challenge, and I had to take extra time to interpret instructions.”*

Participant 6 found it difficult to adjust to the U.S. healthcare system: *“The medical cultural differences here were hard to adapt to, especially after giving birth.”* Participant 7 shared her frustration with visa-related restrictions, which limited her ability to work and further complicated her financial situation. Participant 9 also mentioned the stress of adjusting to an unfamiliar educational system, stating, *“The grading system and academic expectations were very different from what I was used to.”* Different cultural norms regarding gender roles and parenting influenced participants’ experiences

### **Theme 5: Motivation, Ambition, and Career Aspirations**

Despite the many challenges they faced, the participants were driven by strong motivations, both personal and professional. Participant 1 was motivated by a desire to set a positive example for her children: *“I wanted to motivate my kids that they have all these resources at home, so they shouldn’t be mum before they go get that.”* Her ambitions were shared by Participant 9, who connected her educational pursuits directly to her career aspirations: *“My education is directly tied to my career aspirations. I want to be a role model for my children and show them that with hard work, anything is possible.”*

Other participants discussed their career goals, which helped them stay focused in the face of adversity. Participant 5 spoke of her goal to become a nurse practitioner and provide care to underserved communities, while Participant 10 aspired to improve early childhood education in her home country. Participant 7 was driven by a desire to give back to her community: “I want to take what I’ve learned and give back to my community.” These career aspirations were a key factor in the perseverance of these women, helping them stay focused on their long-term goals despite the day-to-day challenges they encountered.

### **Theme 6: Mental Health and Self-Care**

Mental health challenges were frequently mentioned by participants, who emphasized the importance of self-care in maintaining their well-being. Participant 2 recognized the need for self-care early on in her academic journey: “I realized that if I didn’t take care of myself, I wouldn’t be able to take care of my family or succeed in school.” For Participant 10, seeking help was essential to managing the pressures of both motherhood and academia. She shared how she struggled with postpartum depression: “I had to see a therapist...I even deferred my course for a semester so I could heal.”

The participants stressed that self-care was not a luxury but a necessity. Participant 6 discussed the toll that constant stress took on her mental health and how she had to prioritize her well-being: “There were times when I felt completely overwhelmed. Talking to a counselor helped me process everything and find ways to cope.” Again, Participant 6 explained: *“I started gardening in the summer. It keeps me busy and helps me manage stress.”*

## Theme 7: Personal Growth and Legacy

The challenges faced by immigrant mothers in college often led to significant personal growth. Many participants viewed their experiences as not just an academic journey, but also a personal one, where they learned resilience, developed new skills and built stronger relationships. Participant 8 reflected on this personal development: “The challenges...afforded me the opportunity to be resilient...and build stronger relationships with people.”

This personal growth often extended beyond the individual and was seen as creating a legacy for their children and future generations. Participant 1 expressed her desire to leave a positive legacy for her children: “I want my children to see that anything is possible if you work hard and stay focused.” For Participant 9, her academic accomplishments were not just for herself, but for her children: “My education is not just for me, it’s for my children and future generations. I want to show them that with determination and perseverance, they can achieve anything.”

Participant	Academic Demands and Time Management	Balancing Multiple Responsibilities	Support Systems and Coping Strategies	Challenges (Legal, Financial, and Cultural)	Motivation, Ambition, and Career Aspirations	Mental Health and Self-Care	Personal Growth and Legacy
Participant 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Academic Demands and Time Management</b>	<b>Balancing Multiple Responsibilities</b>	<b>Support Systems and Coping Strategies</b>	<b>Challenges (Legal, Financial, and Cultural)</b>	<b>Motivation, Ambition, and Career Aspirations</b>	<b>Mental Health and Self-Care</b>	<b>Personal Growth and Legacy</b>
Participant 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Key Findings

### **Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences juggling maternal responsibilities while pursuing higher education?**

Immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences as an ongoing balancing act between the rigorous demands of academia and their maternal responsibilities. They frequently highlighted the **challenges of time management**, explaining that their ability to navigate both roles depended on their capacity to organize their time effectively. **Participant 1** mentioned, “It was hard leaving the baby and going to lectures... Time was a big challenge for me.” This sentiment was echoed by **Participant 9**, who emphasized the need for a strict schedule: “I had to be very strict with my time. I created a detailed schedule and stuck to it as much as possible.”

For many participants, managing time was not only about keeping up with their academic responsibilities but also ensuring they could fulfill their roles as mothers. **Participant 3** mentioned how she had to “carve out specific times” for each responsibility—academic, work-related, and personal. Others, such as **Participant 4**, described the added financial pressure that made time management even more difficult, particularly when they had to balance part-time work alongside academic responsibilities. These immigrant mothers often felt that no matter how carefully they planned, something had to be sacrificed, whether it was sleep, personal time, or social life.

In addition to time management, **adaptability** played a crucial role in their ability to manage their responsibilities. Participants like **Participant 5** and **Participant 6** described how they had to constantly adjust their schedules and expectations. **Participant 6** shared how unexpected challenges, like childcare issues, would force her to adapt her plans on a moment's notice. This flexibility was essential for these mothers to keep up with their academic and maternal duties.

Immigrant mothers also relied heavily on **support systems** to juggle their responsibilities. Institutional support, such as counseling and childcare services, provided some relief for participants like **Participant 10**, who noted that the Hope Center offered essential help with counseling. Many also relied on informal networks of family and friends. **Participant 1** and **Participant 7** discussed the role that family played in helping them manage their time by taking on childcare duties, especially during critical academic periods, like exams.

The **emotional and mental toll** of trying to balance these roles was another common theme. **Participant 2** and **Participant 6** mentioned feelings of being overwhelmed, particularly during periods when their academic and maternal responsibilities were most demanding. Some, like **Participant 10**, spoke of the emotional challenges of dealing with postpartum depression while still trying to meet academic deadlines.

Despite these challenges, the participants remained driven by their strong **motivation** to provide a better future for their children and families. Many saw their educational pursuits as a means of inspiring their children and setting a positive example. **Participant 1** said, "I wanted to motivate my kids that they have all these resources at home, so they shouldn't be mum before they go get that." Others, like **Participant 9**, viewed their

educational journey as a way to show their children the value of hard work and perseverance.

Overall, immigrant mothers in U.S. colleges describe a delicate balancing act that requires time management, adaptability, emotional resilience, and reliance on support systems. Their determination to succeed academically while fulfilling their maternal duties reflects their resilience and commitment to providing a better future for their families.

**Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do immigrant mothers with college degrees recount their experiences coping with the demands of academic pursuits?**

Immigrant mothers who have completed college degrees recount their experiences coping with academic demands as an arduous but transformative journey. Many shared that their ability to cope stemmed from a combination of **practical strategies**, such as time management, and **emotional resilience** that developed over time as they learned to navigate the demands of both motherhood and education.

For many, **financial constraints** were one of the most pressing challenges. **Participant 4** described how the financial burden of tuition, childcare, and living expenses was overwhelming, stating that “the cost of education, childcare, and living expenses was overwhelming.” Participants like **Participant 10** and **Participant 7** faced additional challenges due to their visa status, which restricted their ability to work. **Participant 10** explained that “Being on a student visa meant that I couldn’t work more than 20 hours a week,” creating added financial stress that compounded the difficulty of coping with academic demands.



Another challenge was **legal barriers**, particularly for those on student visas. Participants like **Participant 5** and **Participant 9** expressed how visa restrictions impacted their academic journey. **Participant 5** recounted the stress of balancing her studies with the legal limitations imposed by her visa status, which restricted both her ability to work and access certain forms of financial aid.

**Cultural differences** also played a significant role in shaping participants' experiences.

**Participant 6** described the cultural adjustments she had to make, particularly in the context of the U.S. educational system and healthcare. She recalled how the differences in expectations regarding maternal care in the U.S. added to the stress of coping with academic responsibilities. **Participant 9** also mentioned the challenge of adjusting to new academic norms, such as grading systems and classroom expectations that were unfamiliar compared to those in her home country.

The **mental health impact** of these challenges was profound, with several participants, including **Participant 2** and **Participant 10**, discussing the emotional toll of managing academic and maternal responsibilities. **Participant 10** spoke of her struggles with postpartum depression and how seeking professional help became essential in helping her continue her academic journey. The mental health challenges participants faced often stemmed from a combination of stress related to time management, financial struggles, and cultural adaptation.

Despite these challenges, the participants developed **effective coping strategies** over time. For many, time management became a crucial tool. **Participant 9** described her strategy of creating detailed schedules and sticking to them as the only way to keep from being overwhelmed by her numerous responsibilities. **Participant 3** echoed this

sentiment, emphasizing that without strict time management, she would not have been able to complete her studies.

In addition to time management, **support systems** were vital in helping participants cope. Many participants found strength in both institutional support, such as counseling services and childcare programs, and in their personal networks. **Participant 8** stressed the importance of finding a supportive community, whether through religious organizations, peer networks, or family. For her, the sense of belonging and mutual support she found within these groups was essential to her ability to cope with the rigors of academia.

**Emotional resilience** was another key factor that enabled participants to cope with academic demands. Many reflected on how the difficulties they faced during their academic journey led to personal growth and increased resilience. **Participant 8** remarked, “The challenges...afforded me the opportunity to be resilient...and build stronger relationships with people.” The ability to persevere despite numerous obstacles gave many participants a sense of accomplishment and reinforced their belief in the value of education for themselves and their families.

Ultimately, immigrant mothers who have earned college degrees reflect on their academic journeys as challenging but deeply rewarding. The coping mechanisms they employed—time management, reliance on support systems, and emotional resilience—allowed them to overcome the significant barriers they faced, providing them with the tools they needed to succeed both academically and personally.

### Analysis of Sub-Themes

In the process of analyzing the qualitative data presented in Chapter 4, a detailed thematic analysis was conducted to determine whether meaningful sub-themes could be identified within the overarching themes. The initial approach involved categorizing participant responses into broader themes to capture the essence of their experiences effectively. While an attempt was made to further break these themes into sub-themes, it became evident that doing so would result in redundancy rather than offering new insights.

Each theme was thoroughly examined to assess variations in participant responses. However, the patterns observed across different respondents demonstrated a high degree of similarity, making sub-theme distinctions superficial and unnecessary. For instance, in the discussions related to **coping mechanisms, cultural adjustments, and academic demands**, participants provided responses that echoed similar sentiments, reinforcing existing themes rather than diverging into distinct sub-categories. The overlaps in perspectives did not introduce new dimensions of understanding that would justify the creation of separate sub-themes.

Additionally, the effort to establish sub-themes risked fragmenting the data without adding substantive value. The primary goal of thematic analysis is to highlight meaningful distinctions that contribute to a deeper understanding of the data. Given that the participant responses aligned closely within the main themes, maintaining a broader thematic structure ensures clarity and avoids unnecessary repetition.

As a result, all findings have been consolidated into comprehensive themes without subdivisions. This decision not only maintains the integrity of the data but also enhances

readability and coherence in presenting the participants' collective experiences. To ensure a structured summary of the findings, all thematic data have been merged into a **summary table**, allowing for a clear and concise representation of the trends observed.

This approach preserves the authenticity of the participants' voices while ensuring that the analysis remains methodologically sound. By refraining from forced sub-theme categorization, the study maintains a more holistic and streamlined narrative that accurately reflects the experiences of the respondents.

<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Common Experiences Among Participants</b>
Time management	Difficulty balancing study and family life
Institutional support	Limited awareness of available resources
Cultural adaptation	Struggles with adjusting to U.S. academic culture
Financial struggles	Tuition, work restrictions, childcare costs
Mental well-being	High stress levels, emotional exhaustion

### **Summary**

The exploration of the experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education reveals a complex and multifaceted journey characterized by significant challenges and extraordinary resilience. These women's narratives illustrate the critical roles of time management, adaptability, and support systems in helping them balance the dual demands of motherhood and academic life. Whether through family, peer networks, institutional

resources, or personal motivation, these mothers consistently drew on various support mechanisms to overcome the barriers they faced.

Each participant's journey reflects the diverse and intricate challenges unique to their situation, including financial constraints, legal barriers tied to immigration status, cultural differences, and the emotional toll of navigating motherhood and academia simultaneously. The ability to adapt and develop creative solutions to these challenges underscores their remarkable resilience. Time management and emotional fortitude were essential strategies, as many participants had to juggle strict schedules and make personal sacrifices to succeed.

Support networks—ranging from family and friends to institutional resources like counseling and childcare—were indispensable to their perseverance. Many relied on these networks not only for practical assistance but also for emotional support, helping them navigate the isolation and stress that often accompany both motherhood and higher education. The importance of community, whether through religious organizations, academic peer groups, or local resources, also emerged as a key factor in their ability to cope.

Furthermore, these narratives highlight significant moments of personal growth, empowerment, and transformation. As they confronted and overcame obstacles, many participants experienced increased self-confidence, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and a stronger sense of identity. This personal development extended beyond academic success, contributing to the well-being and future aspirations of their families. Many mothers saw their educational journey as a legacy they could pass on to their children, aiming to inspire future generations to pursue their own academic goals.

The insights gleaned from these immigrant mothers' experiences emphasize the need for supportive environments that recognize and address their unique challenges. Educational institutions, policymakers, and community organizations can draw on this understanding to create more inclusive and effective programs that facilitate both academic success and personal growth for immigrant mothers. By fostering such environments, we can support the diverse paths to success that immigrant mothers navigate in the United States, ensuring they have the resources needed to thrive both as students and as parents.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research**

### **Introduction**

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the Midwest United States, focusing on the ways in which they navigate their dual roles as students and caregivers. The study was framed by Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966) and Transnationalism Theory (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014), which provided insights into the motivations, challenges, and resilience of immigrant mothers.

The research problem emphasized the lack of institutional support and systemic challenges faced by immigrant mothers in higher education. It framed higher education as a pathway to economic mobility, but one that remains largely inaccessible to non-traditional students due to financial, cultural, and structural barriers (García Coll et al., 2015). The study's purpose was to examine how immigrant mothers juggle their academic and maternal responsibilities while striving for academic success.

The literature review examined key theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that contextualized the study's findings. The Push-Pull Theory provided a lens for understanding how economic aspirations and structural barriers shape educational trajectories, while Transnationalism Theory demonstrated how immigrant mothers remain connected to their countries of origin, influencing their academic and financial priorities (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2019). Additionally, the literature highlighted the ways in which gender norms, visa restrictions, and economic hardship disproportionately affect the academic persistence of immigrant mothers (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018).

A qualitative methodology was used to capture the voices and experiences of immigrant mothers. Through semi-structured interviews with participants from diverse backgrounds, the study uncovered rich narratives of resilience, sacrifice, and aspiration. The thematic analysis identified patterns in how participants navigated time constraints, legal barriers, financial limitations, and cultural expectations. Seven major themes emerged from the data: academic demands, balancing responsibilities, support systems, institutional barriers, career aspirations, mental health struggles, and personal growth. These findings confirmed existing literature on non-traditional students but also extended theoretical discussions by emphasizing the unique intersection of migration, motherhood, and education.

This chapter delves deeper into the interpretation and implications of the study's findings. It examines how the results align with, challenge, or expand upon existing theories, discusses institutional barriers and policy considerations, and provides recommendations for higher education institutions seeking to better support immigrant mothers. This chapter also identifies directions for future research, emphasizing the need for intersectional frameworks that address the complex realities of immigrant mothers in academia.

### **Summary of Findings**

The study explored the lived experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the United States, with a focus on how they navigated the complexities of motherhood alongside academic responsibilities. The study involved 10 participants who were immigrant mothers from diverse backgrounds, specifically originating from Ghana,



China, and India. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 45 years, and their immigration statuses varied from permanent residents to holders of student visas.

The study was guided by two primary research questions:

**Research Question 1:** How do immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences juggling maternal responsibilities while pursuing higher education?

Participants were required to discuss their daily experiences, the challenges they faced, and the coping strategies they employed. Interview questions under this research question included inquiries about daily routines, academic demands, emotional and practical support systems, and specific barriers encountered. For instance, participants described the constant pressure of managing coursework alongside childcare. One participant shared:

*“There were nights I barely slept because after putting the kids to bed, I had to study. Some days, I just functioned on pure willpower,”* (Participant 3).

Another participant discussed the emotional toll of balancing responsibilities:

*“I constantly felt torn between two worlds. When I was with my children, I felt guilty about my unfinished assignments. When I was studying, I felt guilty about not spending time with them,”* (Participant 6).

**Research Question 2:** How do immigrant mothers with college degrees recount their experiences coping with the demands of academic pursuits?

Under this question, participants reflected on their past academic journeys, identifying specific coping mechanisms, resources they utilized, and advice they would offer to other immigrant mothers. Interview questions explored motivations for education, institutional support experiences, and the influence of cultural expectations. For example, participants described their reliance on informal networks to navigate academic challenges:

*“If it weren’t for my sister stepping in to help with childcare, I don’t know how I would have survived my final year,”* (Participant 4).

Several significant themes emerged from the analysis of participants’ narratives, including academic demands and time management, balancing multiple responsibilities, support systems and coping strategies, institutional barriers, motivation and career aspirations, mental health and self-care, and personal growth and legacy.

### **Academic Demands and Time Management**

Participants consistently identified time management as an intense challenge due to the competing demands of motherhood and academics. The overwhelming demand on their time forced many to sacrifice sleep, social engagements, and even their own well-being in order to fulfill both academic and familial obligations. *“There were nights I barely slept because after putting the kids to bed, I had to study. Some days, I just functioned on pure willpower,”* (Participant 3). Another participant shared, *“I had to schedule every single minute of my day to survive. Between school, work, and my children, I had no time for myself,”* (Participant 8). This aligns with recent research highlighting how non-

traditional students, especially mothers, experience heightened time poverty (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2019).

### **Balancing Multiple Responsibilities**

The tension between family roles and academic responsibilities was a persistent challenge. Participants frequently expressed feelings of guilt—guilt for not spending enough time with their children, for not being fully present in their studies, or for neglecting their personal well-being. *“I constantly felt torn between two worlds. When I was with my children, I felt guilty about my unfinished assignments. When I was studying, I felt guilty about not spending time with them,”* (Participant 6). The concept of role conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) helps explain the persistent internal tensions participants described. *“I missed my son’s first school play because I had an exam. That moment still haunts me,”* (Participant 2).

### **Support Systems and Coping Strategies**

The role of support networks—whether from family, friends, or institutional resources—was a crucial factor in determining participants’ academic persistence. Those with strong support systems reported greater resilience and motivation to continue their studies despite external pressures. *“If it weren’t for my sister stepping in to help with childcare, I don’t know how I would have survived my final year,”* (Participant 4). However, those lacking support often struggled to cope with their workload. *“I had no one to rely on. Some days, I had to bring my baby to class because I couldn’t afford childcare,”* (Participant 9). Social capital theory provides context for understanding these findings,

emphasizing the importance of robust support networks in achieving educational success (Yosso & Solórzano, 2019).

### **Challenges Related to Legal, Financial, and Cultural Barriers**

The study highlighted substantial systemic barriers, including restrictive immigration policies, limited financial aid opportunities, and inflexible academic structures. These barriers not only affected their academic performance but also contributed to heightened levels of stress and anxiety. *“I couldn’t access scholarships because of my visa status, and that meant I had to work extra hours just to pay tuition. It felt like an uphill battle every single day,”* (Participant 7).

Another participant reflected on cultural expectations, *“In my culture, a mother is supposed to stay at home. My family back home didn’t understand why I wanted to study instead of focusing only on my children,”* (Participant 1). These challenges disproportionately affected immigrant mothers, confirming earlier research indicating the need for institutional reforms (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018).

### **Motivation and Career Aspirations**

Many participants saw higher education as a means of securing economic mobility and professional advancement. For some, their aspirations extended beyond personal success to inspiring their children and demonstrating the importance of perseverance and education. *“I want my daughter to see that anything is possible. That even as a mother, you can still chase your dreams,”* (Participant 5). *“This degree is my key to a better job. I don’t want my children to struggle the way I did,”* (Participant 10).

### **Mental Health and Self-Care**

Participants frequently reported stress, anxiety, and burnout, consistent with recent findings on mental health concerns among immigrant populations in higher education (Collins, 2020). Despite employing coping mechanisms such as prayer, social support, and personal reflection, mental health challenges remained a significant struggle.

*“Sometimes, I cried myself to sleep. The stress was unbearable, but I had no choice but to keep going,”* (Participant 3). *“I couldn’t talk to anyone about how I was feeling because I was afraid of being judged. In my culture, we don’t discuss mental health,”* (Participant 7).

### **Personal Growth and Legacy**

Beyond academic achievement, many immigrant mothers perceived their education as a long-term investment in their family’s future. They saw themselves as role models, hoping to instill values of resilience and determination in their children. *“This degree is not just for me. It is for my children, for my family, and for the generations that come after me,”* (Participant 6). *“No matter how hard it was, I kept going because I wanted my children to know that education is the way forward,”* (Participant 8).

## **Conclusions Organized by Research Questions**

### **1. How do immigrant mothers enrolled in college programs in the United States describe their experiences juggling maternal responsibilities while pursuing higher education?**

The findings reveal that immigrant mothers engage in a continual balancing act, navigating financial pressures, academic obligations, and caregiving roles. Institutional resources, particularly flexible scheduling and financial aid were key determinants in their academic persistence. Despite facing cultural and systemic barriers, participants demonstrated remarkable adaptability, relying on personal resilience and external support systems to achieve their goals. However, persistent systemic inequities highlight the need for further institutional reforms to support immigrant mothers effectively.

### **2. How do immigrant mothers with college degrees recount their experiences coping with the demands of academic pursuits?**

For those who successfully completed their programs, reflections on their educational journeys were mixed. Many described profound personal growth yet acknowledged significant emotional and physical sacrifices. Some identified gaps in institutional support, advocating for reforms such as increased childcare provisions, mentorship programs, and financial aid tailored to non-traditional students. Their experiences suggest that while academic institutions provide some level of assistance, additional structural adjustments are necessary to create a truly inclusive learning environment.

Additionally, participants emphasized that the support they received varied significantly depending on the institution they attended, underscoring the importance of standardized policies that address the needs of immigrant mothers across different educational settings.

## **Discussion**

The American Dream is typically characterized by individualistic pursuits of wealth and personal success. However, the findings suggest immigrant mothers redefine this concept to emphasize intergenerational prosperity, family stability, and cultural pride. Their pursuit of education, despite numerous barriers, demonstrates an expansive interpretation of the American Dream, suggesting that institutions must recognize and accommodate these multidimensional aspirations.

The findings from this study align with broader literature on immigrant mothers in higher education while also offering new insights into their lived experiences. One of the primary themes that emerged is the intersectionality of gender, immigration status, and student identity. Many participants struggled not only with the workload of higher education but also with expectations placed on them by their cultural backgrounds. The findings raise the possibility that the concept of the American Dream may function differently for first-generation Americans.

One of the most striking conclusions drawn from the study is the disparity in institutional support. While some universities offer childcare services, financial aid, and academic flexibility, others provide minimal assistance, leaving immigrant mothers to navigate higher education with little support. Participants who attended institutions with structured support systems reported higher levels of academic satisfaction and success. This finding

highlights the critical need for universities to develop targeted policies that address the needs of immigrant mothers as a distinct student demographic.

Participant 6, a permanent resident from Ghana, stated, *“In my home country, a mother’s primary duty is the family. Studying while being a mother is not common, so I constantly felt like I was neglecting my children.”* This perspective highlights the cultural tensions immigrant mothers face as they navigate academic spaces that may not fully recognize or accommodate their unique challenges. The challenges that immigrant mothers face are unique. The participants in this study were not only attempting to juggle higher education with parenting, but they were also struggling to bridge the gap between cultural expectations from their countries of origin and the individualistic norms prevalent in U.S. academic institutions, creating ongoing emotional and cultural conflicts as they sought to succeed academically and fulfill familial obligations simultaneously.

The study also contributes to the discourse on resilience among immigrant women.

Despite significant obstacles, many participants demonstrated perseverance, finding ways to adapt. Participant 3, a single mother from India, noted, *“I used to feel guilty about spending time away from my child, but now I understand that my education will give him a better future. That realization kept me going.”* This aligns with the resilience theory, which suggests that individuals develop adaptive strategies in response to adversity (Zimmerman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this research expands on the role of institutional support. While prior studies highlight the importance of academic resources, this study finds that emotional support from faculty and staff plays a critical role. Participant 10, a mother from China, explained, *“I had a professor who constantly checked in on me. That made all the*



*difference.*” Universities should consider mentorship programs specifically targeted toward immigrant mothers to create a more inclusive academic environment.

The detailed analysis addresses critical gaps in current literature by specifically exploring how immigrant mothers simultaneously navigate academic demands and maternal responsibilities. Existing studies often focus on either immigration or motherhood independently; however, this study highlights how both identities intersect uniquely for immigrant mothers (Hill & Torres, 2020). As mentioned, this intersection raises important issues for how institutions of higher learning support this demographic group.

By examining immigrant mothers specifically within the Midwestern U.S. context, this discussion provides regionally specific insights, illuminating how geographical and cultural contexts might influence participants’ academic journeys. This geographical specificity allows institutions within the Midwest to better understand and address unique regional barriers, such as limited access to culturally sensitive resources or insufficient institutional support (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018).

The findings challenge and expand upon established theories such as Push-Pull and Transnationalism theories by adding new dimensions, such as family-related obligations and emotional pressures, as key influences in immigrant mothers’ educational decisions. This theoretical expansion is crucial as it pushes researchers and policymakers to reconsider traditional migration and educational theories to accommodate complex, lived experiences of immigrant mothers (Guarnizo & Smith, 2021).

The detailed discussion links participants’ lived experiences directly to practical institutional implications, such as the critical need for more robust support systems (e.g.,

affordable childcare, flexible academic schedules, culturally responsive mental health services). These insights provide higher education policymakers and administrators concrete evidence upon which to base meaningful reforms (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2019).

Compared to non-immigrant mothers, the participants in this study revealed an intensified experience of academic motherhood shaped by compounded structural and emotional challenges. While many studies highlight the time-management difficulties and mental load faced by student mothers generally, immigrant mothers navigate these pressures within a web of immigration policies, cultural isolation, and lack of social capital. Unlike their domestic counterparts, who may access family support networks, flexible work opportunities, or maternity accommodations, immigrant mothers often face visa-related restrictions, language barriers, and unfamiliar institutional cultures that limit their autonomy. These findings align with literature that points to systemic marginalization among international students (Yakaboski, 2018), yet they push the conversation further by illustrating how motherhood multiplies this vulnerability. The women in this study did not merely contend with juggling coursework and parenting—they did so while navigating spaces that were not designed for them.

What stands out most distinctly among this group is their dual motivation and dual burden. Many participants were not only pursuing academic advancement for themselves but also seeking to build futures for their children both in the U.S. and in their countries of origin. This transnational sense of responsibility is rarely documented in mainstream literature on student mothers. Their resilience is not only in managing tasks but in maintaining hope across borders and generations. Their stories were imbued with a desire to create legacies, influence educational systems back home, and set an example for their

children—despite social, emotional, and financial hardship. This cultural and generational awareness was deeply embedded in their narratives and offers a distinctive contribution to the literature.

This research carries important implications for academic institutions, faculty, and student services. First, there must be a paradigm shift: motherhood should be viewed not as a liability but as a rich, dynamic asset in the academic environment. Faculty and administrators should recognize that student mothers—particularly immigrant mothers—develop unique problem-solving skills, emotional resilience, and time-management capacities that enhance the classroom and research culture.

Institutions could implement mentorship programs, culturally responsive childcare services, and flexible course formats that reflect the lived realities of diverse student parents. Furthermore, designated support staff for international student mothers could foster inclusivity and provide guidance on visa compliance, maternity policies, and academic planning. Reframing motherhood as a strength allows educators and policymakers to craft solutions that are empowering rather than exclusionary.

Another significant theme that emerged from the data—but is often overlooked in literature on academic motherhood—is the influence of cultural parenting values on immigrant mothers' academic experiences. Cultural parenting refers to the ways in which child-rearing beliefs, practices, and expectations are shaped by one's cultural background. For many participants in this study, parenting was not merely a private task, but a culturally embedded responsibility deeply intertwined with community, tradition, and identity.

Participants from Ghana, India, and China described coming from cultures where parenting is collective, multi-generational, and often supported by extended family. In these contexts, mothers are rarely expected to raise children alone, and caregiving is viewed as a shared responsibility among relatives and community members. Upon arriving in the United States, however, these women encountered a sharply different reality. The dominant parenting culture in the U.S.—particularly for those in academia—emphasizes independence, self-reliance, and individual achievement. This shift not only led to feelings of isolation but also forced many participants to reassess their parenting styles and expectations within an unfamiliar cultural framework.

For example, several participants reported struggling to adapt to expectations that young children be placed in daycare or develop autonomy at earlier ages than is customary in their home countries. Others felt judged or misunderstood by faculty and peers for prioritizing family responsibilities, which in their cultures were seen as honorable, not optional. The resulting tension affected how they interacted with their academic programs, how they scheduled their time, and how they internalized their own academic identities.

Moreover, cultural parenting values influenced how participants framed their goals. Rather than seeing their academic pursuits as solely for personal gain, many viewed their degrees as tools to uplift their families and communities—locally and transnationally. This sense of interdependence contrasted with Western ideals of success as individual achievement. As such, their approach to education, time management, and institutional engagement was shaped not only by logistical demands but by deep-seated cultural values around what it means to be a mother, a provider, and a role model.

These reflections on cultural parenting underscore the need for institutions to develop more culturally responsive models of support for student-parents. Recognizing that not all parenting is rooted in Western norms allows for a richer understanding of the diverse experiences immigrant mothers bring to academic life. It also challenges higher education to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and acknowledge the unique strengths and values these mothers contribute to scholarly communities.

A central implication of this study is the urgent need to shift the narrative around motherhood in academia—from one that sees it as a barrier to productivity, to one that recognizes it as a source of unique strength and resilience. The stories of the immigrant mothers in this study powerfully counter the stereotype that parenting detracts from scholarly potential. Rather, they demonstrate how motherhood can enhance empathy, time management, perseverance, and purpose—all qualities essential to academic and professional success.

The assumption that caregiving obligations inevitably hinder academic success is deeply embedded in institutional culture. Yet, research increasingly challenges this notion. For instance, Lander et al. (2021) argue that mothers in academia often bring enhanced emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills to their work, cultivated through parenting. Similarly, Miller and Nash (2016) contend that motherhood can inspire a deeper connection to social justice and education, positioning mothers as advocates for more inclusive and compassionate academic environments.

This study confirms these insights within the specific context of immigrant motherhood. Participants developed extraordinary adaptability—navigating rigid visa requirements, economic hardship, and academic workloads—while still maintaining active parental

roles. These circumstances pushed them to innovate in scheduling, to draw strength from cultural and familial values, and to remain deeply motivated by their children's futures. Such qualities should not be dismissed as private struggles but understood as vital forms of scholarly labor and leadership.

To embrace motherhood as a strength, institutions must go beyond offering accommodations. They must actively reframe motherhood as an asset in their policies, language, and support structures. This includes including parental status in diversity and inclusion efforts, encouraging mentorship programs that connect mothers across departments, and celebrating maternal contributions to research and learning spaces. The stories shared in this dissertation illustrate how academic motherhood—especially among immigrants—is not a deviation from the scholarly norm, but a redefinition of it. These women have already reimagined what it means to thrive in academia. It is time that institutions follow their lead.

The findings in Chapter 4 underscore the complexity of academic motherhood for immigrant women, revealing how factors such as immigration status, cultural parenting values, and marital status intersect to shape their academic journeys. These dimensions are not isolated but interwoven, each amplifying or mediating the pressures participants face. In particular, marital status emerged as a critical and unexpected thread in understanding participants' stress and resilience. Contrary to common assumptions, being married did not guarantee stability or reduced emotional burden. Many married participants found themselves navigating unmet expectations, unequal caregiving roles, or emotional disconnection from partners who could not fully support their academic goals. One participant's experience of feeling "like a single parent even while married"

reflects a broader theme among the women in this study: marriage did not necessarily equate to shared parenting or emotional support. Instead, the assumption of support often intensified their frustration when partners were physically present but unavailable in meaningful ways—emotionally, logistically, or intellectually.

These insights reinforce the need for institutions to avoid reductive assumptions based on marital or visa status and instead adopt a more nuanced, relational approach to student support. Academic mothers—especially those from immigrant backgrounds—cannot be understood through single categories. Their experiences exist at the intersection of caregiving labor, cultural identity, institutional pressures, and personal ambition.

By recognizing this, Chapter 5 reaffirms the importance of honoring the full spectrum of experiences detailed in Chapter 4. The goal is not merely to document hardship but to highlight the adaptive strategies, deep inner resolve, and collective vision these mothers demonstrate. Their stories disrupt linear narratives of academic success and instead offer a more textured understanding—one that is informed by cultural memory, maternal strength, and a refusal to surrender dreams in the face of adversity. These women are not just managing motherhood; they are transforming it into a source of insight, endurance, and scholarly power.

## **Theoretical Implications**

### **Push-Pull Theory**

Traditional interpretations of Push-Pull Theory focus predominantly on economic motivations for migration. However, the data suggest that for immigrant mothers, the decision to pursue higher education extends beyond economics. Family responsibilities,

cultural expectations, and institutional constraints were equally influential, creating additional “push” factors. Thus, a critical reading of this study’s findings suggests that Push-Pull Theory does not adequately integrate non-economic variables such as emotional stress, role conflict, and family obligations to accurately reflect the motivations and constraints experienced by immigrant mothers.

### **Transnationalism Theory**

The study challenges the notion that migration is a unidirectional experience. Many participants maintained strong transnational ties that influenced their educational goals and decision-making processes. Their academic pursuits were not solely about self-improvement but also about fulfilling obligations to family members in their home countries, showcasing the fluid and ongoing nature of transnational identities. For some, financial remittances were prioritized over tuition payments, delaying educational progress but reinforcing the interconnectedness between their academic and familial responsibilities.

The findings confirm that while existing theories provide useful analytical frameworks, they require adaptation to fully capture the multidimensional realities of immigrant mothers in academia. Future research should consider intersectional frameworks that incorporate race, gender, and socio-economic status to further explore the nuances of this experience.

Given participants’ consistent descriptions of institutional challenges, such as inadequate childcare and rigid schedules, we can reasonably assume that higher education institutions remain largely unaware of or indifferent to the distinct needs of immigrant



mothers. While the data does not explicitly confirm institutional motivations, the recurrence of this challenge among participants suggests systemic ignorance or oversight rather than isolated experiences.

Participants shared struggles with mental health yet hesitated to seek help due to cultural stigma. An informed supposition here is that immigrant mothers might benefit significantly from culturally sensitive mental health services. The data implies that if mental health resources were presented in culturally appropriate ways—potentially involving community leaders or trusted cultural intermediaries—immigrant mothers might be more inclined to utilize these essential services.

Participant responses indicate strong economic motivations paired with financial obstacles due to visa statuses and limited access to financial aid. It is reasonable to hypothesize that immigrant mothers may delay or prolong their educational journey due to financial pressure, affecting their academic performance and completion rates. Additionally, some participants' necessity to prioritize sending remittances home suggests potential interruptions in their academic progress, affecting their overall educational outcomes.

Considering participant narratives emphasizing education as legacy and aspiration, a plausible inference is that the educational experiences of immigrant mothers have long-term impacts on their children's attitudes towards education. The struggle, perseverance, and resilience described by participants might positively influence their children's educational aspirations and attainment, potentially creating intergenerational changes in educational attitudes within immigrant families.

Given that participants with stronger support systems expressed significantly less strain, it can be reasonably speculated that enhancing institutional supports—such as comprehensive childcare, flexible course offerings, targeted financial aid, and community partnerships—could notably improve academic outcomes for immigrant mothers. Increased support would likely reduce stress, allowing greater academic focus and achievement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

#### **Sample Size and Geographic Limitations**

The study involved a relatively small sample size of ten immigrant mothers, selected from specific countries—Ghana, China, and India—currently residing and studying within the Midwestern United States. Consequently, the experiences described might not fully represent the broader population of immigrant mothers nationwide or globally. Future research could benefit from a larger, more geographically diverse sample to enhance generalizability and to compare regional or national differences in institutional support.

#### **Self-Report and Recall Bias**

The study relied primarily on self-reported narratives and retrospective accounts from participants. While qualitative research provides rich, detailed insights, responses might have been influenced by recall bias, memory inaccuracies, or social desirability bias, where participants may underreport struggles or challenges. Utilizing additional methodologies, such as longitudinal studies or triangulating qualitative data with institutional records, might provide more robust findings.

### **Limited Scope of Immigration Statuses**

Participants' immigration statuses were limited to permanent residents and student visa holders. Other immigrant statuses, such as undocumented mothers or those on temporary work permits, were not represented in the study. These different statuses may significantly alter experiences and challenges faced, particularly regarding access to resources, financial aid, and institutional supports. Exploring a broader range of immigration statuses could provide deeper insights into systemic barriers.

### **Cross-Cultural and Linguistic Considerations**

Cultural and language barriers may have impacted participants' abilities to fully express their experiences and emotions. Although care was taken to ensure clarity during interviews, subtle nuances and cultural-specific interpretations could have been lost in translation or misunderstood. Future studies could address this limitation by including bilingual researchers or translators familiar with participants' cultural contexts.

### **Short-term Focus**

The research primarily explored current or retrospective experiences without extensively analyzing participants' long-term outcomes post-graduation. While participants expressed aspirations about future career and economic stability, the study does not provide empirical evidence on actual career trajectories or long-term impacts of their educational journeys. Longitudinal follow-up studies would be valuable in assessing the sustained impact of higher education on immigrant mothers' economic stability and social mobility.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future studies should expand the geographical and demographic scope by including immigrant mothers from diverse locations across the United States and internationally. Conducting comparative studies across different regions could help identify regional differences and the impact of local institutional policies and cultural attitudes on the academic experiences and outcomes for immigrant mothers (Hill & Torres, 2020).

Given that this study primarily explored immediate or retrospective experiences, future research could employ a longitudinal design to examine immigrant mothers' educational trajectories, career paths, and socioeconomic outcomes post-graduation. This approach would provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of higher education on both mothers and their families, thus better informing institutional policies and support programs (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2019).

Research could be expanded to include participants with broader immigration statuses, such as undocumented immigrants or mothers on temporary work permits. Exploring experiences across varied immigration statuses would highlight additional systemic barriers and support needs, providing a more nuanced understanding of immigrant mothers' educational journeys (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018).

While qualitative methods offered rich, descriptive insights, future research could utilize mixed-method approaches—combining qualitative interviews with quantitative measures (e.g., surveys assessing institutional support effectiveness, mental health outcomes, academic achievement). Such research would yield a more comprehensive picture of

factors influencing immigrant mothers' academic persistence and overall success (Castañeda & Rodriguez, 2019).

Future studies might explicitly explore intersectionality, examining how race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender roles, and immigration status collectively influence educational experiences. Intersectional analyses could uncover deeper systemic inequalities, helping institutions craft more inclusive and effective support strategies for immigrant mothers (Collins, 2020).

Investigating the effects of specific institutional policies or reforms aimed at supporting immigrant mothers could offer valuable practical insights. Such research could identify best practices, measure the effectiveness of targeted interventions (e.g., childcare services, financial aid adjustments, flexible academic scheduling), and ultimately guide higher education institutions in implementing meaningful changes (Guarnizo & Smith, 2021).

Given participants' reluctance to seek mental health support due to cultural stigma, future studies might examine culturally tailored mental health interventions. Evaluating these interventions could help establish effective approaches that institutions could employ to enhance immigrant mothers' psychological well-being, thereby improving their academic and familial outcomes (Hirschman & Mogford, 2018).

These recommendations for future research not only address the limitations identified in this study but also present a clear pathway for deepening understanding, shaping policy, and transforming institutional practices to better support immigrant mothers in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the unique lived experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the Midwest USA, highlighting the complex interplay of maternal responsibilities, academic challenges, institutional barriers, and cultural expectations. Through the rich narratives of the participants, it became evident that immigrant mothers view higher education as not only a personal goal but also a vital step toward achieving collective prosperity for their families, embodying a broader interpretation of the “American Dream.”

The findings reinforce and expand upon traditional theoretical frameworks such as Push-Pull Theory and Transnationalism Theory. While economic motivations were indeed significant, the study revealed critical additional factors, such as familial obligations, emotional and psychological pressures, and institutional constraints, that shape immigrant mothers’ educational journeys. The transnational identities of these mothers deeply influence their academic decisions, prioritizing responsibilities toward their families in their countries of origin, thus confirming and further enriching the concept of transnationalism.

Institutionally, the study underscores the necessity for targeted policies and support structures that recognize and address immigrant mothers’ distinctive needs.

Recommendations include enhanced financial aid programs sensitive to immigration status, flexible academic schedules, culturally appropriate mental health services, and accessible childcare facilities. Such institutional transformations could significantly alleviate the burdens immigrant mothers experience, fostering higher rates of persistence and academic success.

These women have redefined what it means to be students, mothers, immigrants, and leaders all at once. Their voices challenge us to reimagine institutional systems that too often equate professionalism with disconnection from caregiving. My hope is that this research contributes to a growing movement that sees parenting not as a private matter to be managed in silence, but as a central identity that belongs in classrooms, policy conversations, and scholarly inquiry. These stories are not marginal—they are foundational. And by centering them, we open the door to a more humane, equitable, and inclusive vision of higher education.

Finally, this research clearly demonstrates the resilience, determination, and aspirational strength of immigrant mothers. It emphasizes their potential to positively impact future generations through educational attainment. Future research, particularly longitudinal studies and intersectional analysis can further illuminate long-term outcomes and refine institutional practices. Ultimately, recognizing and supporting immigrant mothers in higher education is essential not just for their individual success but for fostering equitable opportunities and contributing to broader societal growth.

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## Appendices



May 30, 2024 10:18:09 AM EDT

Nathan Myers  
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2024-141 Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers' Journey of Higher Education in Pursuit of the American Dream

Dear Dr. Nathan Myers:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers' Journey of Higher Education in Pursuit of the American Dream

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:  
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,  
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

## **Interview Questions**

### **Demographic Questions:**

1. Can you tell me about your background, including your nationality, age, visa status, and family composition?
2. What motivated you to pursue higher education in the United States while also taking care of your maternal responsibilities?

### **Experiences and Challenges:**

3. How would you describe your experiences in balancing the demands of motherhood and higher education?
4. Can you share specific challenges you have encountered while pursuing higher education as an immigrant mother?
5. Could you share a pivotal moment or experience that epitomizes your journey of juggling maternal responsibilities and higher education?

### **Support and Coping Mechanisms:**

6. Have you received any support from educational institutions or community resources to help you manage both roles effectively?
7. What coping mechanisms have you developed to navigate the challenges of pursuing higher education and being a mother?
8. How have you adapted your coping strategies over time as you progressed in your educational journey?

**Educational Aspirations:**

9. How do you perceive the relationship between higher education and your aspirations for the American Dream?
10. What advice would you give to other immigrant mothers considering higher education in the United States?
11. In what ways do you perceive the challenges you've faced as opportunities for personal growth and empowerment within American society?

**Research Study: “Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers’ Journey of Higher Education in Pursuit of the American Dream”**

**Are you an Immigrant Mother Pursuing Higher Education?**

We Want to Hear Your Story!

**About the Study:** We invite immigrant mothers to share their unique experiences in pursuing higher education in the United States. Your stories will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by immigrant mothers in their pursuit of the American Dream through education.

**Why Participate?**

- **Make an Impact:** Your experiences will help inform policies and support systems for immigrant mothers.
- **Share Your Journey:** Contribute to a collective narrative that highlights the resilience and strength of immigrant mothers.

**Study Procedures:**

- **Interviews:** Share your experiences in one-on-one interviews.
- **Duration:** Interviews last approximately 30 minutes.
- **Location:** Conducted at multiple places either in-person or remotely (Participants will be recorded).

**Participant Criteria:**

- Immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the United States.



**Confidentiality:**

- Your identity will be kept confidential.
- All data will be anonymized, and your privacy will be protected.

**How to Participate:** Contact Phil Gadzekpo at [pgadzekpo@student.ysu.edu](mailto:pgadzekpo@student.ysu.edu) to express your interest and schedule an interview.

**Date:** Ongoing

**Location:** Flexible

**Your Story Matters! Join Us in Shaping the Narrative of Immigrant Mothers' Educational Journeys.**

*This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).*

## **Informed Consent Form**

**Title: Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers' Journey of Higher Education in Pursuit of the American Dream**

**Investigator:** Phil Gadzekpo

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### **Introduction:**

You are invited to participate in a research study titled "Juggling Dreams and Responsibilities: Exploring Immigrant Mothers' Journey of Higher Education in Pursuit of the American Dream." Before you decide to participate, it is important that you understand the nature of the study, its risks, benefits, and procedures. Please take the time to read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of immigrant mothers pursuing higher education in the United States. Your participation will contribute valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs faced by immigrant mothers in their pursuit of the American Dream through education.

**Procedures:**

- **Interviews:** You will be asked to participate in one or more interviews where you will share your experiences and perspectives.
- **Duration:** Each interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes.
- **Location:** The interviews will be conducted at multiple places either in-person or remotely, and you will be recorded during the process.

**Risks:**

While efforts will be made to protect your privacy, the disclosure of personal experiences may evoke emotional responses. If you feel distressed during the interview, please inform the researcher, and appropriate support will be provided.

**Benefits:**

By sharing your experiences, you contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant mothers, potentially paving the way for improved support systems and policies.

**Alternative Treatments:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the information provided. All data will be anonymized, and any identifiable information will be kept secure.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation provided for participating in this study.

**Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, please contact the Office of Research Services at 330-941-2377 or YSUIRB@ysu.edu

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*By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this form and voluntarily agree to participate in the study.*

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*By signing below, you voluntarily agree to be recorded during interviews*

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_