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The Factors That Promote Parental Involvement in Foster Parents of Children in Special
Education and Their Experiences: A Mixed-Methods Study Proposal

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education

by

Kevin S. Han

June 2024

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Factors That Promote Parental Involvement in Foster Parents of Children in Special
Education and Their Experiences: A Mixed-Methods Study Proposal

by

Kevin S. Han

Master of Arts, Education
University of California, Riverside, June 2024
Dr. Eui Kyung Kim, Chairperson

Foster youth are one of the most vulnerable populations in schools today when it comes to education. While previous studies have primarily focused on the foster youth population, far fewer studies have studied the foster parent population. Foster parents can be a source of stability for foster youth, who are at-risk of constant disruptive placements. Currently, there is a growing need to support foster parents with national declining rates of foster parent retention. One way to support foster parents is through parental involvement, which has been associated with higher academic achievement, social-emotional wellbeing, and positive mental health for students. Additionally, parental involvement can also help alleviate foster parent stress by providing social support and strengthening school-family partnerships. This study will utilize a sequential mixed-methods research design to explore what factors promote parental involvement for this population and the specific strategies schools can employ to address this need.

Keywords: Foster Youth, Foster Parent, Parental Involvement, Special Education, Mixed-Methods

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Introduction

On any given day, there are 400,000 youth in foster care nationwide (AFCARS Report, 2021). These children are often placed in foster care and separated from their primary caregivers due to issues of neglect and abuse (Takayama et al., 1998; Tyler & Melander, 2010). In addition to the traumatic experience in their homes, youth in foster care are among the most vulnerable populations in educational settings. Some adverse educational outcomes for foster youth include lower rates of self-reported academic achievement scores (Benbenishty et al., 2018), prereading deficits starting in kindergarten (Pears et al., 2013), and lower standardized academic achievement scores in reading and math (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Smithgall et al., 2004; Somers et al., 2020).

Additionally, students in foster care face other educational challenges such as higher rates of absenteeism and grade retention (Blankenship, 2018; Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Scherr, 2007; Zetlin et al., 2012), lower rates of high school graduation (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Scherr, 2007), and disproportionate rates of school discipline (Kortenkamp & Ehrle, 2002; Scherr, 2007). Specifically, foster youth are twice as likely to be suspended, three times as likely to drop out, and have graduation rates of 50% by the age of 18. Additionally, only 20% of foster youth who graduate high school attend college, and only 2-9% attain a bachelor's degree (FosterEd, 2014).

Despite the objective in planned foster care of expeditious reunification with their primary caregivers, many youths are placed in long-term foster care. After 12 months or more in foster care, youth are at risk for higher numbers of placement changes and longer

foster care terms (Ringeisen et al., 2013). Matching the right foster parents is critical in preventing constant placement changes and providing stability for youth in foster care (Redding & Britner, 2001). Further highlighting the importance of foster parents, a meta-analysis by Li et al. (2017) found that children in family foster care had lower internalizing and externalizing behaviors and greater perceptions of care than children in residential care.

However, a significant area of concern has been the recruiting and retaining of foster parents to meet the expanding number of youth in foster care (Piel et al., 2017). Nationwide, there has been a decreasing trend in non-relative foster homes from 2019 to 2023 (The Imprint, 2023). One strategy for promoting foster parent retention is by having them be part of the decision-making team (MacGregor et al., 2006; McDonald, 2003; Sanchirico et al., 1998). Foster parents reported that being part of the decision-making process increased their satisfaction with fostering (Sanchirico et al., 1998), especially when they were viewed as equals (McDonald, 2003). This could be because those who are part of a team felt more recognized for their efforts and had more resources available to support them in frustrating situations (MacGregor et al., 2006).

Special Education

Previous studies have shown that children in foster care are more likely to receive special education services, including being twice as likely to be placed in more restrictive special education placements (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Zetlin et al., 2012), with estimates ranging between three to six times more than their peers in general education (Education, 2014; Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Goerge et al., 1992). A study by Geenen &

Powers (2006) found that youth in both foster care and special education had lower academic achievement scores than students only in special education. Their study revealed that challenges, such as barriers to accessing services, were further amplified for foster youth if they were also placed in special education, highlighting the multiple vulnerabilities that foster youth in special education face.

One possible reason that foster youth face challenges in special education is that special education emphasizes parental advocacy and involvement (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Quest et al., (2012) had a qualitative study where foster youth in special education shared their educational experiences. Foster youth reported difficulties in their relationships with adults due to the complexities of having multiple adult relationships such as caseworkers, foster parents, and biological parents. Their study found a barrier for foster youth in special education is not having committed adults. One participant shared that they regretted making poor educational decisions and a reason that led to those decisions was because they did not have an adult to guide their decision. The authors explained that having a committed adult can help prevent poor educational choices by helping the youth understand the long-term consequences of their decisions.

Another possible reason for the compounding effects on foster youth in special education is because of constant disruption and placement changes. Foster youth in special education are at risk for disruptive placement changes, with some as high as four times a year (Zetlin, 2006). These placement changes can lead to delays in schools receiving the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) rights (Geenen & Powers, 2006). These delays in receiving paperwork can lead to foster youth losing school credits

and having to repeat classes. Furthermore, these students who are displaced can be delayed in receiving special education services and placed in inappropriate settings (Zetlin, 2006).

Theoretical Foundations

The Ecological Framework for Human Development

Educational researchers have long understood that a child's social environment influences a child's development. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory is a theoretical framework that explains that the environment influences a person's development and behavior. Specifically, the social-ecological theory posits that an individual is influenced by the overlap and interaction between the nested systems they are a part of (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The first ecological system that individuals are nested within is the microsystem. A microsystem is the people and settings directly interacting with the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This includes the most immediate relationships, such as the biological parents, classmates, teachers, schools, neighborhoods, and foster parents. When a child is placed into foster care, the foster parent takes responsibility as a caregiver and becomes one of their primary influences at home. Furthermore, foster youth, like other children, spend much of their day in schools. Schools considerably influence the child's development through interactions with other children and teachers.

The next ecological system that a child is nested within is the mesosystem. The mesosystem is the interaction between each person's microsystems. This links settings and people, such as the interaction between a child's parent and their peer group. These

overlapping relationships can promote or inhibit developmental functioning

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Under the mesosystem level, foster parents interact with school

personnel such as teachers and administrators. The interactions between these

microsystems can significantly impact the child's development. For example, tensions

can arise if foster parents feel unsupported by administrators during the IEP process for

their child.

Exosystems are an extension of the mesosystem and include the formal and

informal social structures that indirectly influence the individual. These social structures

can indirectly affect the parents, such as the types of work readily available to them.

Additionally, broader influences include the laws passed at the state, local, and national

levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Foster parents are placed uniquely within these social

structures because of the different laws and regulations they are given as part of the more

extensive welfare system. Furthermore, foster parents with children in special education

are also affected by different laws as they relate to a child's rights and placements in the

IEP process.

The macrosystem is a more overarching system that includes the culture, belief

systems, and ideologies embedded within the previous systems. These can include

political views, social issues, and the economic climate that a person is in

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). These societal norms and ideologies can potentially

impact the overall perceptions of foster care and parenting. Lastly, the chronosystem is

the last ecological level of influence. The chronosystem incorporates the different

transitions and changes that affect the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This can include

predicted changes, such as developmental milestones and school transitions, unpredicted changes over time, such as parental separation, and historical events, such as a global pandemic. All foster youth and parents share the chronosystem effects of parental separation and integration into a new family structure.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a well-researched construct that is a predictor of many positive outcomes for students (Boonk et al., 2018; Castro et al., 2015; El Nokali et al., 2010; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Topor et al., 2010; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Whitaker, 2019). One outcome that has consistently shown to be positively associated with parental involvement is academic achievement since foster youths are one of the most educationally vulnerable populations (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Smithgall et al., 2004; Somers et al., 2020). Students with parents involved in their education typically have greater academic achievement gains than those without parents (Castro et al., 2015; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Topor et al., 2010). Additionally, parental involvement predicted greater academic gains (e.g., standardized test scores and classroom academic performance) above and beyond a child's cognitive ability score (Topor et al., 2010). Furthermore, the relationship between parental involvement and student learning outcomes was stronger than schools and communities' roles (Ma et al., 2016).

Studies on parental involvement have also found that parental involvement may serve as a protective factor in academic outcomes for other vulnerable populations such as those from lower socioeconomic and immigrant backgrounds (Schmid & Garrels,

2021; Somers et al., 2011). While parental involvement has been associated with greater academic gain in these populations, results from a nationally representative sample found that parental involvement for adolescents in affluent communities had a greater impact on their academic achievement than those living in poorer communities (Gordon & Cui, 2014). These results suggest that more studies should be conducted within vulnerable populations, such as foster parents, to identify additional factors that can help address these gaps.

Another vital area of positive student outcomes for foster youth is social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health outcomes. Parental involvement can protect youth's social, emotional, and mental health outcomes. A study found that parental involvement predicted declines in problem behaviors, both internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and improvements in social skills. These effects were reported for both teacher-rated and parent-rated views on parental involvement (El Nokali et al., 2010). Other studies have reported similar findings, including increased emotional functioning (M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014) and greater social and emotional adjustment (Barger et al., 2019).

Additionally, studies have found associations between parental involvement and mental health. One study found that for middle schoolers, their perceived lack of parental involvement related to increased mental health difficulties and suicidal thoughts, while perceived parental involvement buffered the impact of victimization on mental health difficulties (C. Wang et al., 2018). Similarly, parental involvement was found to predict improved mental health functioning in depression for high school students (M.-T. Wang

& Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). One way that parental involvement may positively impact mental health outcomes from a variety of mental health disorders is their relationship to school-based mental health interventions. A systematic review found that involving parents was positively associated with intervention outcomes by providing parent training and increasing their skills. However, recruiting parents to be involved in school-based mental health interventions remains a major challenge (Shucksmith et al., 2010).

A few studies have specifically investigated the outcomes of parental involvement in foster parents. Overall, studies revealed that foster parents actively involved in their child's education had lower stress levels (Lopez et al., 2023) and strong parent-school relationships (Mires et al., 2018) Additionally, foster parent involvement predicted greater graduation rates at a higher rate than parent and peer attachment (Brown-Wade, 2021) and greater gains in academic achievement (Flynn et al., 2012). In contrast, parents who were less involved and took a more passive role in their children's schooling reported difficulties collaborating with their schools. These foster parents indicated greater distrust and sometimes anger toward their schools (Mires et al., 2018).

Furthermore, parental involvement may play a role in alleviating foster parent stress. Foster parents reported high levels of stress related to their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Gabler et al., 2018; Harding et al., 2018), feelings of being unsupported (Findley & Praetorius, 2023), and issues with the child's placement (Harding et al., 2018). A study with 65 foster parent participants (Lopez et al., 2023) sought to understand the relationship between parenting behavior and parental stress. Among the adaptive behaviors tested (e.g., parental involvement, positive parenting),

their study revealed that only parental involvement was associated with lower levels of parental stress. In contrast, those with maladaptive parenting behaviors, such as inconsistent discipline strategies, reported greater levels of stress.

Personal Motivators of Parental Involvement

One model that has been developed to provide a framework for variables that contribute to a parent's decision to be more involved and the effects that it has on their child is the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler model (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2019). The Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler model of parental involvement postulates that the mechanism by which parents become involved is multi-dimensional. According to their model, there are five levels of parental involvement. The first level of the model, motivators, encompasses various factors that drive parents' involvement. These include personal motivators, parents' perceptions of invitations to be involved, and their life context. Personal motivators are further categorized into two constructs: their sense of self-efficacy in helping their child succeed and their role construction for involvement.

Self-efficacy

A personal motivator of parental involvement in the model is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the parents' belief that their abilities will produce their desired outcomes. Parental self-efficacy plays a factor in their decision to be more involved, make goals, and persist in reaching those goals. Therefore, parents with self-efficacy are more likely to be involved in their child's education and push through adversity to attain positive outcomes for their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Furthermore, parents with

higher levels of self-efficacy predicted greater involvement at home (Giallo et al., 2013), at school (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Pelletier & Brent, 2002), and more significant involvement with their child's educational progress (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

Self-efficacy may play a protective role in some of the challenges that foster parents face. Parental self-efficacy is associated with greater academic outcomes such as achievement scores and graduation rates (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Liu & Leighton, 2021; Tazouti & Jarlégan, 2019). Additionally, parental self-efficacy was found to mediate the influence of SES on academic achievement (Tazouti & Jarlégan, 2019). Furthermore, studies found that parental self-efficacy predicted greater home-based academic involvement for foster parents (Reynolds, 2020). Parental self-efficacy can also be a protective factor from stress and other adverse effects on mental health. Semke et al., (2010) studied the association between parental self-efficacy and stress for parents who have children with disruptive behaviors. Their study found that parental stress was negatively associated with their self-efficacy in influencing educational outcomes for their children.

Similarly, a study conducted by Morgan and Baron (2011) sought to find the relationship between parental psychological well-being and challenging behaviors of children in foster parents. Their survey of 58 foster carers found that parental self-efficacy was a mediator between the child's difficult behavior and their general psychological well-being. They found that parents with higher self-efficacy had lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression caused by their child's challenging behaviors. Potential reasons for this can be that parents with higher self-efficacy are more willing to

persist in reaching their goals through adversity and be more involved in supporting their child's self-management skills (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

Role Construction

Parental role construction is the parents' belief in how they are supposed to be involved and the actions they should take concerning their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2019). This includes the beliefs around what parents should be doing and how much of an active role they should have with their children. Role construction is primarily shaped by societal influences such as expectations of roles from other parents and other members (e.g., teachers, family, and friends) and their own experience of parental involvement at home.

Since these factors are mainly shaped socially, role construction can change over time as their experiences grow (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Previous studies have found that parental role construction was associated with increased involvement practices for parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), including those from lower socioeconomic and diverse backgrounds (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Furthermore, Mires et al. (2018) found that foster parents shared similar sentiments on role construction and that their beliefs impacted their involvement on how they should be involved in helping their children.

Perceptions of Invitations to be Involved

Another key motivator that facilitates parental involvement is their perception of invitations to get involved. This construct consists of three sources of invitations: invitations from the school, the teacher, and the child.

School Invitation of Parental Involvement

Specific school invitations and promotion of parental involvement are some of the greatest predictors of parental involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005a; Yulianti et al., 2022). Parents who receive specific invitations from schools are more likely to perceive their involvement as being welcomed and feel that the school values their involvement efforts. Perceiving a welcoming environment in schools empowers parents to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Additionally, the promotion of parental involvement can contribute to greater parental self-efficacy. A study by Liu & Leighton (2021) found that parents who perceived invitations from school to get involved were directly linked to their self-efficacy in supporting their children. The increase in self-efficacy may have a positive cyclical effect on involvement, as those with greater self-efficacy are more likely to collaborate with educators (Staples & Diliberto, 2010).

Furthermore, invitations and promotion of parental involvement are important factors that support foster parents. Foster parents praised teachers and schools with higher responsiveness and communication levels (Hardin, 2016; Picardo, 2019) and reported that feeling heard increased their satisfaction with fostering (Cleary et al., 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative study with foster parents with children in special education reported that schools with positive school-initiated communication led to greater self-efficacy in fostering (Mires et al., 2018).

Teacher Invitation of Parental Involvement

Teacher initiation of parental involvement was found to be a greater predictor of involvement than family-level characteristics such as socioeconomic status, parental education level, and family size (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). Studies have found that teacher invitation had a larger effect on parental involvement than the other perceptions of invitation (i.e. school, and child) (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Shajith & Erchul, 2014) and was consistent even in low-income parents (Anderson & Minke, 2007). One reason for these findings is that there are links between parents' decisions to get involved and their belief that the teachers cared for their suggestions and were interested in their ideas for their children (Kohl et al., 2000). Teacher invitations can also be especially helpful for parents with a passive parental role construction. Invitations from school personnel are often the initial catalyst for parents who take a more passive role in education. This can lead to parents getting more involved with their children and taking on a more active role in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Child Invitation of Parental Involvement

Children can also help facilitate involvement by inviting their parents to be involved. This could be done implicitly, such as a parent noticing that their student is having difficulties turning in assignments, or explicitly, by asking the parent to help or participate in a school event (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A child's invitations to get involved can also be prompted by schools or teachers. For example, teachers can provide specific assignments that require help from parents. These opportunities have led to

positive parent-school communication and parent-child relationships (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Parental Perception of Life Context

According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model, the last construct in the motivators level is their life context. The life context motivator is divided into two parts: their time and energy, and skills and knowledge.

Time and Energy

An important life context that impacts parental involvement is their level of time and energy. Parents who are constrained in time and have less energy due to heavy demands are much less likely to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005b; Weiss et al., 2003). This can have practical implications such as having difficulty meeting with school personnel during school hours or having time to aid their child with schoolwork (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). These constraints typically impact parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as their jobs typically have less schedule flexibility and less paid vacations (Weiss et al., 2009). Additionally, certain families may be at greater risk for constrained time and energy, such as solo parents or larger families, because of their increased caretaking responsibilities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This could potentially impact foster parents who have to navigate additional responsibilities and systems (e.g., social workers and foster agencies).

Skills and Knowledge

A parent's perception of their skills and knowledge can contribute to their level of involvement. One example of this is the parent's level of education, which can influence

whether they believe they have the adequate skills and knowledge to engage in parental involvement. A study found that parents who did not complete high school were unsure if they could help their children with schoolwork. They also found that they were less likely to be involved in school decisions because they felt inferior to teachers, who they believed to be more qualified (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Additionally, levels of involvement were linked to their knowledge base. As students get older and the subject matter becomes more complex, parents are less likely to be involved in helping their children with homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Special Education and the IEP process

Foster parents who foster youth in special education face additional challenges when navigating the education system for their child. Specifically, their perception of the special education process and knowledge of IEP and special education laws could contribute to parental involvement.

Perception of the Special Education Process

An important factor for foster parents with children in special education is related to their perception of the special education process. Parents with children in special education have reported that they wanted to have a more active role in the IEP process and be considered knowledgeable about their children (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Additionally, parents viewed the special education process positively if they felt educators valued their opinions (Fish, 2008). In a qualitative study by Moyer & Goldberg (2020), a common theme in educational challenges for foster parents was the complexity of accommodations and IEPs. Parents reported that they had no idea about the IEP

process and found the entire process intimidating. Additionally, foster parents have reported IEP-specific issues such as disagreements with the biological parents on services, being left out of receiving information (Picardo, 2019), and not being allowed to make educational decisions (Piel et al., 2017).

Furthermore, foster parents of children in special education have reported feeling frustrated because of schools' lack of information about their children (Zetlin, 2006). Since students in foster care are at risk of being constantly moved, this creates confusion for the foster youth, foster parents, biological parents, and schools (Zetlin, 2006). The number of displacements can amplify existing issues related to feelings from foster parents that their concerns are not heard (Moyer & Goldberg, 2020).

Knowledge of IEP and Special Education Laws

An important factor that can help promote parental involvement for parents with children in special education is their knowledge of IEP and special education laws. Parents with greater knowledge of special education law have increased parent advocacy and participation (Goldman & Burke, 2017). Specifically, parents with more knowledge of special education laws and rights (e.g., requesting a second opinion if they disagree with the school's assessment) were highly involved in the special education process and satisfied with their services (Plunge & Kratochwill, 1995). Foster parents can be at a disadvantage in understanding the IEP process and special education laws because of abrupt placement changes. For example, foster parents have reported not even knowing that the child was receiving special education services until they were invited to an IEP meeting (Picardo, 2019). Foster parents have also reported that the schools need to do a

better job of helping parents be aware of the type of services and placements available for their children. These issues are further exacerbated because schools themselves are often unaware that a student is in foster care and unsure who retains that student's educational rights (Zetlin, 2006).

Significance of Study

This study will contribute to our understanding of how schools can support foster parents. To summarize, foster youth are one of the most educationally vulnerable populations in schools today. While previous studies have primarily focused on the foster youth population, far fewer studies have studied the foster parent population. Since foster youth are at risk for constant disruptive placements and changes, foster parents can be a source of stability who can advocate for their rights. However, foster parents have reported higher levels of stress, feeling unheard in their concerns, and confusion navigating the special education system. There is a growing need to support foster parents, with a national shortage of foster parents and declining rates of foster parent retention. Despite these trends, few studies have examined how schools can support foster parents and promote their involvement.

For schools to better support foster parents, studies must explore which factors promote greater parental involvement. Parental involvement has been identified as a construct that predicts students' higher academic achievement, better social-emotional and behavioral well-being, and positive mental health outcomes. Studies have identified factors that promote parental involvement, including personal motivators, invitations to parental involvement, their life contexts, and the level of communication between parents

and school. Furthermore, foster parents with children in special education face additional challenges that need to be further studied.

The Proposed Study

The proposed study aims to understand better which factors promote foster parents' involvement with their children. Additionally, the study hopes to provide schools with information on how they can better support foster parents with children in special education so that they will continue to persist in fostering and being involved with their children's education. Since this specific population has not been well-researched, the current study will employ a mixed-methods research design to capture the breadth of factors (e.g., personal motivators, invitations of parental involvement, life context, and perception of IEP processes) that help facilitate the level of foster parent involvement. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, supporting a child's development must consider their overlapping social environment. This study will focus on the microsystem (e.g., personal motivators of involvement), mesosystem (e.g., perceptions of invitations to be involved and perceptions of the special education process), and macrosystem (e.g., parent's life contexts).

Research Questions

Quantitative

1. To what extent do the motivators of parental involvement (e.g., personal motivators, perceptions of invitations to be involved, and life contexts) and perception of the IEP process (e.g., IEP meeting experiences and knowledge of the IEP process) predict foster parent's level of involvement in school?

2. To what extent do individual components (e.g., self-efficacy and role construction) of each construct (e.g., personal motivators) predict foster parent's level of involvement in school?

Qualitative

1. What are the experiences of foster parents in parental involvement?

2. What are the experiences of foster parents in navigating the special education system?

3. How can schools promote greater involvement for foster parents?

Methods

Mixed Methods Rationale

Due to limited knowledge of this topic and population, the study will utilize an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Quant → Qual). An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is a research design in which the results of the quantitative study inform the qualitative study (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Love et al., 2022). This is primarily done so that the qualitative portion can help explain the results found from the quantitative study (Love et al., 2022) and provide more complete information to inform practices (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015). Quantitative studies can show trends and use larger sample sizes to make better generalizations (Creswell & Clark, 2017), while qualitative studies can provide more in-depth and detailed information that may be missed by surveys and questionnaires (Mwita, 2022).

Quantitative methodologies using surveys can serve as a low-cost approach to trying to get a higher representation of the population (Queirós et al., 2017). Getting a

higher representation of the population allows researchers to make inferences that could be more generalizable. While there have been a few qualitative studies looking at foster parents with students who have disabilities and their experiences with school involvement (Mires et al., 2018; Moyer & Goldberg, 2020), there are very few (if not none) quantitative studies that have looked at that specific population. This study hopes to use the results from the quantitative strand to make inferences that could be more generalizable to the larger population of foster parents with children who are in special education. The results from the quantitative portion should provide general information on which factors promote parental involvement for foster parents with children in special education.

Qualitative designs can provide a platform for the unique experiences and perceptions of specific student and family populations that may be lost in quantitative studies (Parris et al., 2019). When taking a multicultural perspective in educational settings, it is recommended to use qualitative research designs since qualitative studies can provide a perspective with greater specificity for the population that is being studied (Proctor, 2017). While a few studies have looked at this specific population, this qualitative study hopes to add to the literature by asking additional questions from the results found in the quantitative study. The participants will be given a platform to share their unique experiences navigating the school system and their perception of how it impacted their involvement. Furthermore, the results from the quantitative strand will help inform which factors require further exploring. These questions will ask what they believe schools can do to help promote these factors.

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design should provide a fuller understanding of the factors that influence a foster parent's level of involvement. The quantitative portion will provide general information on which factors impact different areas of parental involvement. In contrast, the qualitative portion will build on those results to provide greater detail about their experiences. Additionally, the qualitative portion will give insight into what schools can do to help promote the factors that facilitate parental involvement.

Population

This study's proposed population is foster parents with children in special education in the United States of America. Both quantitative and qualitative strands will draw from the same population. To qualify for this study, participants must currently be foster parents whose child has a current IEP plan. Due to the limited population of potential participants, the study will not recruit participants based on specific demographics (e.g., geographic location, race).

Recruitment Strategy

This study will utilize purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling is a recruitment strategy in which participants are intentionally selected because they have experienced the phenomenon being studied. More specifically, the study will employ homogeneous purposeful sampling. Homogeneous purposeful sampling recruits individuals who belong to a distinct category (e.g., foster parents with children in special education) (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Additionally, due to the limited population, this study will utilize snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. Snowball sampling asks willing participants to recommend other potential participants that fit the targeted population. This is done until adequate saturation of participants is met (Parker et al., 2019).

The researcher will use purposeful sampling by creating flyers and distributing them to foster parent organizations and social media groups. National foster parent organizations that will be contacted will include the National Foster Parent Association, America's Kids Belong, and Foster America. Social media groups will include Facebook groups for foster families, such as Foster Care & Adoption and Foster the Parent Family Foster Parent Support. The flyers will include a link to a Qualtrics survey with prescreening questions to determine the eligibility for the study. The prescreening survey will also ask whether participants are interested in participating in the quantitative, qualitative, or both studies. Participants who qualify for the study will be invited to participate in either the quantitative or qualitative portion of the study. Additionally, snowball sampling will be utilized to encourage qualified participants to forward the flyer and the prescreening Qualtrics survey to individuals who may be interested in participating.

The researcher will attempt to secure funding to provide monetary incentives for potential participants. The researcher will apply to the UCR Graduate Division research grant application, which will provide up to $2000 for expenses related to their dissertation research. Additionally, the researcher will apply for the UCR School Psychology Dissertation Funds application, which will cost up to $400. Those who

qualify for the quantitative portion will receive a $10 gift card, while participants in the qualitative portion will receive a $50 gift card.

Quantitative

Qualified participants will be given an online survey through Qualtrics. Informed consent will be provided at the start of the online survey.

Measures

Demographics. Demographic information will be collected to provide additional information that may be helpful in the study. The survey will ask about fostering, such as how long they have been foster parents and how long their child has been in foster care. The survey will also ask questions about their child's education, such as how long they have been in special education, and the age/grades of their child.

Parental Involvement in School and Home. The level of parental involvement in school will be measured using the school involvement scale from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education survey by the National Center for Education Statistics at IES (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). Participants will respond by indicating yes or no to 8 items doing things at the child's school since the beginning of the school year (e.g., "Met with a guidance counselor in person").

Personal Motivators. Parental role construction will be measured using the parental role construction scale from the adapted Hoover-Dempsey Sandler scale of parental involvement (Walker et al., 2005). Participants will indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with 10 statements about their role construction for involvement in their child's education (e.g., "I believe it is my responsibility to stay on top of things at

school"). Parental self-efficacy will be measured using the parental self-efficacy scale for helping children succeed in school from the adapted Hoover-Dempsey Sandler scale of parental involvement (Walker et al., 2005). Participants will indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with 7 statements about their self-efficacy in helping their child succeed in school (e.g., "I make a significant difference in my child's school performance"). Responses will be given on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

Invitations of Parental Involvement. Parent perception of invitation from schools to be involved will be measured using the adapted Hoover-Dempsey Sandler scale of parental involvement (Walker et al., 2005). Participants will mark the degree to which they agree or disagree with 6 statements regarding their perceptions of invitations from the school (e.g., "I feel welcomed in this school"). Responses will be given on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Parent perception of invitations from teachers will be measured by indicating how often parents perceived invitations from teachers in the last school year on six statements (e.g., "My child's teacher asked me to talk with my child about the school day."). Parent perception of invitations from their child will be measured by indicating how often parents perceived invitations from their child in the last school year on six statements (e.g., "My child asked me to attend a special event at school."). Responses for teacher and child invitation will range from 1-6 (1 = never; 2 = 1 or 2 times; 3 = 4 or 5 times; 4 = once a week; 5 = a few times a week; 6 = daily).

Parental Perception of Special Education. Parental perception of the special education process will be measured using three scales from the perceptions of parents of students who receive special education services survey (Fish, 2008). The first scale measures a parent's IEP meeting experiences. Participants will indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree on 4 statements regarding their IEP experience (e.g., "Sufficient amount of time is allotted to conduct an effective IEP meeting"). The second scale measures a parent's knowledge of the IEP process and special education law. Participants will indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree on 5 statements regarding their understanding of the IEP process and special education law (e.g., "You have a clear understanding regarding services that your child's school district is to provide for your child under special education law"). All responses will be given on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

Analytic Strategy

A generalized linear model (GLM) will be used to analyze the data. GLM is a more flexible generalization of linear models for dependent variables that are assumed to not be normally distributed. This can include binary and categorical outcomes, or count data (Dobson & Barnett, 2018). Since the outcome variable will be a count data with a minimum number of zero (i.e., the number of times the parents indicate yes to statements regarding their involvement at school) and the values are fairly small, it is assumed that it will follow a Poisson distribution. A Poisson distribution is a discrete distribution that can be used to calculate the probability of the number of events over a fixed time interval. A

Poisson regression is a method of GLM that helps interpret count data by showing the predictor variable's effects on the outcome (Roback & Legler, 2021).

The researcher will test the two quantitative research questions by utilizing a Poisson regression model. First, the researcher will test which construct (e.g., personal motivators, perception of invitations to be involved, life context, perception of special education process) significantly predicts the likelihood that the parent will be more involved in school. Next, to provide additional information on what factors promote parental involvement, each statistically significant construct will be further tested by subsequent models. Subsequent models will use the components that make up each construct and will be tested to determine their effect on the outcome. For example, self-efficacy and role construction will be tested in a subsequent model if personal motivators are a statistically significant predictor.

In addition to testing the predictor variables, other covariates will be added to the model. The model will use control variables of years of fostering, and the age/grade of the child to limit the influence on the outcome from these variables. Previous studies have indicated that the length of service for foster parents predicted their persistence in continuing to foster (Gibbs & Wildifre, 2007; Hanlon et al., 2021). One reason that length of service promotes persistence in fostering is because length of service is highly associated with self-efficacy and competency (Hanlon et al., 2021). Adding the covariate of years a parent has fostered will help control for the likely high correlation between years of fostering and personal motivators of involvement (e.g., self-efficacy and role construction).

There is also evidence that parental perceptions of IEP experiences and school involvement can vary depending on a student's age and grade (Martin et al., 2004; Mires et al., 2018). Mires et al., (2018) reported significant differences for foster parents with children in special education between elementary and secondary school in their perceptions of school-initiated communication and invitations. One potential explanation is that school-home communication is more emphasized in elementary school whereas the number of students in high schools may limit teacher communication. Adding the covariate of the student's age and grade should help control the influence that the child's age will have on parental perceptions of the special education process and invitations of involvement.

Before using a Poisson regression model, a few assumptions must be met. First, the relationship between the independent variable and the log rate must be linear (Roback & Legler, 2021). This will be tested by plotting the residuals to see if they follow a linear pattern. The second assumption is that the observations are independent from one another. Since the surveys will be given individually, this assumption will be met. Next, the dependent variables must follow a Poisson distribution. This will be tested by performing a goodness of fit test of the observed counts and the expected frequencies in a Poisson distribution. The last assumption is that the mean of each variable must be equal to its variance. If the variances are greater than the mean, that means that there is an overdispersion. In the case of overdispersion, a negative binomial regression will be used, which is an extension of the Poisson regression model to account for overdispersed data (Roback & Legler, 2021).

A Wald chi-square value will be obtained between the regression coefficient and standard error for each predictor. This value can be converted to a significance level, where p-values <.05 will be considered statistically significant. The regression coefficients (B) represent the change in the log count per unit increase on a predictor. Generally speaking, a positive B value would represent an increase in the expected number of times a parent was involved, while a negative B value would indicate a decrease. Additionally, results will be given in an Incidence Rate Ratio (IRR) which is obtained by exponentiating the regression coefficients. The IRR can provide the ratio, or multiplicative effect, in which each predictor variable increases or decreases the expected count (UCLA, 2024).

Power. A power analysis was conducted to determine an adequate sample size for this study. An a priori power analysis using the G*power software was used to determine power for a regression model. An effect size of .15, which indicates a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988), a significance alpha level of .05, and a minimum power significance level of .80 were used (Suresh & Chandrashekara, 2012). Lastly, four tested predictors were added to the a priori analysis. The power analysis indicated that a total sample size of 85 participants is required.

Qualitative

Qualified participants for the qualitative study will be recruited for a one-hour interview with the researcher on Zoom. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. A total of 13 participants will be recruited for this study, as previous studies have found that a sample size of 12-13 was adequate to reach saturation in qualitative research (Hennink

& Kaiser, 2022). Informed consent will be given before the interview begins, and participants will be reminded that their interview will be recorded and transcribed. They will be allowed to refuse to answer any question that is asked.

Semi-structured interview

The interviews will follow a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews use a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions. Typically, the interviewer has a set of questions related to the research topic. Still, semi-structured interviews allow researchers the flexibility to follow up with questions (e.g., why and how) to allow for more in-depth analysis (Adams, 2015). The research questions will include their experiences with parental involvement and the special education process. Additional questions will be constructed based on the results of the quantitative study. These questions will be directly guided from the constructs identified as significant predictors of parental involvement. The questions will aim to investigate what schools can do to help further promote each significant factor of parental involvement. Lastly, the researcher will ask each participant if there are any additional things they would like to share or things they believe that schools should know.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Once interviews are completed and transcribed, they will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative approach where data is analyzed to find common themes and patterns (Braun et al., 2022; Byrne, 2022). Reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher plays an active role in knowledge production. It posits that knowledge is influenced directly by the researcher, and their

assumptions shape the knowledge created. Therefore, the researcher must practice reflexivity throughout the research process. They critically reflect on the assumptions, values, actions, and choices and see how that might influence their research (Braun et al., 2022).

Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis is an iterative process where the researcher can flexibly move forward and backward through the phases (Braun et al., 2022; Byrne, 2022). First, the familiarization phase entails continual reading and re-reading of the dataset to become familiar with the data. The next phase will be generating initial codes with short descriptions and labels. The data from those codes will be analyzed to find aggregated meanings or themes. Codes can be flexibly placed into larger themes with smaller sub-themes. Next, the themes should be reviewed in the context of the entire dataset to determine whether they are relevant to the research questions.

For this study, codes and themes will be divided into each research question. The first research question will broadly categorize consistent themes that emerge based on foster parents' experiences of parental involvement. The next question will be categorized by themes related to their experiences navigating the educational system and special education. Lastly, themes will be categorized based on the significant factors identified from the quantitative study and what schools can do to help facilitate parental involvement. The qualitative results should inform schools of the unique experiences of foster parents with children in special education and what they can do to help promote parental involvement.

Limitations & Expected Results

There are a few limitations to this proposed study. Due to limitations in recruiting qualified participants, this study will not be able to explore individual-level and school-level factors. Previous studies have indicated the importance of parental involvement across important demographic variables such as socioeconomic status (LaRocque et al., 2011; Staples & Diliberto, 2010) and race/ethnicity (Chang et al., 2009; Jeynes, 2003; Kim, 2009). There are additional differences in parental involvement for school-level factors such as urban school districts (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Lightfoot, 2004) and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Haynes et al., 1989; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999)**.** Due to these limitations, the results of this study cannot be generalized to these specific populations. However, the results of the study should still help inform schools on what they can do to help promote parental involvement for foster parents who have children in special education. Future studies could explore both individual and school-level factors and their effects on parental involvement for foster parents with children in special education.

Based on the previous literature, it is expected that all of the identified predictors in the quantitative study will be statistically significant factors that facilitate parental involvement. However, as with any research study, it is possible that there could be insignificant results. In those situations, the researcher may add additional questions in the qualitative portion that could help explain those results. Lastly, the researcher expects that results from the qualitative portion will help provide a greater understanding for

schools on how to promote parental involvement for foster parents with children who are

in special education.

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