ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF LATINO-IMMIGRANT MOTHERS AND THEIR ADOLESCENT CHILDREN

This study examined the accuracy with which Latino-immigrant mothers perceive their children’s educational aspirations and the accuracy of children’s perceptions of their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. Additionally, it explored the relationship between perceived maternal educational aspirations and children’s educational aspirations. Children who perceive their parents as having higher educational aspirations for them tend to do better in school. Thirty-three participant pairs of mothers and their children from the Central Valley of California were recruited via telephone interviews to participate in this study. Results indicated that mothers accurately perceived their children’s educational aspirations. However, the children did not accurately perceive their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. A positive relationship was found between the children’s educational aspirations and their perception of their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. These findings suggest that communication between Latino-immigrant mothers and their children could be improved in order to increase educational aspirations.

Krushenka Salazar
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EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF LATINO-IMMIGRANT MOTHERS AND THEIR ADOLESCENT CHILDREN

by

Krushenka Salazar

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APPROVED

For the Department of Psychology:

We, the undersigned, certify that the thesis of the following student meets the required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student's graduate degree program for the awarding of the master's degree.

Krushenka Salazar
Thesis Author

Lorin Lachs (Chair)  Psychology

Hong Ni  Psychology

Constance Jones  Psychology

For the University Graduate Committee:

Dean, Division of Graduate Studies
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Latino population of the U.S. has been growing in the past decades and is expected to comprise approximately 30% of the population by 2050 (Pew Hispanic Center [PHC], 2008, 2013). In 2012, the Latino population was 53 million, making up 17% of the U.S. population. In the last decade, Latinos accounted for more than half of the nation’s population growth (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2013). This population growth has expanded throughout the United States, especially in three states—California, Texas, and Florida. In California, Mexican-origin Latinos are the dominant group—making up 78% of the Latino population in Los Angeles. Mexican-origin Latinos are also the largest Latino group in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (PHC, 2013). Many of the Mexican-origin Latinos are immigrants who have moved to the United States in search of a better life for their families.

Immigrant families face many challenges, due to immigration, low income or socioeconomic status (SES), language, inadequate health care, acculturation levels, and poor educational opportunities (Gallo, Penedo, de los Monteros, & Arguelles, 2009). Educators are concerned about Latino immigrants’ experiences as they adjust to life within a foreign system. For foreign-born children with limited language skills, some challenges—like facing a recent home relocation, and having parents with low educational level—can create further risks of poor educational attainment (McLaughlin, Liljestrom, Lim, & Meyers, 2002). New statistics show that in 2012, 73.2% of Latinos in California graduated with a high school diploma. This is a 1.4 % increase from 2011 statistics (California
Department of Education [CDOE], 2013). Although many Latino students have successfully attained a high school diploma, 39,701 Latino students in California dropped out in 2012. For those students who dropped out, the future will likely not be bright. In general, the success gap between high school graduates and high school dropouts is increasing (CDOE, 2013). High school dropouts are twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates. Dropouts who are employed earn an average of about 37 cents for every dollar earned by high school graduates (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

Multiple risk factors have been identified as predictors of the decision to drop out of school, especially for Latinos of Mexican heritage who are at high risk of not completing high school. Ream and Rumberger (2008) examined data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, a national longitudinal study of approximately 25,000 eighth grade Latino and non-Latino White students. These data included information on family background—SES, students’ engagement behaviors, students’ grades, educational aspirations, and social relationships. Results showed that in high school, Mexican-origin students fell behind in grades and also in educational aspirations, defined as “an individual’s desire to obtain a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education” (MacBrayne, 1987, p. 135). Lower educational aspirations is not the only academic area found to be lower among Latino students when compared to non-Latino Whites. School engagement, defined as the study habits and participation in extra-curricular activities, was also found to be lower for students of Mexican-origin families (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Importantly, the results of the study found that SES
for Latino students was significantly lower (.78 SD) than the average for non-Latino Whites. Indeed, child poverty rates for Latinos are more than twice as high as those for non-Latino Whites (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2006). Even though some Latino students manage to receive good grades and keep higher educational aspirations, low SES tends to be related to the diminishing educational aspirations of U.S. Latino students (Kao & Tienda, 1998). One possible reason for the lower SES is that immigrant parents have limited education and work opportunities (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

While lower SES might be a risk factor for immigrant students, it cannot be the sole cause of school withdrawal: Indochinese refugees who have faced economic hardship have shown a high rate of academic success (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991). Furthermore, Kao and Tienda (1995) found that many immigrant children successfully adapted to American schools regardless of their socioeconomic status or their parents’ educational level. This suggests that other factors may be at play when it comes to Latino immigrant students’ success in school. Although it is hard to establish a linear relationship between the different factors that influence withdrawal from school, some research suggests that students’ family backgrounds, including parental encouragement (Ream & Rumberger, 2008) and students’ perceptions of their parents’ educational aspirations for them (Fuligni, 1997) can influence students’ academic attitudes. Fuligni proposed that parental attitudes and the students’ own attitudes—“a relatively stable or enduring predisposition, positive affective orientation, and tendency to persevere when working on certain specific academic content or task domains” (Fuligni, 1997, p.
— and behaviors play a significant role in school success for immigrant students. More specifically, the educational aspirations—high school or college completion—of immigrant parents were indicated as important influential factors of immigrant students’ success in education.

Although there are many factors that influence academic success, this study focuses on (1) Latino children’s educational aspirations; (2) Latino mothers’ educational aspirations for their children; (3) Latino children’s educational perceptions of maternal educational aspirations for them; and (4) thus, the accuracy of Latino children’s perceptions of maternal educational aspirations. The study also examines whether maternal educational aspirations for children are directly or indirectly related to their children’s educational aspirations. The findings of this study may be useful in designing culturally sensitive interventions that promote communication between mothers and children in regards to educational aspiration.
CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Motivation for Immigration

Many families immigrate to the United States in pursuit of a better life (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). Some of the factors that bring people to the U.S. include finding a better job, better living wages, and better educational opportunities. Data from the U.S. indicates that almost a quarter of all U.S. children live in immigrant families. These children are doing worse academically than immigrant children in European countries (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005). Understanding which factors may affect or help students’ academic performance is therefore of utmost importance.

Research in the area of immigrant academic performance has shown mixed results with regard to immigrant children’s academic performance. Some studies (Fuligni, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008) show that immigrant children show higher achievement motivations, higher engagement in school, and more positive attitudes toward school than native-born students. In addition, they show lower dropout rates than native-born students (Fuligni, 2007). However, Fuligni also showed that students who are first generation scored lower in specific areas, such as mathematics, when compared to second and third generation immigrants and to native-born students. In addition, Asian immigrant youth tend to do better than immigrant youth from Latin America and the Caribbean. Asian youth are also more likely to complete high school than Latin-American and Caribbean youth (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The variability may be due to many factors,
including language barriers, parental education level, and even family’s work and academic achievement aspirations and motivations for immigration (Fuligni, 2007).

The decision to immigrate can vary between families and the motivation for the move may influence students’ academics. Two specific motivations for making the move—education and work opportunities—have been investigated with respect to educational achievement. Hagelskamp et al. (2010) reviewed a number of immigrant education studies and concluded that research often focuses on education as the main reason for immigration. However, economic hardship may also motivate the move. Research on a recent immigration wave points to immigration as a basis for better economic opportunities and, therefore, there is an economic motivation for immigration (Hagelskamp et al., 2010).

Hagelskamp et al. (2010) detail several theories for explaining how family values, expectations, and goals influence motivations for immigration. They argue that immigration motivations are personal to each family because they influence the destination for the family and whether or not the whole family makes the move. Sladovka (2007) argues that migration motivations become "long-lasting migration narratives." These narratives are told repeatedly and reflected upon until they become internalized, influencing the children’s sense of family obligation and academic motivation (Sladovka, 2007). Knowing the motivations for immigration may be helpful in understanding what aspirations parents may be encouraging at home.
Hagelskamp et al. (2010) studied the motivations of parents for immigrating and the relationship between a child’s grade point average (GPA) and his/her parent’s expectations and aspirations in both academics and work-related areas. Data were gathered from a 5-year longitudinal immigrant student adaptation study, which included data from 256 recent immigrant youth from China, Central America, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Mexico. The data were collected between 1997 and 2002 from the public school system in San Francisco. The study included newcomer immigrants whose parents were both from the same country of origin and who had agreed to be interviewed within the first year of the study. During the interview, parents were asked to explain their reasons for immigrating to the United States. They were also asked why they chose to stay in the U.S. and whether or not they would want their children to remain in the U.S. or to go back to the country of origin. In addition, they were asked to explain what they believed were ways to obtain a better future in the United States. It was found that work/employment opportunities for the parents were significantly more important than educational opportunities for their children. Work/employment opportunities were a stronger predictor of parents’ immigration decisions across all groups. However, the discrepancy in the influence on students’ GPAs that education and work motivations varied significantly by country of origin. Educational motivations were more important for Dominican and Mexican parents than to Central American parents. Moreover, among Chinese parents, work prospects were significantly less important compared to the other groups. In addition, the study found that children whose parents mentioned schooling as a
reason to immigrate to the United States had a higher GPA. In contrast, children whose parents emphasized work or employment as the purpose of their immigration had a more rapid decline in GPA during the latter years of their schooling.

The findings of Hagelskamp et al. (2010) hint at a divide between academic and economic immigration motivations, which can influence children’s school performance. It thus may be useful to understand in more depth the academic attitudes of Latino-immigrant parents who define education differently from White middle-class parents.

**Academic Interpretations of Latino Immigrant Parents**

The American education system continually emphasizes that collaborative work between parents and teachers is necessary for students to be academically successful (Villenas, 2002). Valdés (1996) argues that schools expect parents to adopt a middle-class view of education and to have some notion of what achievement means in the United States. However, Latino-immigrant families have very little understanding of American’s views of success and they bring with them their own definition of education and their own definitions of success (Valdés, 1996). Although there are a number of studies that have investigated the meaning of education (educación) for Latino parents, few ethnographic studies have examined it from Latino-immigrant parents’ point of view.

On the surface, the word educación seems to be a direct translation of the English word education. Although they are related in origin, the Spanish meaning of the word implies moral and behavior
values that are not connoted by the English word. It is important to understand the beliefs of Latino parents about the concept of *educación* and what it encompasses to understand its impact in Latino-children’s educational achievement (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995).

Villenas (2002) conducted a 2-year study of Latino-immigrant families in Hope City, North Carolina focused on the cultural dynamics and resiliency of the families as they engaged in explaining their definitions of *educación*. Villenas interviewed Latino families, and found a definition of education that differs greatly from the one used in American society. Families defined a *buena educación* (or, having a good education) as having “well-educated children who have respect, moral values, and loyalty to family.” In contrast, the American education system defines education as related to being formally instructed at a school. Latino-immigrant parents’ idea of education centered on values such as *respeto* (respect) and *buen comportamiento* (good conduct). Some parents stated that their main goal was to have children who were well educated in order to be successful in the United States. Their definition of success encompassed being respectful, a good worker, respectful of their elders, and abstinent of the societal vices they described as dangerous and immoral in the U.S. (Villenas, 2002). When asked about school, one participant stated that he had sacrificed by moving from his native Mexico so that his children would have the opportunity for formal schooling. However, he did not see himself in the role of being an academic “educator” at home. He stated that he had fulfilled his role as a
parent by teaching his children to respect and having brought them to the United States to obtain a formal education (Villenas, 2002).

Although the definition of *educación* did not encompass academics for the parents in this study, the participants felt formal education was valuable for their children. The parents saw themselves as the main educators when it came to their children’s moral values (Villenas, 2002). The study suggests that Latino-immigrant parents value morality and formal education for their children’s future. This factor can help mitigate the risks Latino-immigrant youth face in the U.S if the parents are able to communicate academic and moral values to their children.

For the purpose of clarity in this overview of the literature of Latino parents’ views of education, the Spanish term *educación* will refer to well-educated children who have respect, moral values, and loyalty to family while the English term *education* will refer to formal schooling.

**Communication Between Immigrant Youth and Their Parents**

There are many risk factors to consider when assessing the low achievement and high drop-out rates of immigrant students. Some of them include limited English language skills, not being born in the United States, being recent immigrants, having parents who are recent immigrants with low levels of English language skills, and low parental education level (Gallo et al., 2009; McLaughlin et al., 2002). Research suggests that another factor may be children’s communication with their less acculturated parents, which exacerbates children’s lack of willingness to share information (McLaughlin et al., 2002). For example, the act of a child not telling his/her parents about a school activity may
not be considered extreme for a native-born student. However, for a Latino immigrant parent this may carry larger consequences because of a lack of familiarity with the American education system (McLaughlin et al., 2002). As a consequence, parents might be less likely to take the proactive step to call the school for information (McLaughlin et al., 2002). Miscommunication between an immigrant Latino parent and a more acculturated child may also affect a child’s perception of his/her parents’ academic attitudes and educational aspirations for him/her.

McLaughlin et al. (2002) conducted a study at four schools—elementary, middle, and high school levels—to study the communication between immigrant students and their parents. The study revealed that parents and students do not always communicate effectively. Furthermore, immigrant parents do not always perceive their children’s thoughts or feelings about school accurately. Of those surveyed, 85% of the parents thought their children were happy with their social interactions with their friends and with their relationships with their teacher. However, the students’ responses indicated that 40% of them were happy with their social interactions and indicated that they did not have a positive relationship with their teachers. An explanation for this discrepancy may be related to a lack of an effective parent-teacher-school relationship, cultural differences in school expectations, and/or a lack of communication between parents and their children about school (McLaughlin et al., 2002).

A lack of communication or ineffective communication between parents and students can be troublesome because good communication is necessary to build good relationships with peers, parents, and
teachers (Valdés, 2001). However, effective communication is strongly influenced by cultural and linguistic differences between Latino-immigrant parents and their children. Cultural and linguistic differences can be exacerbated by the complexity of the communication process, which includes the communicators and what they intend to communicate. When parents and children do not communicate effectively, they can develop incorrect perceptions of what matters to each other. For example, McLaughlin et al. (2002) found that parents believed that only approximately 17% of children were participating in after-school activities, clubs, tutoring, sports or other activities. However, the student survey results showed that two to three times as many students had participated in after-school programs. Cultural and linguistic differences become noticeable as immigrant children begin to adapt to the new culture while their parents do not keep up the pace in cultural or linguistic change.

In summary, the academic expectations of parents and their children can be distorted by differences in cultural expectations and can be exacerbated by a lack of communication about school-related activities from students to parents. Even though miscommunication also happens with native-born students, the consequences are more severe for English learners because their parents are less likely to initiate communication with the school. McLaughlin et al. (2002) recommend that educators should help parents, students and teachers to communicate effectively because miscommunication can exacerbate the risk for low achievement in school. So, despite Latino-immigrant parents’ ideas of educación, and a limited understanding of the American
education system: Do they hold educational aspirations for their children? Research on parents’ aspirations may provide an answer.

**Academic Attitudes and Aspirations of Latino-Immigrant Parents**

Research in the area of academic achievement shows that children of parents who value education do better in school, and parental academic support may be a key component of students’ success in school (Reese et al., 1995). Successful students seem to have parents who support their literary and intellectual development. Parental support has also been found to be a significant predictor of academic success (Stewart, 1995). It might be expected that, because Latino-immigrant parents emphasize educación and not education, Latino-immigrant parents don’t have educational aspirations for their children. However, the research shows this is not the case.

For example, Ceja (2004) found that the encouragement offered by parents influenced some Chicana students to pursue a college education. For some students, the kind of support they receive may be different from that offered by White middle-class parents. The evidence indicates that Latino parents understand that an education is extremely important for their children’s success in the United States (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004).

Although Latino-immigrant families do not include formal education in their definition of educación, research suggests that educators should not view this definition as devoid of or lacking educational values (Valdés, 1996; Villenas, 2002). Latino-immigrant parents manage to instill educational values in their children through
alternative means—using *consejos* (advice) and stories—to explain the value of *education* (Valdés, 1996). In many cases, instead of talking directly about college, parents encourage their children to do well in school and to get good grades. Others have talked about their own experiences in the context of lacking a formal education and its effect on their work and educational experiences (Ceja, 2004).

The values emphasized by Latino parents closely represent those seen in agrarian societies. An agrarian society was defined by LeVine and White (1986) as having evolved moral codes favoring filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity, gender-specific ideals of social and spiritual values rather than specialized intellectual ones, concepts of childhood learning that emphasize the acquisition of manners and work skills without competitive evaluations, and concepts of the adult years as the prime period for significant cognitive development. (p. 3)

Reese et al. (1995) point out that an agrarian model is not exclusive to people from rural economies, but it is rather a popular cultural model for many Latin American populations. Even Latino-immigrants who come from more industrialized backgrounds have a difficult time adapting to more “traditional” U.S. values, including those relevant to education. LeVine and White (1986) have argued that an “agrarian model” of human development may have a negative impact on school performance because parents only focus on social and spiritual values rather than on intellect. Although the agrarian model emphasizes moral values and work skills, some Latino-immigrant parents also emphasize a formal education as a means for upward mobility. They hold
high educational aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievement (Ceja, 2004).

Reese et al. (1995) studied a cohort of 121 Spanish-speaking Latino families of kindergarten students from the Los Angeles area to better understand what educación values about education and learning immigrant Latino parents endorsed, and in what ways parents’ beliefs and actions were related to student academic performance. To prevent confusion with educación, the study used words such as preparación formal and estudios (formal schooling, schooling) when discussing education in the American context. Results showed that for Latino-immigrant families, a moral educación is the foundation for a successful academic education. In one case, the participant father expressed that if would be futile to educate a child at a university if the child did not possess the value of hard work to apply himself in his field. This is not to say that they did not have high educational aspirations for their children. When asked directly about the level of schooling they desired for their children, 44% of them said that they would like their children to finish college or university work. These educational aspirations were a part of a whole concept that included education and educación.

Although the parents did have high educational aspirations, they did not explicitly promote academic activities such as reading and homework for academic development. Rather, parents used the actions of stories’ characters to teach moral values, and homework was seen as an activity that helped children to stay in the home and out of trouble. Nevertheless, a positive correlation was observed between first grade literacy environment and first grade reading achievement, as measured
by standardized normed tests ($r = .42; p < .05$). A fusion of agrarian and academic models was seen in this study, as most parents did not separate education from *educación* (Reese et al., 1995). This fusion of values may indicate that some Latino-immigrant parents have some educational aspirations for their children, and according to Reese et al. (1995), parents are “fusing” agrarian values with academic ones as they construct new cultural patterns. Chicana students and first graders in the study performed better academically in an environment that was supportive of both concepts (Reese et al., 1995).

Latino-immigrant parents seem to have educational aspirations for their children that are “fused” into their definition of education and *educación*. Another question to ask is whether their children have educational aspirations for themselves.

**Educational Aspirations of Latino-Immigrant Students**

Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman (2006) measured the educational aspirations of 16,545 students. The sample was obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and limited to an in-home interview sample of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban adolescents. The students were given a questionnaire and asked “on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high, how much do you want to go to college?” (p.212). The data revealed that Mexican and Puerto Rican students had significantly lower educational aspirations than those of Cubans. One explanation offered by Bohon et al. was that Cubans tend to be of higher SES when compared to other Latino immigrants, and that their families are historically well educated.
On the other hand, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans reported lower SES and lower levels of college expectations than did Cubans. The researchers suggested that island-born Puerto Rican and Mexican immigrants are less likely to expect to go to college because they may not be certain of their stay in the U.S., thus affecting their educational aspirations. In addition, parental educational aspirations were measured by asking the students questions about the level of education they thought their parents would like them to achieve.

Interestingly, the data revealed that Mexican and Puerto Rican students with parents who did not complete high school had lower college aspirations. Nonetheless, the Mexican and Puerto Rican students felt that their parents would expect them to obtain a college education (Bohon et al., 2006). It is worth noting that the interviews were conducted in English only, which could have excluded newly arrived immigrants and less acculturated students and families (Bohon et al., 2006). Additionally, parental college aspirations were measured by asking the students—and not the parents—directly. They found that students who believed that their parents had high educational aspirations for them also had high educational aspirations for themselves.

There are very few studies that have examined the relationship between Latino children and their parents’ educational aspirations, and some have found discrepancies due to miscommunication between the less acculturated parents and their children. In addition, miscommunication may lead Latino parents to misinterpret their children’s educational aspirations. Behnke et al. (2004) found that Latino
parents’ own educational and occupational aspirations influence their children’s educational aspirations. The researchers interviewed 10 rural-Latino families and their children. The interviews were coded and the relationships between the parents’ own educational aspirations were compared to that of their children’s educational aspirations. They found that children’s low educational aspirations matched their parents’ low educational aspirations. In addition, the parents with high-educational aspirations of their own also had children who had high educational aspirations for themselves (Behnke et al., 2004). Children who are academically successful tend to have parents who are supportive of academics and who are involved in their children’s literacy as well as their cognitive development (Stewart, 1995). Moreover, they found that only half of the parents knew about their children’s educational aspirations. The parents reported that they had challenges communicating with their children because of language or differences in acculturation (Behnke et al., 2004). The small sample size of Behnke et al. is a limitation of the study, coupled with the lack of information regarding the views of the children on their parents’ educational aspirations for them. However, it is clear that half of the parents did not know their children’s educational aspirations.

In addition, Plunkett and Bácame-Gómez (2003) found that children who perceive their parents as helpful and supportive of their education have higher educational aspirations. The researchers surveyed 1,200 high-school students from three different schools in the Los Angeles area but only used data from 273 students whose parents were born in Mexico. The purpose of the study was to find the relationship
between gender, acculturation, parenting, and adolescents’ academic outcomes and educational aspirations. Plunkett and Bácama-Gómez (2003) used a one-item scale to measure the students’ educational aspirations. The question asked students to “select the highest number of education they desired” (pg. 27). Responses ranged from 5 = “some high school” to 11 = “graduate degree.” The responses sampled ranged from 5 to 11 (\(M = 9.2; \ SD = 1.8\)).

Using a multiple regression analysis, they found that academic attitudes (e.g., completion of homework, liking school) were positively correlated to the students’ perceptions of their parents’ help with academics and to the students’ academic attitudes (Plunkett & Bácama-Gómez, 2003). Parental academic encouragement (Ream & Rumberger, 2008) and parental attitudes toward academics (Fuligni 2007; Reese et al., 1995) are promising predictors of higher educational aspirations in Latino students. Even though a relationship was found between children’s perceptions of academic support and children’s academic attitudes, parental influences on children’s academics need to include parental and children’s comparisons of each other’s views to study the accuracy with which students perceive their parents (Plunkett & Bácama-Gómez, 2003).

**Conclusion**

In summary, the evidence suggests that Latino children face many challenges to succeed in the American education system (McLaughlin et. al., 2002), especially a lack of communication with their parents due to cultural differences between *education* and *educación* and to linguistic
differences due to acculturation of the child vs. acculturation of the parent (Reese et al., 1995; Valdés, 2001). Even though research on Latino-immigrant parents has shown that education is valued by this group, and that some have high educational aspirations for their children, the evidence suggests that a miscommunication or a different definition of education between the two groups may influence children’s perceptions of their parents’ educational aspirations for them. Students’ perceptions of their parents’ educational aspirations for them (Fuligni, 1997) may further influence the students’ academic attitudes. These attitudes play a significant role in school success for immigrant students.

Furthermore, Latino-immigrant parental educational aspirations have been measured directly from their children’s point of view, but not from the parents’ perspective. A comparison of Latino-immigrant parents’ educational aspirations for their children against their children’s perceived parental educational aspirations is warranted to measure accuracy of children’s perceptions. The evidence suggests that parents do not always perceive their children accurately (McLaughlin et al., 2002). Could it be possible that children do not perceive their parents’ educational aspirations for them accurately?

**Research Hypotheses**

It was hypothesized that mothers would not accurately perceive their children’s educational aspirations and that their children would not accurately perceive their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. Additionally, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between perceived maternal educational aspirations and
students’ own educational aspirations. Finally, a positive correlation between maternal levels of education and children’s educational aspirations was hypothesized.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study utilized a convenience sample of mothers who were born in a Latin-American country and their children currently living in the Central Valley of California. Only students whose parents were both born in Latin America were examined.

Latino-immigrant students who were in seventh and eighth grade and their Latino-immigrant mothers were eligible to participate in this study. Several Migrant Education Program coordinators were contacted via email throughout the Central Valley of California, including those from Kern County, Santa Clara County, San Jose County, Fresno County, and Merced County Office of Education in an attempt to find potential participants. With the exception of the Merced County Office of Education, no program responded to the request.

The researcher met with the director of the Merced County Office of Education Migrant Program, and obtained a list of 90 migrant families’ phone numbers, which included potential participants from Merced, Madera, and Modesto in California. The potential participants all had children in the seventh and eighth grades.

A research assistant called the home of potential participants at different hours of the day to maximize the probability that both the mothers and their children would be home. In addition, the research assistant contacted the homes with no answer the first time of contact. Of the 90 potential participants, 35 mothers and their children responded to the surveys. Of the 35 participant pairs of mothers and
their children, two pairs did not meet the inclusion criteria (both had fathers who had been born in the United States). The Merced County Office of Education Migrant Program was contacted a second time in an attempt to obtain more participants, but no response was received.

**Instruments**

Demographic data were collected from the mothers about the language spoken at home, grade of the student, and highest maternal education level (Appendix A). The demographics scale was also translated into Spanish (Appendix B).

Modified scales previously used in a similar study (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003) were obtained. The authors were contacted via email to request access to the surveys used and those were translated into Spanish for use in this study (Appendices C, D and E, F). The scales were translated from English to Spanish by the bilingual researcher and then edited by another bilingual individual.

Table 1 displays the modified scale that was used to measure the mothers’ educational aspirations for their children. The questions were as follows: Question 1 (P1) “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” Question 2 (P2) “As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?” and Question 3 (P3) “How much education does your child want to get?” Mothers were asked to select the highest level of education they desired for their children.

Students’ educational aspirations were measured using the modified scale from Plunkett and Bácama-Gomez (2003) by asking the students a single-item question (S1) about how much education they
Table 1

Mothers’ Educational Aspirations Scale Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Questions on Mothers’ Educational Aspirations Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>“As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>“How much education does your child want to get?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

wanted to obtain (see Table 2). Question S1 was “What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?” Students’ perceived maternal educational aspirations were measured by using a modified question (S2) of the students’ educational aspirations scale (see Table 2) (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003). Question S2 was “How much education does your mother want you to get?” Their responses were then categorized by using the responses in the scale.

The mothers’ and students’ response choices ranged from no education = 0 to graduate degree such as M.D., M.A., Ph.D., J.D., etc. (see Table 3). The meanings of the levels of education were not explained to the students, unless they were confused about the questions. The original scale was found to have high internal consistency reliabilities and evidence of construct validity had been provided through tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and predictive validity (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003).
Table 2

*Students’ Educational Aspirations Scale Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Questions on Students’ Educational Aspirations Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>“What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>“How much education does your mother want you to get?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Response Categories for Students and Mothers’ Educational Aspirations Scales.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Response Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>“No education”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Some elementary school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Completed elementary school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Some middle or junior high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Complete middle or junior high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Some high school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Complete high school or GED”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Complete high school and also had other training, but not college (e.g., technical training, business school)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Some college”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Complete a college degree”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Some graduate work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Graduate degree, including M.D., M.A., Ph.D., J.D., etc.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

The study utilized a non-experimental, cross-sectional group design. The relationship between mothers’ educational aspirations for their children and students’ educational aspirations for themselves was also investigated. The relationship between students’ educational aspirations and their perception of maternal educational aspirations for themselves was investigated.

This was a high-risk study because students were under 18 years of age. Mothers’ consent was collected via telephone for permission to participate in the study. They also provided permission to have their students participate. Students were also asked to provide assent to participate. All mothers and students were notified that their participation was voluntary. All mothers spoke Spanish while approximately half of their children spoke English and the rest spoke Spanish.

Procedures

The research assistant called the students’ homes to introduce the purpose of the study by using a scripted letter to maintain consistency of data collection and to obtain consent from the mothers and assent from the students (Appendices G and H). The research assistant was bilingual (English and Spanish) and spoke to all the mothers in Spanish, which was their language of preference. The mothers were asked for verbal consent to participate and for their children in grades seventh or eighth to participate. The research assistant notified the mothers that participation was voluntary and that they could end participation at any
point during the interview. When mothers declined to participate, they were thanked for their time and the interview ended.

Once the mothers had agreed to participate, they were asked to make sure the student was not in the same room with them. The research assistant then asked the mothers the questions in the Demographics Questionnaire (Appendices A and B).

After the demographic answers were collected, the research assistant explained to the mothers the differences between education and educación so that they would understand which construct the scale was measuring. The word estudios (formal studies) was used to avoid confusion. Then, the mothers were given an opportunity to ask questions about the distinction before the Maternal Educational Aspirations Scale was administered (Appendices C and D) (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003). Some of the mothers did not understand the questions and asked for further clarification on the meaning of “formal studies.” Some of the mothers answered that they did not know their children’s educational aspirations. The research assistant had been trained to probe the mothers by asking them further questions about what their children wanted to study when they became adults. Some of the mothers said that they truly did not know what educational aspirations their children had. An answer of “Don’t Know” was accepted only after this procedure. Lastly, the mothers were asked if they had any questions. None of the mothers had further questions about the study and they were asked to put their children on the phone. The children were again asked to be in a separate room from the mothers while answering the questions.
The research assistant introduced herself to the students and read the script on the assent form to explain the purpose of the study to the students (Appendices G and H). The students were also notified that their participation was voluntary and that they could end the interview at any time. The students were then asked for verbal assent. None of the children who were asked to participate after their mother had participated refused to give assent.

Immediately after assent was obtained, the students were asked the questions on the Student Educational Aspirations Scale (Appendices E and F) (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003). When the students answered the questions, the research assistant coded them according to the answers in the scale. Some students did not understand what the questions meant, and the research assistant introduced the scale levels to the students for clarification. Some students stated that they did not know what level of education they planned on completing or what educational aspirations their mothers had for them. The research assistant probed further, and only accepted a “Don’t Know” answer when the students insisted that they did not know. At the end of the interview, the research assistant thanked the students for their participation in the study and she answered any questions the students had.

Once mothers and students had completed their surveys, the data were analyzed to include only the households that met the inclusion criteria. Each student and each mother who participated was entered to win a $50 gift card. At the end of the study two mother and two student gift cards were raffled. Each raffle winner was notified of his or her prize.
via telephone, at which time, their address was collected to send the gift cards via mail.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demographics Information
Of the 35 participant pairs of mothers and their children, two pairs did not meet the criteria to be included in the study (both had fathers who had been born in the United States). The demographic data for the remaining participant pairs of mothers and their children were relatively homogeneous. All 33 participant mothers were born in Mexico. Of those 33 participant mothers, 32 of them were the biological mothers of the student and one was a stepmother. All the mother participants spoke Spanish in the home to their children. Twenty-one of the children spoke Spanish in the home and 12 spoke English. The data showed that 16 children were in the seventh grade and the remaining 17 were in eighth grade. Data on the gender of the children were not gathered. However, it is estimated from the informal information from the research assistant, that approximately half of the children were female and the other half were male.

Descriptive Statistics
For ease of exposition, the three interview questions listed in Table 1 will be referred to as P1, P2, and P3. The two interview questions listed in Table 2 will be referred to as S1 and S2.

Figure 1 shows the frequency histogram for the answers given by mothers to question P1 (“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”). As shown in Figure 1, most respondents (N = 15) indicated that their highest level of education was completing elementary school. The figure also indicates another mode at answer 4 (“Completed middle
or junior high school”). Further analysis of the data revealed that two mothers indicated that they “completed high school and also other training, but not college,” and one mother “completed a college degree.” The mean answer for P1 was 3.09 ($SD = 1.91$), a little higher than “some middle or junior high school.”

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Frequency histogram of response to question P1 (“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”).

*Note: See Appendices C and D for the text of the answers to which these categories refer.*

Figure 2 shows the frequency histogram for the answers given by mothers to question P2 (“As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?”). As shown in Figure 2, most respondents ($N = 22$) indicated that they would like their children to obtain a “graduate degree.” Figure 2 also indicates another mode at answer 9 (“Complete a college degree”). The mean answer for P2 was 10.36 ($SD = .929$). Interestingly, all mothers wanted their child to complete a college degree or higher.
Figure 2. Frequency histogram of response to question P2 (“As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?”).  
Note: See Appendices C and D for the text of the answers to which these categories refer.

When asked how much education mother participants thought that their children wanted to get, their answers ranged from “complete high school or GED” to “graduate degree, including M.D., M.A., Ph.D., etc.” Figure 3 shows the frequency histogram for the answers given by mothers to question P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”). As shown in Figure 3, most respondents (N = 15) indicated that they believed that their children wanted to “complete a college degree.” Figure 3 also indicates that some mothers (N = 4) believed their children wanted to complete some graduate work. Some mothers (N = 6) believed their children wanted to obtain a graduate degree. Others (N = 4) answered that they didn’t know. The mean answer for P3 was 9.28 (SD = 1.28), just above “complete a college degree.”
Figure 3. Frequency histogram of response to question P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”).

Note: See Appendices C and D for the text of the answers to which these categories refer.

Figure 4 shows the frequency histogram for the answers given by students to question S1 (“Select the highest level of education that you plan on completing”). As shown in Figure 4, most respondents (N = 18) indicated that they planned on completing a college degree. Figure 4 also indicates that some students (N = 5) planned on completing a graduate degree. Some students (N = 2) did not know the highest level of education that they planned on completing. The mean answer for S1 was 9.13 (SD = 1.20), just above “complete a college degree.”

Students were asked to guess how much education their mothers wanted them to get, and most respondents answered “at or above completing high school or GED.” Figure 5 shows the frequency histogram for the answers given by students to question S2 (“How much education does your mother want you to get?”). As shown in Figure 5, most respondents (N = 19) believed that their mothers wanted them to
complete a college degree. Others (N = 6) thought that their mothers wanted them to complete a “graduate degree,” while a few participants N = 4 said that they did not know. The mean answer for S2 was 9.41 (SD = .91), between “compete some college” and “some graduate work.”

**Figure 4.** Frequency histogram of response to question S1 (“What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?”).  
Note: See Appendices E and F for the text of the answers to which these categories refer.

**Figure 5.** Frequency histogram of response to question S2 (“How much education does your mother want you to get?”).  
Note: See Appendices E and F for the text of the answers to which these categories refer.
Inferential Statistics

Because the response scale was ordinal, pairwise Spearman’s rho correlations were calculated for the five interview questions (P1, P2, P3, S1, and S2). Table 4 shows the pairwise inter-correlations between the survey items.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.37*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant with \( p < .05 \)

** Significant with \( p < .01 \)

The analysis revealed a significant relationship between P3 and S1, \( \rho (26) = .60, p = .002 \). Figure 6 shows a scatterplot of the relationship between P3 and S1. As shown in Figure 6, there was a significant positive relationship between how much education the mothers thought their children wanted to obtain and the highest education level their children planned on obtaining.

In order to investigate this relationship further, difference scores between P3 and S1 were calculated.\(^1\) Figure 7 shows the frequency histogram for the difference scores between P3 and S1. As shown in Figure 7, the mode difference score (\( N = 17 \)) between P3 and S1 was zero.

\(^1\) Difference scores were also calculated for all significant correlations between survey items.
Figure 6. Correlation between P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”) and S1 (“What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?”).

Note: Data points of at least 1 “Don’t Know” are excluded from the figure.

Figure 7. Frequency histogram of difference scores between P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”) and S1 (“What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?”)
This indicates that, for most respondents, there was no difference between how much education the mother participants wanted their child to obtain and the highest level of education their child planned on completing.

A significant relationship was also found between P3 and P2, $\rho (27) = .37, p = .047$. Figure 8 shows a scatterplot of the correlation between P3 and P2. As shown in Figure 8, there was a significant positive relationship between how much education mothers wanted their child to obtain and how much education they believed their children wanted to obtain.

Figure 8. Correlation between P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”) and P2 (“As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?”).

Note: Data points of at least 1 “Don’t Know” are excluded from the figure.

Figure 9 shows the frequency histogram for the difference scores between P3 and P2. As shown in Figure 9, the mode difference score ($N = 13$) between P3 and P2 was zero ($M = -1.03, SD = 1.32$). This indicates that most respondents had no difference between how much education they wanted their child to obtain and how much education they thought
their child wanted to obtain. Although most respondents had a difference score of zero, some respondents (N = 4) had a difference score of one and some (N = 8) had a difference score of two. It should be noted that most of these differences scores were negative. This indicates that mothers wanted their children to get higher educations than they thought their children wanted to get.

![Difference Scores for Response Categories for P3-P2](image)

Figure 9. Frequency histogram of difference scores between P3 (“How much education does your child want to get?”) and P2 (“As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?”).

A significant relationship was found between S2 and S1, $\rho (27) = .61, p < .0005$. Figure 10 shows a scatterplot of the correlation between S2 and S1. As shown in Figure 10, there was a significant positive relationship between the highest level of education the students thought their mothers wanted them to obtain and the highest level of education they planned on completing.
Figure 10. Correlation between S2 ("How much education does your mother want you to get?") and S1 ("What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?").

Note: Data points of at least 1 “Don’t Know” are excluded from the figure.

Figure 11 shows the frequency histogram for the difference scores between S2 and S1. As shown in Figure 11, the mode difference score (N = 19) between S2 and S1 was zero. This indicates that most respondents had no difference between how much education they believed their mother wanted them to obtain and the highest level of education they planned on completing. No other pairwise relationships between survey items showed significant correlations.

Figure 12 summarizes the significant inter-correlations between the survey items. Importantly, there was no statistically significant relationship between P2 ("As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get?") and S2 ("How much education does your mother want you to get?"), \( \rho (27) = .26, p = .17 \), indicating that the children did not know what level of education their mothers wanted them to achieve.
Figure 11. Frequency histogram of difference scores between S2 ("How much education does your mother want you to get?") and S1 ("What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?").

Figure 12. Inter-correlations between survey items. Asterisks indicate statistically significant Spearman Rho (p < .05)
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Immigrant families face many challenges due to immigration (Gallo, Penedo, de los Monteros & Arguelles, 2009). Many Latino students have been successful at attaining a high school diploma; however, a large number drop out of high school (CDOE, 2013). Furthermore, Mexican-origin students have lower grades and educational aspirations than non-Latino Whites (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Previous research has demonstrated that the educational aspirations of immigrant parents are an influential factor in immigrant students’ success in education (Fuligni, 1997). Some studies have found that children and parents do not always perceive each other effectively due to miscommunication between less acculturated parents and their more acculturated children. Evidence suggests that parents do not always perceive their children accurately (McLaughlin et al., 2002).

Based on this literature, it was predicted that Latino-immigrant mothers would not accurately perceive their children’s educational aspirations, and that their children would not accurately perceive their mothers’ aspirations for them. It was also predicted that parental educational aspirations of the Latino-immigrant mothers for their children would positively correlate with their children’s educational aspirations for themselves. These hypotheses were investigated by administering a scripted phone interview in Spanish to 33 families. The maternal and children’s educational aspirations scales were modified from a scale previously used in a similar study (Plunkett & Bácama-Gomez, 2003).
It was found that participant mothers accurately perceived their children’s educational aspirations. Such a finding is inconsistent with the findings of McLaughlin et al. (2002) who found that most parents did not perceive their children’s thoughts or feelings about school accurately. Children in the present study appear to have been effectively communicating their academic aspirations with their mothers. One explanation for this discrepancy may be that the majority of the children spoke Spanish in the home, which might minimize risks of miscommunication related to linguistic differences. Previous research has found that linguistic differences may exacerbate miscommunication between immigrant children and their parents when the more acculturated children begin to adapt to a new culture and their parents do not keep up with the linguistic change (McLaughlin et al., 2002; Romo, 1996; Valdés 1996). Another potential explanation may be the type of information shared between the children and their mothers. McLaughlin et al. (2002) found that children did not communicate their feelings about their social interactions and positive relationships with their teachers to their parents. However, it is possible that immigrant children in the present study did communicate their educational aspirations to their parents, while failing to effectively communicate other aspects of their educational experience. Lastly, it is also possible that the results of the current study differ because the sample of participants might be different or have different countries of origin.

Conversely, the lack of a correlation between P2 and S2 suggests that children did not accurately perceive their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. This is consistent with the second hypothesis,
which stated that children would not accurately perceive their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. This prediction was made based on a number of empirical findings. For example, Ceja (2004) found that Latino-immigrant parents encouraged their children to do well in school and to get good grades instead of talking directly about college. Parents were found to do this by talking about their own experiences having lacked a formal education and the effect this had on their work and educational experiences. Because a similar pattern was found in the present study, it may be that mothers did not talk to their children about a specific level of education, but instead, may have emphasized an overall idea of “doing well” in school. Valdés (1996) suggests that immigrant families bring a culturally specific definition of education and of success, which greatly emphasizes a good moral education. The mothers in the present study may have been emphasizing educational aspirations as a whole concept that includes both education and educación (Reese et al., 1995).

Valdés (1996) also suggests that Latino-immigrant parents have little understanding of the American education system and its view of success. Informal observations by the research assistant indicated that the mothers in the present study did not always understand how to directly respond when asked how much education they wanted their children to obtain. This may suggest a lack of understanding of the ordinal American education system where academic success is attained by achieving higher levels of education as opposed to the more general ideas of “doing well in school” and “getting good grades.”
Taken together, the present results show that the first and second hypotheses were only partially confirmed. These were based on the assumption that linguistic differences and a great parental emphasis of \textit{educación} might influence effective communication of educational aspirations between the mothers and their children. Mothers were found to have perceived their children’s educational aspirations accurately. However, children did not accurately perceive their mothers’ educational aspirations for them.

Results of this study also found a significant positive relationship between the children’s educational aspirations and their perception of their mothers’ educational aspirations for them. The difference score of zero between S2 and S1 showed that most children in the study aspired to complete the same level of education that they thought their mother wanted them to obtain. More specifically, the majority of the children thought that their mothers wanted them to obtain a college degree, and in turn, they also aspired to complete a college degree. Fuligni (1997) showed that students’ perceptions of their parents’ educational aspirations for them could influence their own academic attitudes, which include educational aspirations. Although Fuligni (1997) did not have parents participate in the study, he found that the child’s perception of parental educational aspirations alone influenced the outcome of the level of education the children wanted to obtain. One of the factors previously identified for success in education is having high educational aspirations (Fuligni, 1997). The children in this study seemed to be influenced by what they thought their mothers would like for them to achieve academically. Although the mothers had not effectively
communicated the specific level of educational aspirations for their children as discussed above, they may have effectively communicated that formal schooling is important. This finding is supported by Villenas (2002), who found that Latino-immigrant parents value formal education; even though some did not see themselves in the role of being an “academic” educator at home. A parent interviewed in Villenas (2002) stated that he had fulfilled his role as a parent by teaching his children to respect and by having immigrated to the U.S. to obtain a formal education. Those results are consistent with the supposition that the mothers in the present study may not have seen themselves in the role of academic educators and thus may not have emphasized their specific ordinal educational aspirations for their children. But, they were probably effectively communicating that education beyond a high school degree is important for success in the U.S.

**Study Limitations**

The validity of the results for the maternal educational aspirations scale may be questionable due to the method of administration of the scale questions. Several informal observations were made by the research assistant who made the interviews. For example, most of the mother participants did not understand what they were supposed to answer when the research assistant asked what level of education they wanted their child to complete. The mothers asked to be given examples of the levels of education that they had to choose from on the scale. Some of the examples given to the mothers included: “like becoming a teacher, or a technician, what would you like them to be in the
professional world?” Once the levels of education were given to them, they provided the answers used in the data analysis. As mentioned earlier, the responses provided might be a reflection of the mothers’ lack of understanding of the American education system. This may have affected the results for the mothers’ educational aspirations for their children.

The current study is further limited by the fact that the participant group was fairly homogeneous in language spoken, country of origin, students’ grade level, education level and gender of the mothers. This lack of variability may have resulted in no significant correlation between parental levels of education and children’s educational aspirations. However, it is important to mention that most of the mothers who had a low level of education responded (on question P2) that they wanted their children to obtain a higher level of education than they did. This is interesting because Fuligni (1997) suggests that, although parental educational level might be one factor that predicts student academic success, parental educational aspirations for their children plays an important role in students’ academic success. It is important to mention that seventh and eighth grade students may also be “naïve” reporters, and their educational aspirations may change as they become more aware of the future during their high school experience. Furthermore, no data were collected on the gender of the students. It could be that gender of students may have been a factor on the level of responses provided. Traditionally, females may have different expectations or responsibilities in a household than males do. This could have influenced the responses obtained.
Another limitation of the current study was the format of the interview. The researcher had to obtain informed consent and assent over the phone, which required a lengthy script explaining what the study entailed and whether or not the parent and their child would be willing to participate. The lengthy study interview-format may have contributed to many of the participants hanging up on the research assistant. The loss of willing participants may have impacted the results of the study in that the sample was limited and not representative of the target population. The participants may have participated due to similar characteristics within the group (e.g., patience, willingness to help others, more time to participate if not a single parent). Also, many of the phone numbers in the database were obsolete and the researcher had no other means of contacting the family. This was due to migrant families being nomadic. During an interview with the director of the Migrant Program of Merced County Office of Education, the researcher learned that the families in the study move at least every 3 years to be able to qualify under Migrant benefits. This move can be within the same city, county and sometimes they can travel from state to state following the crops. When the families were finally reached, the mothers could only participate if their child was home and was also willing to participate in the study. This caveat reduced the number of pairs of willing and qualified participants for the study. Those variables and the small number of potential numbers from the original source limited the ability to obtain a higher number of participants.

However, there are advantages to working with a migrant population. The study participants’ homogeneity was convenient to study
a small segment of the immigrant population that is very similar in SES, education level, employment, and language. The significant findings of the study can be potentially generalized to the large migrant population in the Central Valley of California and recommendations based on the study results could be widely applicable to this subset of the immigrant population.

While the migrant population is a potentially useful sample to study, it is also true that the convenience of the sample may have contributed to sample selection bias. Latino-immigrants come to the U.S. from different backgrounds, geographic locations, and for different reasons. Their backgrounds vary not only in SES and educational level, but also in the certainty of their ability to stay in the U.S. (Bohon et al., 2006). The study’s sample homogeneity does not allow for the results of this study to be generalized to the larger non-migrant Latino-immigrant population.

**Implications**

Even though the mothers in the study did not effectively communicate their specific educational aspirations to their children, they were found to have effectively communicated that they wanted their children to complete a high level of education. Interestingly, some research in the area of educational aspirations defines “high educational aspirations” as completing high school or a college degree (Fuligni, 1997). Others have defined “high educational aspirations” as “an individuals’ desire to obtain a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education” (MacBrayne, 1987, p. 135). The children in the study
had “high” educational aspirations for themselves, if they are measured by any of the above definitions. Those aspirations were influenced by what they thought their mothers wanted them to achieve academically. It is important for this group of seventh and eighth-grade Latino-immigrant children to have high educational aspirations, as research shows that in high school some Mexican-origin students fall behind in grades and in educational aspirations (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Future longitudinal research could examine the longitudinal changes, if any, of young middle school students’ educational aspirations in high school, and the influence that their perception of their mothers’ educational aspirations have on those changes. In addition, future studies could also study fathers’ influence and compare any differences in the interrelationship due to parental gender and children’s educational aspirations.

If parental educational aspirations influence children’s educational aspirations, then it would be beneficial to reach out and encourage Latino-immigrant mothers to more effectively communicate their specific educational aspirations—graduate degrees—with their children. It is important for children to believe that their mothers have high expectations because some research has shown that children who do not have high educational aspirations may end up dropping out of high school (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). At the same time, effectively communicating higher and more specific educational aspirations, like obtaining a graduate degree, may need to be coupled with additional academic support from the school system to help this population of students reach high academic goals. Not all children will achieve a graduate degree, but having a better understanding of the American
education system may help Latino-immigrant families make more informed decisions when discussing the future with their children.

This can be done in different ways. Educational organizations, including schools and migrant programs, can engage in providing specific information to Latino-immigrant parents about the importance of having high educational aspirations for their children, and of effectively communicating those aspirations with their children. Other possible ways of reaching out to the Latino-immigrant mothers may be by adding key points in advising, and improving the outreach to the Latino-immigrant community to help explain the complex levels of the American education system.

In conclusion, the present study examined communication patterns between Latino-immigrant children and their mothers. The results suggest that communication could be improved. Future studies might address effective ways to improve communication between Latino-immigrant parents and their children in order to increase educational aspirations.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE
Demographics Questionnaire

A.) Which of the following best describes your family composition?

1. Both birth mother and birth father
2. Birth mother and stepfather
3. Birth mother and her boyfriend
4. Birth mother only
5. Birth father and stepmother
6. Birth father and his girlfriend
7. Birth father only
8. Adopted parents
9. Other ________________________________

B.) Who, if anyone, functions as the mother figure most often?
1. Birth Mother
2. Stepmother
3. Other ________________________________

C.) Who, if anyone, functions as the father figure most often?

1. Birth Father

2. Stepfather

3. Other ________________________________

D.) What language(s) do you speak at home?______________________

E.) What language(s) do your children speak at home?__________________

________________________________________

F.) In what country were you born?______________

G.) In what country was the other parent/parent figure born?______________

H.) What grade is your child in? _____________
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE (SPANISH)
Encuesta de Datos Demográficos

A.) ¿Cuál de las siguientes opciones mejor describe a su familia?

1. Con la madre biológica y el padre biológico
2. Madre biológica y padrastro
3. Madre biológica y su novio (a)
4. Madre biológica solamente
5. Padre biológico y madrastra
6. Padre biológico y su novia (o)
7. Padre biológico solamente
8. Padres adoptivos
9. Otro

B.) ¿Quién, si alguien, funciona como la figura maternal más seguido?

1. Madre biológica
2. Madrastra

3. Otra _________________________________

C.) ¿Quién, si alguien, funciona como la figura paterna más seguido?

1. Padre biológico

2. Padastro

3. Otro _________________________________

D.) ¿Qué lenguaje (s) habla usted en casa? __________________

E.) ¿Qué lenguaje (s) hablan sus hijo (s) en casa?
_____________________________

F.) ¿En qué país nació la madre o figura maternal? _________________

G.) ¿En qué país nació el padre o figura paterna?________________________

H.) ¿En qué grado está su hijo (a)? _________________
APPENDIX C: MATERNAL EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN SCALE
Maternal Educational Aspirations for Their Children Scale

Please use the numbers from the box to answer the following questions.

0. No education
1. Some elementary school
2. Completed elementary school
3. Some middle or junior high school
4. Complete middle or junior high school
5. Some high school
6. Complete high school or GED
7. Complete high school and also had other training, but not college (e.g., technical training, business school)
8. Some college
9. Complete a college degree
10. Some graduate work
11. Graduate degree, including M.D., M.A., Ph.D., J.D., etc.

P1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?_____

P2. As a mother/mother figure, how much education do you want your child to get? ________________

P3. How much education does your child want to get? ________________
APPENDIX D: MATERNAL EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN SCALE (SPANISH)
Encuesta para Madres Acerca de sus Aspiraciones Educativas para sus Hijos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nivel de Estudios</th>
<th>Descripción</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.</td>
<td>Ninguna educación formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Algo de escuela primaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Completé la escuela primaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Algo de escuela secundaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Completé o completar la escuela secundaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Algo de escuela preparatoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Completé o completar la escuela preparatoria o un curso equivalente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Completé o completar la escuela preparatoria y también entrenamiento adicional pero no universidad (e.g., entrenamiento técnico, curso de negocios a nivel técnico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Algo de universidad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Completé o completar estudios universitarios a nivel de licenciatura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Algo de estudios de posgrado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Completé o completar estudios de posgrado (e.g., doctor médico, doctor en filosofía, maestría en negocios, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P1. ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de estudios formales que usted obtuvo? 
____________

P2. ¿Como madre o figura maternal, que nivel de estudios formales desea que su hijo (a) obtenga? ________________

P3. ¿Qué nivel de estudios desea obtener su hijo (a)? ________________
Students Educational Aspirations Scale

Please use the numbers from the box to answer the following questions.

0. No education
1. Some elementary school
2. Completed elementary school
3. Some middle or junior high school
4. Complete middle or junior high school
5. Some high school
6. Complete high school or GED
7. Complete high school and also had other training, but not college (e.g., technical training, business school)
8. Some college
9. Complete a college degree
10. Some graduate work
11. Graduate degree, including M.D., M.A., Ph.D., J.D., etc.

S1. What is the highest level of education that you plan on completing?_____

S2. How much education does your mother want you to get?______
APPENDIX F: STUDENTS EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS SCALE (SPANISH)
Encuesta de Aspiraciones Educativas para Estudiantes

0. Ninguna educación formal
1. Algo de escuela primaria
2. Completar la escuela primaria
3. Algo de escuela secundaria
4. Completar la escuela secundaria
5. Algo de escuela preparatoria
6. Completar la escuela preparatoria o un curso equivalente
7. Completar la escuela preparatoria y también entrenamiento adicional pero no universidad (e.g., entrenamiento técnico, curso de negocios a nivel técnico)
8. Algo de universidad
9. Completar estudios universitarios a nivel de licenciatura
10. Algo de estudios de posgrado
11. Completar estudios de posgrado (e.g., doctor médico, doctor en filosofía, maestría en negocios, etc.)

S1. ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de estudios formales que tú planeas obtener? ______

S2. ¿Cuánta educación formal quiere tu mamá que tú completes?_______
APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT AND ASSENT SCRIPT
Consent to Participate in Research Study

Good evening. I am calling to invite you to participate in a study conducted by Krushenka Salazar, a School Psychology student and Lorin Lachs, a professor of Psychology at California State University in Fresno in conjunction with the Migrant Education Program at Merced County Office of Education. In this study we hope to learn about Latino mothers’ educational aspirations for their children in grades 7th through 8th. We would also like to learn about children’s educational aspirations for themselves. This study has been approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Constance Jones, Psychology Department Chair, at (559) 278-6648.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer two questionnaires. The questionnaires should not take longer than 15 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may end the interview at any time during our conversation. We ask that you go to a different room so your children cannot hear your answers. If you decide to participate, you will also be asked to allow your child/children grades 7th through 8th to participate. Your child/children will answer one questionnaire and we ask that you be in a different room when the child answers the questions. We do not guarantee that you will benefit from this study. If you decide to participate and to allow your children’s participation, each of your names will be entered into a raffle for the chance to win one of four $50 gift cards. At the end of the study 4 names will be chosen at random and the cards will be sent in the mail to the winners.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. This information will be compiled for use in a graduate thesis.

Do you agree to participate and to let your child participate?

Parent ______ Yes _____ No

Parent permission for child to participate ______ Yes _____ No

We will start with asking you about some family questions (See Appendices A or E)

The following questions are in regards to education. As you know, for Latino parents education translates into educación. Parents expect their children to be well behaved and respectful as well as morally upright. However, the word education, in the United States, means formal studies as in going to school or to a university. For the purpose of this study, we will ask you some questions about education and will refer to it as estudios. Please answer the questions in the context of estudios. Do you have any questions?

Ask questions on the Parental Educational Aspirations Scale (See Appendices B or F)

This concludes the parents’ questionnaires. Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time. Can I please speak to your son/daughter in a different room?

Good evening. I am calling to invite you to participate in a study conducted by Krushenka Salazar, a School Psychology student and Lorin Lachs, a professor of Psychology at Fresno State University. In this study we hope to learn about Latino mothers’ educational aspirations for their children in grades 7th through 8th. We would
also like to learn about children’s educational aspirations for themselves. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer one questionnaire. The questionnaire should not take longer than 5 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may end the interview at any time during our conversation.

If you decide to participate, your name will be entered into a raffle for the chance to win one of four $50 gift cards. At the end of the study 4 names will be chosen at random and the cards will be sent in the mail to the winners. Do you agree to participate?

**Student’s Assent**

_____ Yes  _____ No

*Ask questions on the Student’s Educational Aspirations Scale (See Appendices C or G)*

This concludes the student’s questionnaire. Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time.

**Date**

______________________________

**Signature of Researcher**
APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT AND ASSENT SCRIPT (SPANISH)
Consentimiento para Participar en un Estudio de Investigación

Buenas tardes. Le estoy llamando para invitarla a que participe en un estudio conducido por Krushenka Salazar, estudiante de psicología educativa, y de Lorin Lachs, profesor de psicología de la Universidad Estatal de California en Fresno, junto con el Programa Migrante de la Oficina del Condado Educativo de Merced. En este estudio nos gustaría aprender más acerca de las aspiraciones educativas que tienen las madres Latinas para sus hijos en los grados del séptimo al octavo grado. También quisiéramos aprender acerca de las aspiraciones educativas que los estudiantes tienen para sí mismos. Este estudio ha sido aprobado por el Comité para la Protección de los Sujetos Humanos. Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de este estudio, por favor contacte a Constance Jones, Directora del Departamento de Psicología, al (559) 278-6648.

Si usted decide participar, le pediremos que conteste dos cuestionarios. Los cuestionarios no deben de tomar más de 15 minutos. Su participación es voluntaria y usted puede terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento durante nuestra conversación. Le pedimos que vaya a una habitación diferente para que sus hijos (as) no puedan escuchar sus respuestas. Si decide participar, también se le pedirá que le permita participar a sus hijos (as) que estén en el grado séptimo u octavo. Sus hijos contestarán un cuestionario y le pediremos que usted esté en una habitación diferente cuando sus hijos respondan las preguntas. No le garantizamos que usted obtendrá algún beneficio de este estudio. Si desea participar o si le permite a sus hijos participar, cada uno de sus nombres serán incluidos en una rifa para la oportunidad de ganar una de cuatro tarjetas de regalo con el valor de $50 dólares. Al final del estudio, 4 nombres serán escogidos al azar y las tarjetas serán mandadas al correo a los ganadores.

Cualquier información que sea obtenida en conexión con este estudio y que pueda identificar a usted o a sus hijos (as) será mantenida confidencialmente y será divulgada solamente con su permiso o como sea requerido por la ley. Esta información será recaudada para usarla en una tesis de posgrado.

¿Consiente usted a participar y a dejar que sus hijo (a) participe?

Madre ___________ Si ___________ No

Permiso de la madre para la participación de sus hijo (a) _________ Si ________ No

Voy a empezar haciéndole algunas preguntas familiares (Ver Apéndices A o E)

Las siguientes preguntas están relacionadas con la educación. Como usted sabe, para los padres Latinos la palabra educación significa que los padres esperan que sus hijos sean respetuosos y que se comporten en una manera respetuosa. Pero en los Estados Unidos, la palabra educación significa estudios formales como el ir a la escuela o a la universidad. Para el propósito de este estudio, le voy a hacer algunas preguntas acerca de la educación y me voy a referir a ella como estudios. Por favor responda las preguntas en el contexto de estudios. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta?

Hacer preguntas en la Encuesta para Madres Acerca de sus Aspiraciones Académicas para sus Hijos (Ver Apéndice B o F)

Esto concluye el cuestionario de la madre. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta?

Gracias por su tiempo. ¿Puedo hablar con su hijo (a) en un cuarto diferente?

Buenas tardes, estoy llamando para invitarte a un estudio de investigación conducido por Krushenka Salazar, estudiante de psicología educativa y de Lorin Lachs, profesor de psicología de la Universidad Estatal de California en Fresno.
estudio nos gustaría aprender más acerca de las aspiraciones educativas que tienen las madres Latinas para sus hijos en los grados del séptimo al octavo. También quisiéramos aprender acerca de las aspiraciones educativas que los estudiantes tienen para sí mismos. Si decides participar, te vamos a pedir que respondas un cuestionario. El cuestionario no se llevará más de 5 minutos. Tu participación es voluntaria y tu puedes terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento durante nuestra conversación.

Si deseas participar tu nombre será incluido en una rifa para la oportunidad de ganar una de cuatro tarjetas de regalo con el valor de $50 dólares. Al final del estudio, 4 nombres serán escogidos al azar y las tarjetas serán mandadas en el correo a los ganadores.

¿Consientes participar?

Consentimiento del Estudiante  __________  Si  ________ No

Hacer las preguntas en la Encuesta de Aspiraciones Académicas para Estudiantes (Apéndices C o G)

Esto concluye el cuestionario de los estudiantes. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta?

Gracias por tu tiempo.

Fecha  
Firma del Investigador

_____________________________________________________________________


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Krushenka Salazar

Type full name as it appears on submission

April 15, 2015

Date