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## Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives on Quality Communication in a Head Start Program

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Danielle Bryant-Mathurin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives on Quality Communication in a Head Start Program

by

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MS, Mercy College, 2009

BS, Mercy College, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Researchers have suggested that active communication between teachers and parents is positively associated with student success in school, specifically in terms of student attendance, performance, and behavior. The problem that inspired this basic qualitative study was the quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs that serve low socioeconomic status (SES) students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in a Head Start program that serves low SES students in the northeastern United States and explore how quality of parent-teacher communication might be improved. Ecological systems theory and the communication component of Epstein's model of parental involvement served as the conceptual framework. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 16 Head Start program participants (eight teachers and eight parents). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to determine the emerging themes relevant to the study. The findings revealed that parents and teachers perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between them, and barriers might be overcome by developing a mutual understanding of goals, trust, respect, confidence, and cooperation. The subthemes were that quality communication can be improved by (a) having language interpreters and (b) adapting new modes of communication such as utilizing technology. The findings of this study can lead to positive social change because high quality parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs positively influences children's attendance, performance, and social and emotional well-being.

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## Dedication

This is dedicated to my village who gave me support, guidance, and encouragement all the way through this journey. My husband Thomas, my daughter Lauryn, my parents Emily and Solomon, and my sleeping angels: this is dedicated to each of you. Know that I love you all!

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Researchers have suggested that active communication between teachers and parents is positively associated with students' success in school, specifically in terms of attendance, performance, and behavior (Barger et al., 2019), as parents play an essential role in the learning and development of children (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Parent and teacher communication and relationships increase the chance that students will find both academic and social success in programs and schools (G. Li et al., 2019; Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019). Almost 70% of children spend most of their time in school (Barger et al., 2019); therefore, the quality of communication between parents and teachers influences the academic and social development of children (Leenders et al., 2019; Perrigo et al., 2022). Parent-teacher communication, however, is often less coordinated, especially for parents with low socioeconomic status (SES; Puccioni et al., 2019). Ineffective, or low-quality communication between parents and teachers may impact the performance of children in Head Start programs negatively (American Psychological Association, 2022).

In this study, I sought to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in Head Start programs and their perspectives on how the quality of communication might be improved. The specific focus was on Head Start participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. The appeal to revisit the parent-teacher partnerships, which are a result of high-quality parent-teacher communication, has increased in early childhood literature (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). The study's findings may lead to positive social change by encouraging childhood agencies and providers to evaluate their current approaches

regarding the quality of parent-teacher communication and examine how communication might be improved. Effective communication is important in any relationship, especially when the goal is to build relationships between teachers and families, as it forms the basis for the involvement of the family (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Leenders et al., 2019; Perrigo et al., 2022). This chapter includes information related to the background of the topic, the problem under study, the purpose and research questions, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study.

### **Background**

The active development of a child is not only limited to the efforts of the child and their teachers but requires community efforts involving children, their parents, and their teachers (Barger et al., 2019; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Researchers have suggested there is value in parental input to optimize children's educational development (Barger et al., 2019). When parents are more involved in their children's education, children are more likely to show positive attitudes concerning school and perform better at when they are at school (Barger et al., 2019). Both parents and teachers should support each other's roles and families, and schools should have shared responsibility for children's academic success (Rattenborg et al., 2019). Parent-teacher communication is effective in promoting children's academic performance (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Gisewhite et al., 2019; Rattenborg et al., 2019).

Although the benefits of parent-teacher communication are well understood, a gap in practice exists when examining why parent-teacher communication in schools that

serve low SES students remains problematic (Barger et al., 2019; Puccioni et al., 2019). The focus of this study was to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in Head Start programs and their thoughts on how this communication might be improved. The specific focus was on participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States.

### **Problem Statement**

Parent-teacher communication is important to the growth and development of the whole child (Anderson et al., 2019; Barger et al., 2019; Syuraini et al., 2022). But researchers have suggested that more research is needed to investigate parent-teacher communication in programs and schools that serve low SES children to identify why parent-teacher communication in schools that serve low SES students remains problematic (Yazdani et al., 2020). The income of the family influences the participation of the children in education (McWayne et al., 2022). More than 75% of children from middle- to high-income families are enrolled in kindergarten; however, only 48% of children from low-income families are enrolled in kindergarten (Anderson et al., 2019). This disparity highlights a national issue related to the quality of parent-teacher communication and identifies a gap in practice related to the quality of parent-teacher communication in early childhood programs that serve low SES students (Koball et al., 2021).

At the local level, parental involvement goals were set for a grant through the Martha Mertz Foundation. The objectives set were based on parental involvement, as reported by the end of February 2019 school year. At that time, the program had 98

unduplicated parent attendees at various workshops. In the 2018–2019 school year, by February 2019, the program had served only 44 unduplicated attendees at parent workshops. Through the current study aims to fill the identified gap in practice by examining parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in a Head Start program and their thoughts on how this communication might be improved, with specific focus on participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. Ineffective communication between teachers and parents concerning students' learning process may negatively impact their academic performance. This could result in compromising educational outcomes for children. If the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs or schools serving low-income families remains unaddressed, it could affect children's long-term well-being (Zhang et al., 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. The specific focus was on Head Start program participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. Researchers have suggested that parent-teacher communication has a positive influence on the children's well-being (Barger et al., 2019), yet quality communication between parents and teachers does not always occur (Leenders et al., 2019; Wang, 2020). According to researchers, parent-teacher communication is not well understood or universally promoted by school

authorities, teachers, or parents (Leenders et al., 2019; Wang, 2020). Therefore, I sought to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in a Head Start program and their perspectives on how this communication might be improved in a Northeastern state in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide this study:

- RQ 1: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication in Head Start programs?
- RQ 2: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on how they can improve the quality of their communication in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guided the current study was a combination of ecological systems theory and the communication component from Epstein's parent involvement framework. Communication is a concept supported by ecological systems theory and Epstein's model of parent involvement. Specifically, communication among the adults who are responsible for children increases the well-being of such children and of the adults as well.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) posited that individuals develop within five interconnected social systems that he termed ecosystems. This theory explains how one ecosystem is wholly contained within the next in a series of concentric circles. The smallest, inner ecosystem is the microsystem, which refers to groups and institutions that influence the

child directly, such as family, school, institutions, immediate surroundings, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This microsystem is contained within the mesosystem, which consists of interactions between the elements of the microsystem, such as between parents and other family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The mesosystem is the ecosystem with the most relevance to the current study.

Although Bronfenbrenner (1977) originally stated that his theory was applicable to all individuals, he later narrowed his focus to how the theory might explain aspects of children's education and cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner, a child's cognitive development is influenced by the microsystem (i.e., those who directly interact with the child), which is influenced by the mesosystem (i.e., the interactions between those actors), which is influenced by the exosystem (i.e., the influencing factors outside the child's direct experience and control), which is influenced by the macrosystem (i.e., the culture), which is influenced by the chronosystem (i.e., the life cycle and socio-history).

The focus of this current study was on activities within the mesosystem—in this case, the interactions between parents and teachers. In terms of the conceptual framework, the interactions between the various human elements of the child's microsystem form the child's macrosystem, with communication being a vital aspect of those interactions. Per ecological systems theory, these actions and their effects are interdependent of one another. The well-being of children and their parents is positively affected by communication within the mesosystem, as Bronfenbrenner (1977, 2005) described. Based on the framework, a qualitative interview approach was chosen for the

current study, as teachers and parents are part of several subsystems as described by Bronfenbrenner (1977), making it valuable to ask them directly about their interactions within those systems.

Epstein (2011) described six types of family involvement in the model of parent involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) learning at home, (d) volunteering, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating (p. 82). These different types of family involvement offer a framework for school systems to assist parents and teachers in understanding the child's environment to foster parents' involvement in their child's academic success. Epstein explained that children develop higher academic skills when parents, school, and community work together. Epstein (2005) stated that the theory could be used to assess "teachers and administrators understanding of teaching" and to facilitate children's learning "with connections of home, school, and community" (p. 126).

### **Nature of the Study**

A basic qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. A basic qualitative research study is used to examine experiences and how people interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and to explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. This research design was appropriate for gathering an understanding of the experiences and interactions of parent-teacher communication practices. The insights gained from their interactions and

experiences can be used for improving communication between parents and teachers.

The basic qualitative research design consisted of interviews as the source of data. The interviews were semistructured, one-on-one, and open-ended. The interviews were conducted with both teachers and parents. Based on the purpose of the study, open-ended questions in a systematic interview protocol (see Silverman, 2016) were used to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives of the quality of their communication with each other and their thoughts on how communication might be improved in high-poverty areas. The content validity of the interview protocol was completed by members of an expert early childhood panel (see Flick, 2018). Member checking was conducted with all 16 participants after data analysis had been completed, and a 2-page summary report of the findings were shared (see Patton, 2015).

### **Definitions**

*Academic success:* In the context of this study, academic success refers to a child's ability to succeed in curriculum studies by obtaining high school grades. This success engages in educationally purposeful activities, skills, persistence, and attainment of education outcomes (Nihal Lindberg et al., 2019).

*PreK:* PreK refers to educational programs designed to provide children 3 and 4 years old with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities (Gormley et al., 2023).

*Quality:* Quality in this study refers to the level and effectiveness of the degree of communication between teachers and parents. Informal conversations and unscheduled visits contribute to quality communication and are important parent involvement practices (Leenders et al., 2019).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are factors that affect the outcome of the study and are assumed to be true by a researcher as a natural consequence of conducting the research, but at the same time, cannot be verified as such (Creswell, 2009). The first of these was that the parents and teachers were honest and forthright with their answers to the interviews, which cannot be verified but needed to be assumed. I also assumed that the participants had no hidden agendas or motivations that would affect the veracity of their testimonies. A further assumption was that the methodology and data collection procedures were appropriate and yielded the needed answers to the research questions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). These assumptions were necessary to ensure that the collected data reflected the views expressed by the participants. Lastly, I assumed that the population and sample were representative of the whole to which the study problem applied. The assumptions specified in this section may help readers determine the transferability of the results to different groups and regions (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The specification regarding the scope and delimitations of the study, such as those regarding the inclusion of participants, are detailed in this section. This information will help readers determine the potential transferability of the findings of this study. In this study, I focused on low-income families; upper-middle-income families were excluded. The reason for choosing to focus on low-income families is the finding from the literature that, despite income of the family influencing the education participation of the children (Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020), more than 75% of children from middle- to

high-income families enroll in kindergarten classes compared to almost 48% of children from low-income families (Anderson et al., 2019), revealing an educational disparity (Koball et al., 2021). This study was further delimited to teachers and parents of children enrolled in Head Start programs because these programs serve students from low-income families, which were the focus of the study. This study only considered participants within northeastern state in the United States because it was easily accessible to me and contained the population that I required in my research.

Only parents and teachers of children of ages 3–5 years enrolled in Head Start Programs was recruited to participate in the study due to a focus on children from low-income families. I opted for teachers and parents of children under the ages of 3 to 5 because of their familiarity of Head Start standards. The choice regarding teachers who had experiences in teaching early childhood ensured that teachers who do not teach in the early childhood schools located in a northeastern state in the United States would not take part in the study. Parents who have not enrolled their children in early childhood school for a Head Start Program in a northeastern state in the United States were not eligible for the study.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations that might feature in this study. The first limitation of this study was the small sample size. A small sample aligned with the qualitative method that was used in the current study. Another limitation was the fact that the sample was limited to a northeastern state in the United States. To address this limitation, I specified the limits of the transferability of the findings and ensure the recommendations

do not exceed these limits. Because I am a director in one of the schools and currently an educational coordinator, my experience and perceptions of the quality of communication in the Head Start program are likely biased based on my previous experiences. To address bias, I kept a reflective journal in which I documented my personal feelings, prejudices, and other insights that can influence data analysis. There was a possibility that interview questions were prejudiced based on prior experiences I have had, which may result in priming (Hamblin, 2018). To address this limitation, I designed and use open-ended questions asking for participants' description of their experiences as well as their attitudes and views. Additionally, I ensured a peer review of the interview questions to ascertain that they are appropriate for answering the research questions. At the beginning of the interview, I asked participants for honesty. Finally, the structuring of the questions was based on theoretical underpinnings as dictated by the conceptual framework of the research.

### **Significance**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and to explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. The specific focus was on participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. School administrators can use the current study's findings to compare parents' and teachers' perceptions to initiate strategic school-to-home communications channels that can enhance the free flow of information sharing for positive social change, particularly when the academic performance of children from

low-income families is concerned.

The findings may support positive social change and aid stakeholders with their understanding of quality parent-teacher communication in programs and schools serving low economic status students in the northeastern United States. When teachers and parents from programs or schools serving low SES children review the findings of this study for potential similarities or discrepancies, they may choose to improve the quality of communication by altering their current mode of communication to provide more meaningful communication. Parents can benefit from the enhanced communication practices in response to their input from the study. Ultimately, it is hoped that the children will attain greater academic achievement attributable to enhanced quality of communication between school and home.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I presented an extensive general background of the study, the problem statement, the study purpose, the nature of the study research questions, and the theoretical framework. In addition, I discussed the scope of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, the definition of key terms, and the potential significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide a compressive literature review of the perceptions that teachers and parents have toward quality communication in the Head Start programs. In addition, I discuss the literature search strategy used, conceptual framework, the existing literature review related to key variables and concepts, and the current gaps in the literature. The chapter ends with a summary and transition to Chapter 3.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem in this basic qualitative study was the lower quality of parent-teacher communication in early childhood programs that serve low SES students (Leenders et al., 2019; Perrigo et al., 2022). Parent-teacher communication is important to the growth and development of the whole child (Anderson et al., 2019; Barger et al., 2019). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. The specific focus was on Head Start program participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States.

Previous researchers have focused on measurement of parent-teacher communication (Özçinar, 2020), predictors of parent-teacher communication (Torres-Rendón & Zinsser, 2022), the relationship between parent-teacher communication and student academic performance (G. Li et al., 2019; Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019), and providing guidance to teachers on having parent-teacher communication (Thompson et al., 2019). What is missing from the research on practice that was addressed by this qualitative study is the quality aspects of parent-teacher communication. The quality aspects of parent-teacher communication are especially important for low-income families, as the income of the family influences the education participation of the children (Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020).

The gap in practice concerned the need to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in a high-poverty area. In Head Start programs located in a high-poverty

area in the northeastern United States, parental involvement goals were set for a grant through the Martha Mertz Foundation for the 2018–2019 school year. The objectives set were based on parental involvement, as reported by the end of the February 2019 school year. At that time, the program had 98 unduplicated parent attendees at various workshops. In the 2018–2019 school year, by February 2017, the program had served only 44 unduplicated attendees at parent workshops. Ineffective communication between teachers and parents concerning students' learning process may negatively impact their academic performance (Leenders et al., 2019), causing long-term effects that could be resolved with an increase in parental involvement (Zhang et al., 2020).

In this chapter, a review of the available literature concerning communication between parents and teachers and children's social development and well-being is presented. The chapter contains a review of relevant literature on the following themes: perceptions of communication, communicating to expand academic success, parent-teacher communication, benefits of parent-teacher communication, and parental engagement and involvement. The last section of the chapter summarizes the review of the literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The search engines used for the research of this paper included Google Scholar, Springer, Sage Publications, PsychINFO, and DeepDyve. Search terms used included *children and well-being*, *students and well-being*, *students and poverty*, *teachers and parents' communication*, *teachers' and parents' communication and children's well-being*, and *poverty and education*. The search engines produced ample and valuable

results for each of these terms. A total of 72 works were cited in this review.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory and the communication component of Epstein's (2011) model of parental involvement. The ecological systems theory provides support for the idea that communication among the adults who are responsible for children increases the well-being of such children and the adults as well. The key aspects that are used to underpin the theory include guidance, support between the parties, generating roles, norms, and rules that shape development and societal affiliations in an individual's life as far as communication is concerned (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The supporters of the theory assume that the model is composed of the following: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), a child's cognitive development is influenced by the microsystem (i.e., those who directly interact with the child), which is influenced by the mesosystem (i.e., the interactions between those actors), which is influenced by the exosystem (i.e., the influencing factors outside the child's direct experience and control), which is influenced by the macrosystem (i.e., the culture), which is influenced by the chronosystem (i.e., the life cycle and socio-history).

The focus of this current study is on activities within the mesosystem construct, in this case, the interactions between parents and teachers. In terms of the conceptual framework, the interactions between the various stakeholders in the child's life form the child's mesosystem, with communication being a vital aspect of those interactions. This

may facilitate the flow of information between parents and teachers concerning the child's interrelationship between home and school towards academic success (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005). In relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, educators and parents possess an invaluable role in the lives of students. Though their roles are in different capacities, communication between them is decisive in a child's development as far as their academic performance is contextualized. A strong connection between teachers and parents, which can only be achieved through effective communication, provides the learner with stability that emboldens, supports, and motivates them to focus on their academics. I used Bronfenbrenner's theory to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in a Head Start program and their thoughts on how this communication might be improved in a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States at the mesosystem level, particularly concerning the interaction between parents and teachers.

The conceptual framework of this study also included the communication component of Epstein's (2011) model of parental involvement. Epstein described parent-teacher communication as one of the six primary types of parental involvement that are crucial for establishing effective working relationships between parents and teachers and for meeting the need for families, schools, and community to share responsibility for the socialization of the child. Epstein posited that parental involvement is a partnership in which the school, family, and local community share responsibility for children. Different types of family involvement offer a framework for school systems to assist parents and teachers in understanding the child's environment and foster parent involvement in their

child's academic success. Communication is a two-way process between school and family that involves both parties (Epstein, 2011; Symeou et al., 2012). Epstein recommended that schools should have clear writings in English, and documents are also translated into different languages spoken by students, families, and the availability of interpreters for parents who speak different languages in meetings and conferences. When communication between parties is clear, both parties understand their respective roles and responsibilities in helping children prepare to achieve academic success. Thus, Epstein's model was used to examine the importance of parent-teacher communication by understanding how parents and teachers interact and perceive their relationship and communication with each other and how they think it affects children.

Multiple researchers have used the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1977) and Epstein's (2011) model of parental involvement to conduct studies related to children. For example, Mary and Antony (2022) used the ecological systems theory to focus on how resilience in children can be taught during childhood using the social interactions they have with parents and teachers. Crawford et al. (2019) similarly studied minority children but regarding their underrepresentation in gifted programming as students. Crawford et al. noted that in order to understand this underrepresentation, it is important to consider the interconnected interaction network taking place across multiple places that affect their underrepresentation.

Epstein's (2011) model of parental involvement was used in a study by Ihmeideh et al. (2018) to examine the various stakeholders in the life of children, such as parents, teachers, school counselors, and school administrators regarding the way they perceive

the school-family relationship. The researchers showed that the participants reported high to moderate school-family relationship levels. Among the six types of family involvement that Epstein's model described (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with the community), decision-making obtained the lowest level mean score, and learning at home obtained highest level. There was a positive response from the school staff with respect to the school-family relationship compared to parents. The findings of the study by Ihmeideh et al. (2018) were supported by a more recent study in which the authors cited teacher-initiated practices that included parent education and ongoing communication were common (Albaiz & Ernest, 2021). Epstein's model was also used in a study in which the researchers sought to examine whether there was a meaningful difference in parents' perceptions regarding effectiveness and frequency of parental involvement among different demographic groups, such as those of different SES, education level, and ethnicity (Newman et al., 2019). It was shown that the views of the participating parents differed significantly with respect to the implementation of parental involvement strategies by schools.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

#### **Perceptions of Communication in Learning**

Many educators and researchers have referenced Epstein's (2011) work regarding parental involvement; however, there is no specific definition of parental involvement. Bower and Griffin (2011) suggested that parental involvement could appear in many ways, which can be serving at schools without pay, talking with teachers, assisting with

homework, appearing at school events, or attending parent-teacher conferences.

Traditional parental involvement consists of parents participating in their child's home-based activities (Ribeiro et al., 2021) and school-based activities (Puccioni, 2018). Home-based activities consist of helping with homework, encouraging the child to read, and promoting school attendance (Berkowitz et al., 2021). School-based activities consist of attending school meetings, volunteering in the school and in classrooms, and serving on various school committees (Puccioni, 2018). Parental involvement could be chaperoning field trips, attending school activities, signing homework folders, signing classroom handouts, or volunteering for PTO committees.

Although parents and teachers want to support students and see academic and social success, the collaboration presents numerous challenges and barriers such as SES conditions and ethnic backgrounds (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). The transition from elementary to middle school shows a marked decline in academic achievement (Borman et al., 2019). Miscommunication or inadequate frequent communication between parents and teachers could significantly influence the performance of learners as there is limited information shared between them that can be used to help learners in the areas where they show weakness (Oberle et al., 2016). Given the change in setting, many of the strategies used by parents and teachers of middle school students is no longer feasible.

The National Parent-Teacher Association (NPTA) has released a framework to increase the family to school partnership, claiming that the parent-teacher-student connection is vital in allowing students to prosper (Mitchell, 2020). The standards consist of welcoming families into the school community, communicating effectively, supporting

student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with the community (Dettmers et al., 2019). Based on the NPTA framework, it could be demonstrated that regardless of ethnicity, gender, educational background, or SES, all parents can support and advocate for their children while serving as positive academic role models in creating supportive and collaborative relationships with the school (Deeba et al., 2021). Though the use of the NPTA framework promotes home-to-school communication and relationship building for students' academic success, it is not factored in the systemic issues in place that hinder the outreach from schools.

With regard to perceptions of communication in learning, a number of researchers have explored this phenomenon (Bauer et al., 2016; Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Gisewhite et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016). Researchers have found that many of the parents viewed parental involvement in school activities as poor when compared to the views of teachers (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). But parents perceived communication to be invaluable in ensuring that the learners' background is shared with teachers to facilitate the development of suitable teaching strategies (Gisewhite et al., 2019). Many parents view communication as important to share information about learners' background, cultures, their progress at home, and as well possible areas that need improvement (Bauer et al., 2016). Parents' and teachers' perceptions toward the value of education have differed significantly because most of the parents presume that teachers may have limited understanding of learners' cultural backgrounds, a situation that may challenge the teaching process (Bauer et al., 2016). To combat some of these challenges, digital communication was perceived as positive for both parents and teachers, and

digital communication was seen as supporting the partnership between teachers and parents (Kuusimäki et al., 2019).

### **Communicating to Expand Academic Success**

In relation to the expansion of academic success, multiple researchers have explored this theme, including Gisewhite et al. (2019), Hamblin (2018), and Sezgin and Er (2016). Gisewhite et al. (2019) found that both parents and educators tend to overestimate student's academic abilities when communication is lacking, while Hamblin (2018) reported that promoting parent-teacher communication is indispensable as far as learners' academic performance is referenced. Similar findings were reported by Sezgin and Er (2016), who noted that parental tasks performed most often involved communication with teachers and the school as well as parents' self-development toward becoming better involved. Finally, Hamblin (2018) cited that effective communication can also help improve student achievement, agreeing with other researchers.

Gisewhite et al. (2019) examined parent communication in connection with parental involvement in middle schools. A total of 437 parents and guardians of students in regular education, middle school sixth-eighth grade classrooms, and kindergarten-to-eighth grade public schools in a large urban city participated in the study. Gisewhite et al. (2019) concluded that both parents and educators tend to overestimate student's academic abilities when communication is lacking. There is a dire need for parent-teacher communication. Information from the study revealed how the roles of parents changed from their involvement in the scholastic aspects of the students' lives to be more supportive of them. Parents took their time to focus on the academic component of their

children's learning, supporting the child's work performance as well as their learning ability to ensure learning success. The results were supported by Bordalba and Bochaca (2019), who indicated that parent-teacher communication is critical as it is an effective tool that can be used to encourage their children to become self-directed learners.

Hamblin's (2018) study included 40 K–12 teachers, 12 secondary and 28 elementary, from several districts in a large metropolitan area in the Southwest to understand the views they had toward the effectiveness of parent-teacher communication. Hamblin gathered data through the questionnaire to solicit educators' views relating to useful behaviors that could be used to promote parent-teacher communication in the elementary and secondary levels. The questionnaire was used to rate educators' beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions in regard to parent-teacher communication. Hamblin established that openness and empathy between teachers and parents were invaluable in promoting parent-teacher communication, which was viewed indispensable as far as learners' academic performance is referenced. Hamblin showed a key gap in the literature, as quantitative methods were used to rate participants' views toward teacher-parent communication.

Sezgin and Er (2016) examined the extent of parental involvement in primary school children in first and fifth grade in terms of parent-teacher communication, home setting, and homework support. Their purpose was to measure the parent's level of involvement in their children's education in primary schools. Sezgin and Er also gave special regard to the following variables: (a) the parent's gender and educational background, (b) the child's class, (c) the type of school, and (d) the family's average

income. The quantitative data were collected from a Turkish Parent Involvement Scale 31 (TPIS) developed by Sezgin and Er (2016). Representation of the extent of parental involvement was measured by The Likert-scale survey items. Findings revealed that parental tasks performed most often involved communication with teachers and the school as well as parents' self-development toward becoming better involved. In relation to a study by Naqvi (2018) concerning African American fathers and Avnet et al. (2019), who focused on academic achievement and variables such as parent involvement, Sezgin and Er (2016) shared similar thoughts that the mother's level of communication and involvement were significantly higher than the father's constant need to communicate effectively.

Effective communication with parents is an important skill for teachers (Sezgin & Er, 2016). Communication can be through face-to-face conversations, phone calls, email, newsletters, weekly folders, written notes, and many other avenues. Naqvi (2018) carried out a study to determine the teacher's efforts at initiating contact between parents and teachers. Naqvi found that making positive contact with each parent at the beginning of the school year, either through phone calls or emails, is important in updating the teachers about the progress that the child has been making while at home. Hamblin (2018) also carried out a mixed-method analysis to determine how communication can be a good thing in fostering student achievement. Hamblin found that besides fostering improved relations with parents, effective communication can also help improve student achievement as was also supported by Y. T. Lin and Averill (2023). According to Yang et al. (2019), inadequate education in both parents and teachers could be the reason

behind an ineffective parent-teacher relationship. Most parents need to learn how to be effectively involved in their child's education (Yang et al., 2019). In some schools, however, involving parents is largely up to each individual teacher.

### **Parent-Teacher Relationship**

The parent-teacher relationship has been explored in the context of the learners' academic performance and development. The parent-teacher relationship is a collective effort between parents and teachers directed toward the primary purpose of supporting children's learning, with parents actively participating in their children's education. Guo and Kilderry (2018) aimed to understand the perceptions of early childhood teachers on parenting in a Chinese context. Their results highlighted the need for teachers to work with parents to educate them about the importance of their involvement in their children's education. Silinskas and Kikas (2019) supported the importance of parental involvement in children's education by highlighting the findings that low self-concept in math predicted increased parental control and perceived parental support was related to increased task persistence during homework. Findings have shown that a teacher's role includes ensuring parent education and learning since teachers are presumed to hold more knowledge and authority in terms of children's education (Guo & Kilderry, 2018). Guo and Kilderry explored the parent-teacher partnership from the perspective of the teacher. The dominant message from Guo and Kilderry's study was that parents are important in their children's education, which was also supported by Silinskas and Kikas (2019), and an idea that aligns with the dominant theme in scholarship on Chinese parenting regarding the importance of parental involvement in children's education (Silinskas &

Kikas, 2019). Parental involvement and educational beliefs are factors that could influence the education of their children.

The SES of the parents is considered to be a key aspect of parent-teacher communication and a child's academic performance. Specifically, parents' educational beliefs and growth in the academic achievement of kindergarten children are believed to be related to varying levels of SES (Elliott & Bachman, 2018; Puccioni et al., 2019). Based on Elliott and Bachman's (2018) study, there is no evidence to confirm that parental education levels or household income levels contributed to educational beliefs associated with the academic success of children from low-income families, especially when compared to high-income families. Puccioni et al. (2019) concluded that parents' school readiness beliefs were positively related to home-based involvement which also is positively associated with children's academic achievement. Elliott and Bachman (2018) found evidence to confirm that SES effects the beliefs of the parents regarding educational beliefs. In addition, parent education levels were a moderating variable in the association between parents' beliefs of school readiness and enrichment practices.

Researchers have also explored the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. This examination was conducted by Boonk et al. (2018), who concluded that parental involvement is related to children's academic achievement. The researchers' established some correlations between various parental involvement variables and academic achievement. Boonk et al. showed positive relationships associated with parents who have high expectations when it comes to the grades of their children, as well as the level of communication between the parents and children about

school-related topics. Parental involvement has some influence on the academic achievement of students. In most cases, parents and teachers report a lack of time as an essential aspect that negatively influences communication. Grijalva-Quiñonez et al. (2020) reported similar results, concluding that academic achievement influenced types of parental involvement in homework. For low-income families, some of the barriers that have been noted that influence parent teacher communication include the challenges that they may encounter while navigating their child's school settings and cultural incongruence between schools and families (L. W. Li et al., 2021).

Negative school experiences held by parents may also constitute a key barrier in their relationship with teachers. Learning institutions ought to offer guidance services to support parents in addressing these types of psychological problems (Guo & Kilderry, 2018). Such guidance should embolden the parents to pursue support and get information related to the key issues they worry about, to understand the improvement level of the class, to grasp the teachers' approach to education, and to learn how to behave under what conditions—providing the parents the required level of knowledge in creating dual effects by decreasing parents' negative thoughts relating to school, as well as increasing their interest in the school on the other (Naqvi, 2018).

There is a need for teachers and parents to work together for the children's education and well-being. Elliott and Bachman's (2018) study which was also supported by the findings from Puccioni et al. (2019), showed evidence that the level of SES matters when it comes to the level of involvement that parents have in their children's education. The relationship between parents and teachers is considered to be an important

factor in the quality of the communication between parents and teachers, as well as students' performance.

### **Parent-Teacher Communication**

Parents are typically meticulous about monitoring the relationships between their children and the adults who play a significant part in the children's lives. Parents' involvement can extend to the school environment, where parents monitor the teachers who care for their children to ensure that they can be relied on, especially when the performance of the children is concerned. (Thomas et al., 2019). In their effort to get involved in school and track their children's performances, Elliott and Bachman (2018) stated that teachers faced time constraints that often-caused difficulties in parent-teacher communication, which could hamper efforts to engage and maintain positive relationships, as time constraints frequently influenced the quality of time that parents had in communicating with teachers. Schools also have the responsibility to actively reach out to children's parents and caregivers to help in supporting children's learning and development (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Elliott and Bachman (2018) and Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) recommended that a balance needs to be integrated, including the use of modern technology for parents to communicate with teachers about their children's performance and efforts should focus on inclusive and welcoming school environments.

In the literature on parent-teacher communication, a focus has been on promoting it based on the perceived benefits. Bordialba and Bochaca (2019), Gartmeier et al. (2016), and Rattenborg et al. (2019) noted that there are different means and channels that can be

used to promote communication between teachers and parents and that most teachers need the training to be able to communicate with parents successfully to mitigate barriers of communication that can have negative effects on the children's performance. Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) noted that digital media for parent teacher communication has been increasingly popular. Informal training or workplace learning is a strategy that teachers use to improve their professional competencies. There is evidence to support informal learning processes where teachers learn while they are already working (T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Gartmeier et al. (2016) studied the parent-teacher communication competence of 677 German mathematics teachers, examining the number of times they were communicating about parents with colleagues and the time they have spent with the parents of their students. These researchers suggested that there was a relationship between teachers' competence in their conversations with parents and the number of times the teachers communicated with their co-teachers about parent-related issues (Gartmeier et al., 2016). There were positive outcomes when the teachers learned in a team (Gartmeier et al., 2016); however, the teachers mostly only shared their positive experiences with their parents to their co-workers. Gisewhite et al. suggested that appropriate preservice training on effective ways for teachers to communicate with parents would be beneficial to fostering the parent teacher relationship.

It is important to explore parents' attitudes regarding school communication because it is one of the ways through which a good relationship between teachers and parents can be enhanced. Palts and Harro-Loit (2015) analyzed the attitude of Estonian parents with children in PreK school toward the value of communication in the learning

process. These researchers conducted six focus group discussions conducted to gather data. The five types of communication patterns identified by Palts and Harro-Loit (2015) were: (a) “communication-literate and flexible” parents (p. 151) who are active participants in their children’s education; (b) “passive-positive” parents (p. 151), most commonly evident medium-sized rural and city schools and who actively support their children but provide no information to schools regarding their children’s needs; (c) “active-positive” parents (p. 152), most commonly evident in large city schools or medium and large rural schools and who give extra attention to communication; (d) “passive-negative” parents (p. 152), who is considered the most complicated type and who cause problems in the overall communication culture; and (e) “active-negative” parents (p. 152), who need support in improving their social skills and help teachers in developing a culture where communication with the teacher or school is important for the student’s academic achievement. Parents who infrequently communicate seem to be less concerned about their children’s well-being and academic performance (Hourri et al., 2019; Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015).

The changes in the nature of parent-teacher communication based on the development of new technologies have also been noted in the literature. Beecher and Buzhardt (2016) and Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) stated that the advancement in technology, such as the use of smartphones and medial social platforms, has revolutionized parent-teacher communication in recent years. There are researchers who explored the different modes of communication and recommended the use of smartphones to promote the quality, frequency, and value of communication between

parents and teachers (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Bordalba & Bochaca (2019)). Ozdamli and Yildiz (2017) conducted a study using the Parental Academic Support Scale to study 1,349 parents to assess the importance and frequency of communication across different modes of communication. These researchers established that parents prefer email communication, text messaging, and different types of social media communication. They found that smartphones have influenced how parents and teachers communicate and concluded that parents view academic support and new communication technologies as being significant for their children's education. The researchers also showed that parents perceived email as providing more immediate feedback and timely responses (Ozdamli & Yildiz, 2017). The use of digital technologies was also supported by the study conducted by Laho (2019) that examined parents' and teachers' perceptions and use of a learning management system for school-home communication in a rural K-12 school district. Laho concluded that families and teachers were comfortable with utilizing digital tools to communicate and traditional resources such as email and phones continued to be the preferred method of communication. Coelho et al. (2018) examined the opinions and expectations of the parents in terms of integrating mobile technologies in improving the relationship between school and family. In a survey where 790 parents participated, the opinions of the parents were generally positive on the usage of mobile devices for educational purposes. There were also positive perceptions of the use of mobile devices to improve school-family cooperation and family participation. Such findings provide evidence about the role that technology has in promoting parent-teacher communication. Kuusimäki et al. (2019) also noted the positive perceptions of parents and teachers with

using technology to foster a positive relationship regarding their child's learning.

### **Benefits of Parent-Teacher Communication**

Improved communication between parents and teachers could improve student motivation, engagement, efficacy, and, ultimately, academic achievement. The value of teacher-parent communication has been validated in many studies. Murray et al. (2015) stated that in the early childhood learning phase of education, parents who had better communication with teachers became more involved with their children's education at home and rated the educators' effectiveness more highly. Parents who were more involved with their children's education at home were more likely to engage in effective communication with their teachers (Murray et al., 2015). Parents who were involved were revealed to communicate regularly with the teachers of their children. The findings of Murray et al. (2015) were supported by Syuraini et al. (2022), who indicated that early childhood education learning outcomes were positively influenced by teacher-parent communication and parental participation.

The value of parent-teacher communication was also noted in situations where teachers determined to change the early childhood teaching environment in some significant way. Morrison et al. (2011) observed that family involvement in early childhood classrooms, especially when changes were made, made transitions easier and made program implementation smoother. McWayne et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of families' experiential knowledge in early childhood programs. These authors emphasized that parental feedback and input were very important and that parents could provide valuable ideas (Morrison et al., 2011). the parent-teacher role is a

collaborative one, ideally, rather than being a relationship in which the teacher simply tells the parent what he/she is doing (Morrison et al., 2011). The teacher-parent relationship is a two-way relationship because they should be helping one another to achieve a common goal.

The current state of parent-teacher communications as an area of investigation has received substantial attention. In the research presented in this section, I investigate the perspective of teachers regarding their communication with parents (Sheridan et al., 2019; Torres-Rendón & Zinsser, 2022), the nature of their connections with parents over time (Sheridan et al., 2019), and parental involvement as revealed in a statistical snapshot (Borup et al., 2019). These perspectives allow for a practical examination of a complex topic that benefits from alignment with real-world examples.

In parent-teacher relationships, as in all relationships, communication is most effective when it occurs through channels that have been opened for that express purpose. Anderson et al. (2019) examined the state of early education in the two counties that form an urban area of Omaha, Nebraska. They noted that while the area was impoverished and resources were scarce, great improvements had been made by opening up lines of communication between parents and teachers (Anderson et al., 2019). The researchers noted the value resulting from the simple realization on parents' parts that such communication was available, even before reaping the benefits of the resulting communication and cooperation between parents and teachers (Anderson et al., 2019).

The value of parent-teacher communication is evident even at the early stage of childhood learning. Various effects were identified when parents have built a relationship

and established communication with teachers as early as during childhood education (Anderson et al., 2019). As parents become more involved in their children's education, they build and establish better communication with teachers (Anderson et al., 2019). In the research paper presented herein, I further explore this concept by examining the perspective of parents and teachers with regard to the quality of their communications and how it can further improve. Given the identified benefit that comes from establishing good communications between parents and teachers, it is essential that it is explored to further improve it, especially in areas where it is not as prominent and where there are challenges getting parents involved and communicating with teachers.

### **Studies on Parent-Teacher Communication**

Studies on parent-teacher communication have extensively described the impact or effect that parent-teacher communication has on learners' success, particularly when academic accomplishment is contextualized. Researchers have focused on parent-teacher communication have suggested strategies to facilitate it, based on the benefits associated with it (Leenders et al., 2019; McWayne et al., 2022; Sheridan et al., 2019)). Murray et al. (2015) investigated the strategies used to facilitate parent-teacher communication using a mixed-method approach. As these researchers noted, the mode of communication between teachers and parents has significantly evolved over the past 2 decades (Murray et al., 2015). Currently, the researchers have established that technological methods are preferred compared to traditional face-to-face meetings (Leenders et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2015). Based on the study findings, it was established that the use of email, phone call, and social platforms were widely used to facilitate parent-teacher communication in

various settings. The same findings were reported by Sheridan et al. (2019), who also found modern modes of communication being used by parents to communicate with teachers concerning the well-being of their children.

While the above literature provides an overview of how communication between teachers and parents has been examined, Sheridan et al. (2019) noted that there is still a gap in the literature in documenting the perceptions that teachers and parents have concerning the value of their communication on students' performance. Although researchers have shown that effective home-school communication is central in influencing learner's attitudes towards education, limited research has nonetheless examined the extent to which parents and teachers perceive compunction between them to be effective. The scarcity of research on this topic provides a gap that I sought to address by examining teachers' and parents' perceptions concerning the value of communication between them, particularly when student performance is concerned.

### **Summary**

By conducting the above literature review, I sought to provide current literature underpinning the present study as well as the theoretical frameworks used to ground the study. As such, different themes emerged from the literature reviewed and as guided by the selected theories. The key themes that were identified include perceptions of communication (Bauer et al., 2016; Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Guo & Kilderry, 2018), communicating to expand academic success (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Willemse et al., 2018), and benefits of parent-teacher communication (Ozmen et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2019; Torres-Rendón & Zinsser, 2022). The literature review demonstrated that quality

parent-teacher communication is a critical aspect when it comes to educational outcomes (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Ozmen et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2019; Willemse et al., 2018). As much as the studies might differ in terms of their settings, methodology, and approach, researchers repeatedly stressed that parent-teacher communication is a positive aspect that impacts quality outcomes in the education sector (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Willemse et al., 2018). As supported by various studies that were reviewed relating to the topic using the identified themes, I identified a gap in practice relating to the quality of parent-teacher communication in early childhood programs that serve low SES students. In particular, there is a gap in practice regarding the lower quality of teachers' and parents' perceptions towards the value or quality of communication between them, leading to poor student outcomes (Gisewhite et al., 2019)). To address this gap, I conducted the present study to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the Northeastern region of the United States and to explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology, research design, data collection instruments, role of the researcher, and ethical considerations that governed the present study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. The specific focus was on participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. The study's purpose aligned with the current literature that linked greater academic performance to effective communication between parents and teachers (G. Li et al., 2019; Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019). This chapter focuses on the methodology used to conduct the study and details about the research design, the researcher's role, methodology for data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter ends with a summary highlighting the important details.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The phenomenon addressed in this study was participants' perspectives on the quality of communication between low-SES parents and their children's teachers.

Through the current study, I addressed the following central research questions:

- RQ 1: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication in Head Start programs?
- RQ 2: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on how they can improve the quality of their communication in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States?

Mixed-method, quantitative, and qualitative designs are common research

methods used in social science. The quantitative method is often used, especially in the sciences, to add rigor to the study through outcomes that are possible to quantify (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative methods include collecting and translating data into numerical form to permit statistical representation (Creswell, 2009). Researchers use mixed-methods research when an exploration requires combining elements from both qualitative and quantitative methods (Silverman, 2016). In a mixed-method design, both descriptive text and quantitative data are used in the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). This approach provides a balance by using the beneficial qualities of both quantitative and qualitative methods to minimize the weakness of either approach (Connelly, 2009). Although researchers have agreed on the validity of a quantitative method in adding value to research, quantitative methods are not suitable in instances where the researcher seeks to explore individuals' experiences that are nonquantifiable (Mankelwicz & Kitahara, 2010). In this study, the goal was to examine the participants' individual human perspectives rather than numerical data. Thus, the quantitative method was not considered appropriate for this study. Because the purpose did not require quantifying any element, the mixed-method research design was also not considered appropriate.

The qualitative method is useful in research where the goal is to explore an event or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). As the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and to explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved, this basic qualitative method allowed the participants to express their subjective experiences in descriptive terms (see

Patton, 2015) Therefore, I considered the qualitative method appropriate for this study.

A qualitative study can be ethnographic, case study, grounded theory, historical design, phenomenological research design, or basic qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). An ethnographic design, which consists of participant observation in their natural, cultural environment (Sutton & Austin, 2015), was rejected because the study's purpose did not require culture-specific insights. A case study design, which is used when a researcher seeks to answer "how" questions from multiple data sources (Hamblin, 2018), was rejected because it does not provide a comprehensive approach through which the perceptions of teachers and parents concerning the value of communication between them could be examined. The grounded theory research design, which is used when a researcher seeks to develop a theory concerning a phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015), was rejected because the purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions that teachers and parents, not to form a theory concerning the quality of their communication. A historical design, which is used when examining historical events (Sutton & Austin, 2015), was rejected because the focus in this study was on a phenomenon in the present.

The phenomenological research design consists of creating a meaning based on human experience (Moustakas, 1994) and was considered unfit for this study. The phenomenological research design, by providing direction and meaning to an individual's experience, allows the emergence of a discovery (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). It provides a tool to analyze the perceptions emerging from individuals' experiences with respect to a phenomenon (Silverman, 2016). The phenomenological research design would have been an appropriate choice for this study if the purpose was to solely explore

the participants' lived experiences (see Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Through this study, I aimed not only to examine the perspectives of a population but also to provide recommendations based on those perspectives.

In alignment with the needs of the present study, the basic qualitative research method is selected. A basic qualitative research study is applicable in the situation that prompt symbolic interaction, phenomenology, and constructionism (Merriam, 2009). It is utilized by researchers when the focus of the research is to understand people's perspectives on their experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in a Head Start program and their thoughts on how this communication might be improved. The specific focus was on participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States. Another rationale for selecting a qualitative study was that it can be used to collect detailed information to facilitate a deeper exploration of perceptions, experiences, and understanding of a phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a result, the basic qualitative research method was used in the present study to address the purpose. I conducted semistructured interviews with both teachers and parents.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My primary role as the researcher of this study was to design and conduct the study (see Flick, 2018). As the researcher of this study, I was responsible for obtaining permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. Additionally, I obtained permission to virtually interview teachers and parents from the

selected school by contacting the school director (Appendix B). I was personally responsible for inviting people to participate. As an educational coordinator and settlement house employee, I had access to personnel and children files, which I accessed with the school director's permission. Although I obtained permission before accessing the files, the individuals whose records I selected for recruitment in the study remained confidential between me and the participant in question.

I gathered all the data in this study, and every concern from the participants was personally handled by me, consistent with the researcher's responsibilities (see Holloway & Galvin, 2016). During data collection, my role was to present the questions and allow the interviewees to respond. I used a designed interview protocol consisting of semistructured questions. I ensured anonymity to participants by removing any personally identifiable information and replacing the identity of each participant with a specific alpha-numeric code.

No professional or personal relationship existed between me and the group of individuals who were participants in the study. The absence of such a relationship could have been a barrier, as it would require forming an acquaintance before beginning the interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015); however, the absence of a prior relationship ensured that no previous contact affected the data collection process (Patton, 2015).

Concerning bias, it was possible that familiarity with the topic could be a source of bias (Silverman, 2016). In this regard, I identified three beliefs that could result in biases. First, I believe that communication between parents and teachers is overall a positive phenomenon. Second, I believe that communication between parents and

teachers could have greater significance for students from high-poverty areas than those from more prosperous areas. Finally, I believe it is possible that parent-teacher communication could help improve the outcomes of students. To mitigate the influence of these biases on the research process or the findings, I facilitated this research study through a designed interview protocol featuring-structured question (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additionally, I sought to minimize the research bias through member checking (see Flick, 2018). Member checking is a technique that qualitative researchers use to check and test the study results' accuracy by sharing preliminary findings with the participants to ensure that they convey their intended responses. In this technique, I shared preliminary analysis with the participants before the final analysis to ensure that the findings depicted their actual responses (see Flick, 2018).

## **Methodology**

This section consists of the study's methodological details, including information about participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and the plan for data analysis.

### **Participant Selection**

The study participants included parents and teachers of early childhood children who were currently enrolled in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area. The Head Start program is an initiative that promotes school readiness for young children from low-income families through local communities. The program supports the mental, social, and emotional development of children birth to age 5 (ECLKC, 2016). The program was an

appropriate focus for this study because the purpose was to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other and their thoughts on how this communication might be improved in a high-poverty area.

In a basic qualitative study design, the small sample size is considered appropriate because my purpose was to investigate the topic of interest in detail and document new knowledge concerning it, which previously was undocumented (Creswell, 2009). There was a target total of 12 to 15 participants. Of these, half of the participants were parents and half were teachers. According to Guest et al. (2006), 10 to 16 participants are sufficient for the emergence of themes concerning the research question in a qualitative study.

Participant selection was based on the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria differed between the two groups of participants. For parents, excluding foster parents and guardians with children in Head Start programs, the inclusion criteria were to have their child enrolled in a Head Start program. For teachers, the inclusion criteria were that they were employed at the time of the research by the students' school and had a minimum of 5 years of experience as teachers.

From the selected target population, the sample was selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from the available teachers who teach and parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start program (see Patton, 2015). I began by contacting the school director, first through email and then via phone, to introduce the study during the initial contact and obtain informal authorization for distributing emails to recruit the participants and conduct virtual interviews (Corbin &

Strauss, 2015). At this stage, I introduced the research purpose and its significance and obtained verbal approval, followed by formal, written permission (Appendix B).

Authorization was obtained to distribute invitations to participate and consent form to potential participants and conduct virtual interviews relevant to communication between parents and teachers.

Based on the inclusion criteria, the school director helped identify participants who were suitable for the study and provided their email addresses to me. I sent teachers and parents an Invitation to Participate and the consent form containing information about the research, including its purpose and the selection criteria required for participants. The email included my phone number and email address for further communication or questions (Silverman, 2016). The email also included information that informed potential participants of what was expected from them in the data collection process. Once a person expressed a desire to participate in the study, they contacted me by using my email address or phone number in the Invitation to Participate and consent form. To be included in the study, the parents had a child enrolled in the school, and teachers had at least 5 years of teaching experience. As part of the Invitation to Participate and consent form, each participant received an informed consent form, which included my contact details. Participants were requested to respond to the informed consent email with the statement, "I consent." They were also asked to print the email as a copy of their consent for their records.

Once a potential participant expressed a desire to participate in the study, I verified that their experiences matched the study's criteria (see J. Smith, 2015). To verify

participant criteria, I relied on their testimony. Once participants were verified and informed consent obtained, I scheduled an interview either on Zoom or on the platform of their choice. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' permission obtained in the informed consent form. I used a backup device in case there was any difficulty with the original device.

### **Instrumentation**

In this basic qualitative study, the source of data consisted of qualitative interview transcripts and audio tapes that followed an interview protocol. Qualitative interviews consisted of researchers asking open-ended questions and audio recording the responses (Creswell, 2009) of 16 participants during one-on-one interviews lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour. As supported by Creswell and Poth (2018), the interview instrument's content validity was achieved through a panel of experts in early childhood education. Here, I used the panel members' knowledge in the field to assess each question's correctness before including it in the interview protocol. The experts were asked to review each question based on the literature reviewed and theoretical underpinnings underlying the current study to certain that the interview instrument measured the intended content (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview method and questions were guided by the interview protocol. The interview protocol included the introductory remarks beginning each interview session, followed by the interview questions.

### ***Interview Protocol***

Based on the purpose of the study, open-ended questions in an interview protocol (Silverman, 2016) were used to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives on the

quality of their communication and their thoughts on how communication might be improved in high-poverty areas. My interview protocol was based on the literature reviewed and as informed by the conceptual framework used. The study's protocol was reviewed through a panel of experts, who were asked to give their opinion as to whether the questions asked in the interview protocol were sufficient to answer the research questions, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Flick (2018). In so doing, I selected two peers in the research area who was separate from the committee members. These peers were selected through two criteria: (a) being a professor at a local college specializing in the field relevant to the current study and (b) having at least 5 years of teaching experience. Once identified, I provided the research protocol to them to determine whether the interview questions are sufficient to answer the research questions (Patton, 2015). Based on their feedback, changes may be made to ensure the final interview questions help obtain the responses needed to answer the research questions (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

A potential limitation of this instrument is the researcher's bias (J. Smith, 2015). The potential limitation of bias was addressed by multiple strategies, including a systematic interview protocol, member checking, and the use of the handheld tape recorder during the interviews, the use of which was indicated in the informed consent form, as suggested by Flick (2018). I used the same systematic interview protocol for all participants in their respective groups, namely that of parents and teachers, resulting in even data collection process for individual participants, limiting the possibility of bias that could have occurred if different questions or procedures were followed for different

participants, as Merriam and Grenier (2018) suggested. Next, I conducted a peer review of the interview questions to help ensure they align with the study's purpose and are feasible. The use of an interview protocol, which was developed beforehand and was used for each of the interview sessions, ensured that no ad-hoc decisions were made during the interview process that could introduce bias, as per the recommendations of Merriam and Grenier (2018). I also used expert reviewers to review the final data analysis to check for bias. For this purpose, I gained assistance from the two experts who performed content validity for the interviews. The expert reviewers were provided with the final analysis, with all the information that could be used to identify participants removed, through email, and their feedback was used to make necessary changes to reduce bias. Member checking was performed with all the participants after data analysis has been completed and a report of the findings developed, as per Patton (2015). I asked for feedback from the participants on the representation of their final data to ensure the views of the participants are not distorted. Participants were encouraged to contact me through email or phone to share their feedback, should they have any. Open-ended questions guided the interview protocol. In this qualitative research, I used "open-ended questions that are few and intend to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (see Creswell, 2009, p. 216).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The data for this study were collected through interviews with parents and teachers of early childhood children ages 3 to 5 years who are currently enrolled in a Head Start program and who have 1 more year before leaving the Head Start program.

The process of data collection consisted of individual, one-on-one, in-person interviews with eight to 10 teachers and eight to 10 parents. This section details the procedures that were used for recruitment, participation, and data collection.

Before beginning the study, I obtained Walden's Institutional Board Review (IRB) permission to conduct the study (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). Next, I obtained site authorization from the Head Start Director/Early Learn Coordinator of the program from which participants were recruited. Since the district requires no formal application to conduct the study, I informed the Head Start Director/Early Learn Coordinator when the research process began. I met all IRB compliance requirements and sent formal communication via email and obtained permission for site authorization (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). At this stage, I introduced the research purpose and its significance and obtain verbal approval, followed by formal, written permission (see Silverman, 2016).

I used parent contact information from a database, selection based on criteria, and email invitations to participate with consent forms containing information about the research, including its purpose and criteria. Holloway and Galvin (2016) recommended including a phone number and email address for communication in the invitation; therefore, my phone number and email address was included for further communication. Each potential participant was directed to read the Invitation to Participate and consent form and respond via email or phone within 1 week if they wished to volunteer as a participant.

Patton (2015) recommended that Invitation to Participate and consent form include details on the nature of the study and the requirements from the participants. The

email included information on the selection criteria to participate in the study. After understanding the conditions and the purpose of the study, the potential participants were encouraged to indicate their desire to participate in the study by contacting me using the email address or phone number. Once a potential participant expressed a desire to participate in the study, I verified that their experiences matched the study's criteria, as suggested by J. Smith (2015), and I relied on the participants' testimony. The verification process was more straightforward, as I depended on the participants' testimony to verify the participants' experiences. Finally, as part of the Invitation to Participate, each potential participant was emailed a copy of the informed consent form and was encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification regarding the study. After the verified participants responded to the email with "I consent," their recruitment for the current study was considered completed. If I did not recruit enough interested participants, I planned to use snowballing as a method for recruitment.

After the participants were recruited, I scheduled an interview session with each participant via phone within 1 week. The date for the interview was based on the convenience of both the participant and the researcher. Due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the suggested interviews took place virtually using Zoom or GoToMeeting or as a form of video conferencing. The interview date and time was decided beforehand through discussion with the participants over phone after obtaining the informed consent to avoid confusion and enable convenience. The one-on-one interviews consisted of open-ended questions asked to the participants. Their responses were recorded using a handheld audio recorder.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol, which was developed and was used for each of the interview sessions. The interview protocol included the introductory remarks beginning each interview session and the interview questions (Silverman, 2016). During the interviewing process, I ensured that the participant was reminded of their rights, voluntary participation, and consent form details that describe the nature of interactions between me as the researcher and participants and the scope of the data collection process. After reminding them of their participation, I informed the participants that the interviews were recorded as a preventive to data loss. In case the participants refuse to be recorded, then I ensured that adequate notes were taken in the filed journal to supplement their responses. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. If a participant withdraws from the study during the data collection process, all data collected from that participant up to that point were permanently destroyed (Merriam & Grenier, 2018).

At the end of the interviews, the participants exited from the study through a debriefing procedure. During the debriefing, I explained the follow-up proceedings regarding data analysis and reporting the findings. Finally, the participants who took part in the study were sent a personal message from me thanking them for their participation. After the interview ended, the audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Open coding was used by the research to perform data analysis. The six-step procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) for data analysis was used to

conduct the analysis. Accordingly, the following six steps coding protocol or procedure was applied.

1. First, I read through the data to ensure that I was acquainted with the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
2. Second, I reread data to look for repeated words or phrases and assign unique codes to generate initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3. Third, after identifying repeated phrases and concepts and generating initial codes, I searched for themes as patterns in the initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
4. Fourth, upon discovering themes, they were reviewed against the document to add, remove, or merge themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
5. I defined each theme with a short description and a name (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
6. The last step was writing up a draft of the analysis based on the themes identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Discrepant data, if any, were reported to ensure that a more complete view of the collected data was presented (Merriam & Grenier, 2018).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). This study was established through multiple approaches as part of the data collection and data analysis procedures. Credibility refers to the degree to which the findings align with reality through internal

validity (Flick, 2018). Transferability refers to the extent to which it is possible to apply the study results to other situations or conditions (Patton, 2015). Dependability involves strategies that ascertain the ability to repeat the research procedures in a similar context resulting in similar results (Silverman, 2016). Confirmability describes the degree of objectivity of the findings (Merriam & Grenier, 2018).

The trustworthiness of findings in this study was established, beginning with identifying potential threats to the findings (see Flick, 2018). A threat identified is the potential to misrepresent the data, especially the responses of the participants during the interviews, which can threaten the credibility of the study (see Patton, 2015). To address this threat, I used a handheld tape recorder during the interview sessions. I personally transcribed the recorded audio in order to ensure no discrepancy between the mechanical recordings and the transcribed words. Providing accurate transcripts based on recorded audio, representing the actual words spoken during the interviews, provided a method to ensure credibility (see J. Smith, 2015).

The trustworthiness of the study may also be threatened due to inconsistency during the research process, which could affect the dependability of the research (see Flick, 2018). Such inconsistency may emerge from the absence of a systematic interview protocol for all participants, resulting in an uneven data collection process for individual participants, influencing the accuracy with which their experiences are captured (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). To ensure the dependability of the study, I used a systematic interview protocol based on the recommendation provided by Holloway and Galvin (2016). The interview protocol was used to ensure the interviews are the same for all participants in

their respective groups, namely that of parents and teachers. The use of an interview protocol, which was developed beforehand and was used for each of the interview sessions, to ensure that no ad-hoc decisions were made during the interview process that could introduce inconsistency, and threatening dependability, as noted by Merriam and Grenier (2018). Dependability establishes consistent and repeatable findings.

Confirmability is described as the magnitude to which the study results reflect the actual study and not based on the investigator's bias (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). As per the recommendations of Merriam and Grenier (2018), I kept a reflective journal which I used to document personal feelings, prejudices, and other insights that can influence data analysis. Furthermore, I achieved conformability by clearly describing how conclusions and interpretations were established and demonstrating that the findings was solely derived from the study's data (see Birt et al., 2016). In reporting findings in the qualitative research, I achieved this by providing rich quotes from the study participants (see Birt et al., 2016).

In order for transferability to be established in the study, readers were provided with evidence showing that the research findings could be applied to other populations, times, situations, and contexts. While it is not possible to prove that the research findings apply to different contexts, I focused on providing evidence to help others form judgments regarding the transferability of the findings to their setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba, I used the technique of providing thick descriptions regarding the phenomenon. I provided a detailed account of the data collection process. I considered the impact of socio-cultural factors on the data

collection process (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The information shared included details such as the interviews' duration, where the interviews took place, the interview session, and other aspects of the data collection process (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together with the social and cultural contexts and the findings of the study, readers will be able to form judgments regarding transferability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

To conduct an ethical study, I began by obtaining CITI training for ethical research and by reading guidelines provided by American Psychological Association (APA) on how to ensure that the study was within the required ethical framework. In so doing, I ended by identifying and minimizing risks that were potentially likely to emerge during the planning of the study, participants' selection and recruitment, data collection, and data analysis processes (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). This included the identification of physical and psychological harm, as well as possible risks that could undermine participants' confidentiality. Ethical research is of invaluable significance because it promotes the acceptability and applicability of the study findings (Flick, 2018). In addition, ethical research ensures that the relevant practices that seek to promote participants' safety and confidentiality are adhered to for it to be valid (Flick, 2018).

Before starting the study process, including participants' recruitment and data collection, I sought permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board to authorize the study (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Upon approval (#05-13-22-0392754), I began the data collection process by seeking authorization from the school director. The process was critical because I need a gatekeeper's approval permission to access the

teachers and parents for participation in this study (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Participants' recruitment began after I obtained approval from the IRB and the site director.

Participants whose contact details were provided by the school director were contacted through email. The Invitation to Participate and consent form included information regarding the study and an informed consent form. The informed consent form ensured that participants would take part in this study after understanding their rights and risks. No participant who did not sign and return the informed consent form was included in the study. No participants voluntarily withdrew from the study which did not require additional recruitment.

Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study, but no participants chose to withdraw. In addition, I ensured that any distressing aspects were solved amicably to allow them to continue with the study. Besides disguising participants' identities (see Flick, 2018), I ensured that the output from data analysis, which was in the form of electronic and hard copies, was well protected and stored using a unique password (see Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The purpose was to prevent third parties from accessing the data before permission, thereby protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality (see Merriam & Grenier, 2018).

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I provided a comprehensive portrayal description of the present study's research methodology. I discussed the researcher's role, participant selection criteria, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, and

ethical procedures. Moreover, I also outlined vital techniques and strategies that strengthened the present study's reliability and validity. In the next section, Chapter 4, I present the research findings, analysis, and discussion.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and to explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. I employed NVivo12 by QSR to assist in organizing the data and determining the hierarchy of themes across the interviews. Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis was used, which involves six steps: (a) familiarizing myself with the data, (b) generating codes, (b) constructing themes, (d) reviewing potential themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. The following research questions guided me in completing the study:

RQ 1: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication in Head Start programs?

RQ 2: What are parents' and teachers' perspectives on how they can improve the quality of their communication in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States?

The fourth chapter of the study contains the results of the thematic analysis of the interviews with parents and teachers. In this chapter, I discuss the results of the semistructured interviews with the Head Start parents and teachers. First, the demographics of the participants are discussed to gain an idea of their background. The data analysis process of the interviews are presented to demonstrate how the themes were generated through the thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006). I then present and explain the findings of the thematic analysis of the interviews, along with

direct quotes of the participants. Finally, a summary concludes the fourth chapter.

### **Setting**

The semistructured interviews for this study were conducted from the privacy of my home through Zoom or by phone. Participants selected included parents and teachers of early childhood children who are currently enrolled in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area. There were eight teachers and eight parents who agreed to take part in my study. All 16 participants were (a) parents whose child was enrolled in early childhood program (3–5 years old) attends a Head Start school; OR (b) a teacher who teaches early childhood education at a Head Start school; (c) an adult older than 18 years; and (d) teaching experience of at least 5 years. No unexpected situations affected the analysis of the study results. Interviews were conducted in the privacy of my home by Zoom, and I transcribed each interview word for word and started the coding and analysis process. Each participant was given a code: T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8 and P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8.

The parents who took part in the study were all from low-income families. This means that they earn less than twice the federal poverty line of \$52,492 for two adults and two related children. Children aged 0 to 5 years from low-income families in the United States are eligible for the free Head Start and Early Start programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). All teachers who participated in this study were required to have a minimum of 5 years teaching experience. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' code, gender, and ethnicity.

**Table 1***Research Participants*

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Participant	Gender	Ethnicity
T1	F	Asian American	P1	F	Asian American
T2	F	African American	P2	F	African American
T3	F	Hispanic	P3	F	African American
T4	F	Asian American	P4	F	Hispanic
T5	F	Hispanic	P5	F	Hispanic
T6	F	African American	P6	F	African American
T7	F	Hispanic	P7	F	Hispanic
T8	F	Bangladeshi	P8	F	African American

**Data Collection**

After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB, I began data collection process by sending out 19 email invitations. Nine invitations were sent to teachers and 10 to parents; however, out of the 19, only 17 agreed and 16 met the inclusion criteria. These 16 participants were from a Head Start program who taught at the Head Start Program or had children enrolled in a Head Start program in a northeastern state in the United States. The data collection instrument used was the interview protocol. First, before their scheduled interviews, the participants were emailed consent forms and replied, "I consent." Second, prior to each interview, I went through consent forms and their invitations. Third, at the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the study's purpose and the research question. Participants were reminded that they could end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time and were notified of their right to withdraw from their study.

Fourth, during the interview process, each participant was asked questions based

on the research questions. Fifth, before each interview ended, I expressed my gratitude to each participant, thanking them for their contribution to my study and assured participants that I would be available to answer any questions that they might have about the study. Participants were reminded they would receive a summary of the study findings to review.

The data were recorded using the default Zoom recorder. Even so, permission was first obtained from the participants before the recording. They all agreed that the interview sessions can be recorded. For backup, notes were taken in with the use of paper and pen in each interview. There were slight variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. As described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the plan was to collect data by using semistructured interviews from 12–15 participants. Ultimately, 16 participants were used as 16 responded. No unusual circumstances were encountered during data collection.

The data collection process took approximately 4 weeks. Regarding location of data collection, all 16 participants were interviewed online via Zoom. Each participant selected a convenient time and day to be interviewed. Regarding the frequency of the interviews, the individual semistructured were conducted every 2 days depending on the availability of the participants. All participants were interviewed once. Regarding duration, the length of each interview was between 50 and 60 minutes.

No unanticipated situations took place during the data collection process. All steps of the data collection process shared in Chapter 3 were followed accurately and appropriately in the data collection process. I audio recorded the interviews through

Zoom. All written documents were stored in a secure locked filing cabinet, and digital files were stored on a personal computer with protected passcodes.

### **Data Analysis**

In this basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews, I examined parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other in a Head Start program and their perspectives on how this communication might be improved. The audio-recorded interviews from all 16 participants were transcribed appropriately with the aid of NVivo 12 software. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach: (a) familiarizing myself with the data, (b) generating codes, (c) constructing themes, (d) reviewing potential themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. I started the analysis process by reading and rereading each transcribed interview line by line, following the six thematic analysis steps.

During the familiarization of data phase, I familiarized myself with the data. With the help of NVivo 12 by QSR, I found over 50 codes, out of which about 10 categories emerged. From those categories, four main themes emerged: two from the interviews with parents, and another two from the interviews with teachers. Overall, the NVivo 12 software helped me to find themes as it provided me with the tools that I used to classify, sort, and arrange my data in ways that enabled me to identify patterns, categories, and themes. In essence, it helped me with the coding process as I used this software to analyze the content and the sentence structure within it, which allowed me to identify themes. Tables 1 to 6 show the coding process of the two sets of participants. Table 7

contains the themes per participant group and research question. There were no unusual situations that affected the data analysis process.

## **Interview Analysis**

### ***Phase 1: Familiarizing Myself with the Data***

In the first step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) analysis, I familiarized myself with the collected data. To confirm the accuracy of the data, I compared each audio recording with the written transcripts. I printed each interview and organized them based on the order of the interview. Each participant was given a code to ensure privacy. I read and reread the transcripts being observant and aware of repetition in the data. I read the transcripts a third time and made notes. Phrases, paragraphs, and sentences that I found to be meaningful to the topic were highlighted. The highlighted data were then reviewed afterward in order to establish whether it could help answer the research questions. The adoption of NVivo enabled the use of various coding strategies during the six-step thematic approach to data analysis.

### ***Phase 2: Generating Codes***

In Phase 2, I used open coding. During the open coding phase, I read each transcript and made notes in the margins. I analyzed each line of the transcripts, hand coding and identifying key concepts and repeated segments relevant to the conceptual framework and research question. Table 2 is an example of direct quotes from transcripts and the codes that were found from teachers. It shows an example of quotes from the teachers' interviews and the codes that were developed from their responses. Table 3 shows the codes and categories from the teachers' interviews.

**Table 2***Sample Codes and Supporting Quotes: Teachers' Interviews*

Sample Participant Responses	Codes
T1: "Definitely the language sometimes for certain families, because I, I could only speak English, Chinese, and most of the family from the area that I work at, they speak Spanish. I try to help them but sometimes it is not as accurate."	Do not speak the language. Issues with language
T7: "I think a big one would be just for me, obviously with the language, I could have someone else help me out and someone who speaks the language."	Need assistance with language. Need of translators
T3: "Well, because we get feedback back and forth, you know, it's, I haven't really had any parents not answer any text or not respond to anything we send them or done with, you know, communicated with them."	Getting feedback back and forth Parents responsive to communication
T2: "So, I think that that could definitely be a barrier if they [young parents] aren't feeling like maybe we aren't doing as much as we can or maybe they don't really care to be as involved. So, I think that that could definitely be a barrier of the parents not really maybe taking what we do as seriously as we would like, or I can't say we since I'm just talking for myself, as I would like. With these young ages. I think it gets a little bit hard sometimes."	Barriers if parents aren't feeling teachers are doing as much as they can.  Barriers if young parents aren't feeling teachers are doing as much as they can. Barrier of not taking what we do seriously. Younger Parents do not care to be involved
T6: "The younger generation was very challenging for me because a lot of them didn't know what to expect or they were just... How do I say it? They were just reckless, I can say. They've just didn't understand, and their mindset was just like, "Oh, this is the school. They just do whatever they want. I'm just here to pick him or her up and then take them home. This is not a real parent teacher conference. You're just a head start. You're just a babysitter thing," because that's what I would get from my younger generation parents"	Feeling that teachers are not doing as much. Parents do not care to be involved. Difficult to communicate with younger parents. Younger parents do not know what to expect Younger parents are more challenging to communicate with
T1: "If they [parents] reply, [it] is very satisfying because you need to get the stuff from the parents. I mean, get them to cooperate with you and then to help the child inside the classroom...I feel like it is a cooperative relationship."	Satisfaction from reply from parents Cooperation between teacher and the parent
T5: "When I think of it, I think of it as a community effort that everyone is taking part... Everyone that has taken part in this child's life is a part of this community and we all need to be aware so we can get the best outcome for them at home and in the classroom to build that partnership that we need."	Community effort with parents and teachers Build partnerships.
T7: "I definitely do think that the parent-teacher [communication] should be something that I think everyone feels comfortable with and everyone should go at how they choose to do it."	Comfortable parent-teacher communication More open communication
T4: "Understanding on both sides." "And again, I think that level of trust is so important to develop for them to be more open."	Mutual understanding Mutual trust between parents and teachers Open and honest communication
T6: "I've seen it [engagement] increase during the, the constant communication with the parents. When it's parent engagement with the children. When you ask them to come into school to engage like a parent children date, they will come in to engage with the child, like do certain activities."	Relationship with parents has increased. Constant communication between parents and teachers Improved communication

**Table 3***Sample Codes and Categories: Teachers' Interviews*

Codes	Categories
Codes dealing with communication barriers due to ESL parents and younger parents	
Do not speak the language.	Barriers with language
Issues with language	Barriers with communication between themselves and parents
Nonresponsive parents	Non-responsive parents
Lack of communication	Poor communication between themselves and parents
Needs Conversation with parents	Improvement in communication
Getting feedback back and forth	Effective communication
Parents responsive to communication	
Want improvement in communication	
Efforts in communication	Barriers in communication between themselves and parents
Barriers if parents aren't feeling teachers are doing as much as they can.	Minimal efforts
Feeling that teachers are not doing as much.	No efforts from younger parents to enhance communication with teachers
Parents do not care to be involved	Challenges with expectations
Difficult to communicate with younger parents.	Lack communication
Unaware of expectations as stated by the teachers.	
Younger parents are more challenging to communicate with	
Younger parents do not know what to expect	
Comfortable parent-teacher communication	Having more open communication with parents
More open communication	confidence, and cooperation
Codes dealing with mutual understanding, trust,	
Mutual understanding	Respectful environment and relationship
Mutual trust between parents and teachers	Having mutual = trust with parents
Open and honest communication	
Get parents to cooperate.	Share common goals regarding communication
Set goals and expectations	Support
Providing support to build relationships.	Build relationships
Relationship with parents builds with time	Active communication and interaction
Relationship with parents has increased thanks to constant communication with them	
Improved communication	
More conferences and meetings	Methods to Improve communication
Brief monthly meetings	Strategies to improve communication
Meeting can be over zoom, phone call, in person, or via other applications	

The codes and categories in Table 3 align with RQ 1 and RQ 2. The categories answer RQ 1 by illustrating the perspectives of the teachers on the quality of communication between them and teachers in the Head Start program. Table 4 depicts how codes from interviews with parents transformed into categories from where the themes were developed.

**Table 4***Sample Coding Process of the Parents' Interviews*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Teachers not communicating; no notice of events/closings. Teachers do not communicate directly with parents.	Failures of communications Failures to communicate directly with parents
Request for better communication, Teachers need to communicate directly with parents. Work towards better communication	Barriers with direct communication as teachers are failing to communicate directly with parents. Barriers towards better communication with teachers
Understanding teachers are busy but must communicate with parents.  Attempts to communicate.	Challenges with schedule which allows limited communication
Parents not satisfied nor okay with communication. Feedback from assistant teacher vs. main teacher. Collaborative effort but not balanced between teachers.	Lack of communication Minimal efforts Communicate from assistant vs. main teachers.
Parents want a phone call by next day or email as a second option. Parent expectations	Parents expect next day contact
Best communication methods	Parents felt best ways to communicate was through online applications (like Dojo), text, in-person, phone call. Different modes of communication
Making sure parents receive newsletters { forms of communication } in timely manner. Parents wanted more efforts from teachers to get info out Parents expect open and Honesty in communication.	Efforts in how communication is distributed and when Parents want more information from parents Open and Honest communication
Parents prefer: Ability for face-to-face feedback Desire teachers to be approachable/available	Face to face communication Face to face interaction Approachable and available interactions
Teacher should be approachable, professional. Build trust with teachers	Mutual trust and professionalism
Partnership and relationship between parent and teacher	Partnership and relationship

### ***Phase 3: Searching for Themes/Constructing Themes***

This step involved searching for themes. I collated codes into potential themes and gathered all data that were relevant to each theme. The two tentative potential themes that emerged from the teachers' interviews included the following. Theme 1 was:

Teachers perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between parents and teachers. Teachers believe that there is a communication barrier between themselves due to English being a second language for many parents, and there is no effort from younger parents which negatively affects the quality of communication. Theme 2 was: Teachers believe that communication with parents can be improved by developing a mutual understanding of trust, confidence, and respect in teachers, and being cooperative.

The first theme shows the perceptions of teachers regarding the barriers to good communication between themselves and parents in the Head Start program. The categories in Table 3 show that according to the teachers, there exists barriers with language between themselves and parents, there is poor communication between themselves and parents, and there are no efforts from younger parents to enhance communication with teachers. These categories became the first theme.

The second theme demonstrates the way that teachers feel regarding how communication between themselves and parents in the Head Start program can be improved. The categories in Table 3 above show that according to the teachers, communication between themselves and parents could be improved through active communication and interaction between themselves and parents, having mutual trust with parents, respectful environment and relationship, and sharing common goals regarding

communication. These categories became the second theme. I created or generated the initial themes. I continued refining themes and identifying relations with the themes that connected to the research questions.

#### ***Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes***

During Phase 4, I evaluated the thematic data two more times. This step was focused on theme review. I reviewed, modified, and developed the preliminary themes that I had identified in Phase 3. I reviewed the themes to ensure they all make sense. I compiled all the data that was relevant to each theme. This process was made easier and quicker by the NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software that I was using. The data associated with each theme were color-coded. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility within the study, a peer debriefed who had a solid understanding of qualitative research, and the phenomena reviewed the themes.

#### **Table 5**

##### *Sample Categories and Themes: Teachers' Interviews*

Categories	Themes
Barriers in communication/language Need assistance in terms of language barrier issues. Parents don't speak the language/need interpreter. No efforts from younger parents to enhance communication with teachers.	Theme 1: Teachers believe that there is a communication barrier between themselves and parents due to English being a second language for many parents, and there is no effort from younger parents which negatively affects the quality of communication (Answer to RQ1)
Respectful environment and relationship Having mutual respect and trust with parents	Theme 2: Teachers believe that communication with parents can be improved by developing mutual respect and trust with parents, and building relationships with parents (Answer to RQ2)

#### ***Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes***

The fifth step involved finalization and definition of themes. I looked for

related patterns that were combined and clustered into themes. After identifying themes that were more meaningful, a more abstract descriptor was assigned to them. After analyzing all the data, the themes were arranged in a matrix with their corresponding supportive patterns and codes for each data cluster. The data were then synthesized to create a composite synthesis of data gathered as regards the research questions.

Revisions were made to the newly created themes in phase five that resulted in two themes and two subthemes:

- Theme 1: Parents and teachers perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between them.
- Theme 2: Barriers to quality parent-teacher communication can be improved by developing mutual understanding of goals, trust, respect, confidence, and cooperation.
  - Subtheme 1: Quality communication can be improved by having language interpreters for face-to-face and print translations.
  - Subtheme 2: Quality communication can be improved by using technology to adapt modes of communication.

### ***Phase 6: Producing the Report***

The final phase within Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis is to complete a concluding review of the themes and write about the results. After my in-depth analysis of the data was complete, I confirmed the two concluding themes and answered the research questions. There was no evidence of conflicting findings in the data, so I concluded that no added analysis was needed. If there had been inconsistency in

the data, I would have explained the discrepancies among the findings. The two themes were used to provide information on the research question regarding teachers' perspectives of remaining. Table 5 shows a representation of the several categories and themes identified during thematic analysis. The themes help to address RQ1 and RQ2. Table 6 shows how codes were developed from quotes from parent participants.

**Table 6***Sample Codes and Supporting Quotes: Parents' Interviews*

Sample Participant Responses	Codes
<p>P1: "Like other people, they {teachers} don't communicate. You find things out through other people. The people you're supposed to find out things from, you don't" ... "with language and stuff, they communicate pretty well. Except what I think they should start doing is putting out the calendar of events at the end of the month before. So, then I know that school is going to be closed on a certain day."</p> <p>P1: "they {teachers} need to get on their toes and start communicating with the parents directly instead of having someone do their {teacher} dirty work or their {teachers} work."</p> <p>P6: "I think it should be, um, I understand that teachers are incredibly busy, and they have large class sizes, but I think a parent shouldn't go no more than one day of hearing from their {teacher}, from hearing, um, back from the teacher if they're trying to communicate with them"</p>	<p>Teachers not communicating; no notice of events/closings. Teachers do not communicate directly with parents.</p> <p>Request for better communication, Teachers need to communicate directly with parent not through someone else.</p> <p>Work towards quicker communication, understanding teachers are busy, but must communicate with parents, Parents did not hear enough from teacher.</p>
<p>P6: "So when my child was in the specific program that he was in, I didn't feel that, uh, the teacher did the greatest job in communicating with the parents. I got a lot more, um, feedback from the assistant, which I thought, you know, I know it's a, it's definitely a collaborative effort. Um, but I, I didn't hear enough from his main teacher... to be honest, I wasn't satisfied. I wasn't okay. Yeah. With the teacher, the assistant teacher, I would say again, did way more of, of the work in communicating."</p>	<p>Teacher did not do the greatest job in communicating. Feedback from assistant teacher vs. main teacher. Collaborative effort but not balanced between teachers</p>
<p>P4: "I expect that if it comes to a phone call, at least the next day or later that day, if they have a chance. So with phone calls, the next day I would prefer. And then with email"</p>	<p>Parent wants a phone call by next day or email. Parent expectations</p>
<p>P2: "Like the best communication that I've had with teachers, like through dojo also through text or phone call or in person a lot, a lot of in person." "The teachers that my son had there, they're very good communicators and they're great giving you updates on a daily basis."</p>	<p>Different communication methods such as ClassDojo, text, phone call, in-person</p>
<p>P2: "My expectation is for them {teachers}, you know for them {teachers} to... To be open and honest, you know, on how my child is learning class...I expect like the teachers to me truthfully and honestly like how he's doing when it comes to transition."</p> <p>P4: "With my child's teacher, she's very open and honest with how my child is."</p>	<p>Parents expect open and honest communication.</p>
<p>P3: "I prefer the face to face... communication back and forth. I just think that's what I've always been used to, and I appreciate being able to approach them and talk to them in face to face. "I appreciate that feedback"</p>	<p>Parent prefer. Ability for face to face feedback Desire teachers to be approachable/available</p>
<p>P6: "I definitely think that the teacher does need to show more their human side and just approaching the parent in a professional manner, but also in a friendlier time manner. Like they have to have the balance mm-hmm in order for the parents to really kind of trust the teacher."</p>	<p>Teacher should be approachable, professional. Build trust with teachers Show their human side</p>

Below is a sample from the parent interviews. The parents perceived that there are barriers to quality communication because the teachers do not communicate effectively. For instance, parents reported that teachers do not give any notice of events/closings, do not communicate directly with parents, and the communication is not quick enough. Furthermore, the second theme which addresses RQ2 is that parents believe communication can be improved in a Head Start program through more open, honest, and frequent communication with teachers; teachers to be available and more approachable; building trust; and by developing a mutual understanding of goals for the young students. Parents acknowledged barriers to quality communication and suggested multiple ways teachers could communicate with them. Table 7 below illustrates the breakdown of the number of themes for parents.

Specifically, two themes and two subthemes arose from data collected from parents and teachers. The first theme provides the answer to RQ1. Theme 1: Teachers and parents perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between parents and teachers, while the second theme addressed RQ2. Overall, parents and teachers perceived the quality of communication between them can be improved when barriers to quality are addressed by both in Head Start programs (RQ1) in the Northeastern United States. The two subthemes addressed RQs 1 and 2.

**Table 7***Sample Breakdown of Theme/Subthemes from Parents' Interviews*

Categories	Preliminary Themes
Failures of communications Failures to communicate directly with parents.	Theme 1: Parents believe that there is a lack of communication due to teachers not communicating directly with parents; not communicating quickly enough and failing to give notice of events or closings.
Preferences, efforts feedback Expectations	
Parents expect open and honest communication.	Theme 2: Parents expect open and honest communication between themselves and teachers in an environment where teachers are approachable and show their human or vulnerable side.
Different communication methods like ClassDojo, text, phone call, and in-person	Subtheme: Parents suggested multiple ways teachers could communicate with them

**Results**

In this section of the study, I first discuss the findings from the interviews with the teachers, followed by the themes established from the parents' interviews. This section contains the most crucial points of the research, as the findings were all aimed to address the research questions and purpose of the study. Along with the themes, tables and actual interview responses are found in the chapter to provide a breakdown and more precise understanding of the new research findings. The demographic information was used to cross-reference emerging themes to find any mutual tendencies among participants' replies. The demographic information was also used to draw conclusions in connection to the research questions.

**Results of Interviews with Teachers**

The first part of the findings contains the themes from the analysis of the interviews with the teachers. Thee teachers used different communication channels to

accommodate parents with language barrier issues and practiced patience in understanding the busy schedule of parents and sending reminders to ensure that the quality of communication is sustained. Meanwhile, to improve their communication further, teachers noted that there must be a mutual understanding of goals for the children. Table 8 contains the study themes breakdown from the teachers' interviews.

### ***Research Question 1***

The first research question sought to understand the teachers' perspectives on the quality of communication in a Head Start program. From the analysis, it was uncovered that teachers worked to adjust to the parents' communication styles and strategies to maintain and sustain an adequate quality of communication with the parents. Meanwhile, the teacher participants also reported how the quality of communication is negatively affected by the lack of effort from the younger parents.

**Theme 1: Teachers Perceived There are Barriers to the Quality of Communication Between Parents and Teachers.** The first theme suggests that the teachers believe there is communication barrier between themselves and parents due to English being a second language for many parents, and there is no effort from younger parents, which negatively affects the quality of communication. This was mentioned 67 times by all the eight respondents.

Another example highlighted the importance of patience in communication. Teacher 6 explained that the teachers must both be flexible and patient as they try to communicate and reach out to parents, saying,

Usually if they're not communicative, we try to use a different platform that

they're most comfortable with. So, let's say a phone call is not comfortable for them, I could ask them if they want to speak to me on Zoom, or ClassDojo, or email, whatever is more comfortable for them or whatever suits them the most. And usually, a lot of the parents were like, "Oh, can we meet in person," because they prefer to communicate in person.

Teacher 7 also spoke about experiencing language barrier, which is part of communication barrier. When she is unable to communicate with parents who do not speak English, she asks for assistance. Specifically, Teacher 7 stated that "I think a big one would be just for me, obviously with the language, I could have someone else help me out and someone who speaks the language." According to Participant 6,

The younger generation was very challenging for me because a lot of them didn't know what to expect or they were just... How do I say it? They were just reckless, I can say. They've just didn't understand, and their mindset was just like, "Oh, this is the school. They just do whatever they want. I'm just here to pick him or her up and then take them home. This is not a real parent teacher conference. You're just a head start. You're just a babysitter thing," because that's what I would get from my younger generation parents.

As part of the teachers' adjustment to the parents' communication style to maintain and even improve quality communication, they noted the positive effect of ClassDojo on the communication of teachers and parents. Teacher 6 commented that: "The current communication we use is we use ClassDojo, we use Zoom because due to COVID, most of the parents don't come into the building anymore. So, we use

ClassDojo, Zoom, and we also communicate over the phone.” Meanwhile, Teacher 8 explained the advantages of using ClassDojo and how such platform has helped them tremendously, saying,

In my classroom, we use a lot of ClassDojo. And that involves taking photos of the children when we’re doing our lessons, just so that parents are able to see, through the photos, what their kids are learning, so that they can either continue it at home or talk about it with their child when they pick them up.

For the teachers, ClassDojo had permitted them to promote accountability as messages could be marked, read, and seen as compared to the other platforms. Teacher 4 described ClassDojo as instrumental in their classroom:

I’m able to actually see when parents are reading messages and getting them. So, they may not respond, but I know that you saw my message, and that made it a little bit easier in terms of communicating. It may not be a two-way street, but I know that some type of way, that you’re getting my message.

Also, teachers noted that ClassDojo helped them overcome the common issue of the language barrier between them and their parents. Teacher 2 explained how with the help of both ClassDojo and the other resources present, they can address the needs of the children to the parents despite the lack of a common language:

Obviously, I also only speak English. So, I think that language could also be a barrier. If the parents speak any different languages and I’m not able to communicate or I’m not able to get my point across as much as I can because of a language barrier, I think that that could always hinder our relationship or the

information that they're getting if it's their second language.

The teachers also constantly reiterated the significance of being patient and understanding in terms of the parents' lack of involvement and responsiveness. For the teachers, it was crucial for them to show their consideration of the parents' busy schedules and other vital responsibilities. Teacher 1 then provided an example of how she tries to manage communication with parents who are busier than usual:

If it's a working parent, definitely during the weekend or the day off would be most effective, they would be more willing to reply you or they have time to reply you. And I don't mind, they send me a text or, you know, during the weekend or not too late at night, not too early in the morning as though as not phone calls.

Similarly, Teacher 7 shared her personal experience and her own practices with parents who are less responsive than others:

So generally, I would like parents to respond to me within a reasonable time, preferably within 24 hours, because I understand that families are working and there are other obligations. I normally give parents the reminder to respond as soon as possible or within the 24 hours, and if they don't respond, then I normally would follow up with a phone call.

From the analysis of the interviews, I also found that a more relaxed and collaborative manner of communication is effective for both parties. Teacher 3 provided an example, emphasizing the importance of feedback between teachers and parents. This participant stated,

So yeah, we have one child that she was being potty trained and we, or I, I text,

well, zooming back and forth and she, then she started texting us that and she was about to turn three and we were trying to explain to mom that, you know, we can't really force kids but once they hit a certain age, they have to do things on their own. And we did it within a week and it, it helped that we were back and forth on the, you know, zoom and texting and getting it done. And we did it.

An example that emerged was the observation that communication typically improves as school year transitions. For the teachers, they found that communication becomes more open and effective as the school year moves forward. Teacher 5 narrated that communication enhances over time as all parties and stakeholders are able to adjust and learn about the styles better. This participant then explained,

I'm able to now lean on my assistant a little bit more with announcements and things like that that need to be posted. And they are now beginning to step into that role of communicating with parents as well. So, it's not always a hundred percent on me as a lead, but I'm also giving them a, a little bit of responsibility as well. The message is clear and it's attainable. And the parents are able to communicate with myself and the teacher. So, there's a backup and it pushes me to be, to be more open and communicate with the parents because things are happening and I want them to be involved and they need to see myself and my assistant as the forefront of these things, they don't need to get a lot of it secondhand.

### ***Research Question 2***

The study's second research question asked about the teachers' recommendations

from experience on communication that could be improved between parents and teachers in a Head Start program. With the thematic analysis of the interviews, I discovered that the teachers suggested the need to create a mutual understanding of goals for the benefit of the children. In particular, the teachers also called for parents to have trust, confidence, and respect in teachers to facilitate an improved communication. At the same time, four participants suggested to possible effectiveness of increasing the frequency of communication and three participants noted the need for assistance when language barrier is present. Table 10 contains the breakdown of RQ2 the theme from the interviews with the teachers.

**Theme 2: Barriers to Quality Parent-Teacher Communication can be Improved by Developing Mutual Understanding of Goals, Trust, Respect, Confidence, and Cooperation.** The second theme that emerged was that teachers believe that communication between them and parents can be improved by developing a mutual understanding of goals for children between themselves and parents, and by parents having trust, confidence, and respect in teachers and being cooperative. This was mentioned 27 times by six respondents. Teacher 1 highlighted that the relationship between teachers and parents must be open and cooperative, stating,

If they, the reply is very satisfied because you need to get the stuff from the parents. I mean, get them to cooperate with you and then to help the child inside the classroom. I feel like is a cooperation relationship between the teacher and the, and the parents, even though I could do so much inside the classroom, I still need the help for the parents, to, for the parents help to help the child growth, like

to help the them to develop certain skills.

Teacher 5 furthered that with the children's growth and improvement in mind, the community and its stakeholders must work together to achieve the best possible outcome.

This participant stated,

When I think of it, I think of it as a community effort that everyone is taking part. So, I need to push myself to not depend only on the sole guardian that everyone just, as we say in the classroom, we are a community. Everyone that has taken part in this child's life is a part of this community and we all need to be aware of what's happening with the students so we can get the best outcome them at home and in the classroom to build that partnership that we need.

Finally, Teacher 8 shared the different forms of communication present and how these should be maximized for the benefit of the children. This participant narrated,

So, when it comes to us being a teacher and not having the time or maybe not really trying figure out what's happening at home so that you can get in communication with the parent, if they aren't dropping off the child or you don't see the parent, or they're not picking up the phone. So being persistent, that can be tough sometimes because you're so busy.

The teachers also called for the parents to have more trust and confidence in them while maintaining respect as they communicate with one another. For these teachers, this helps in developing a more effective communication and relationship for the benefit of the children. As an example, one teacher believed that with the right communication attitude and style, parents would be more open and willing to communicate with the teachers as

well:

Definitely try to speak to them in a more respectful way and make them feel comfortable to reply and make them feel comfortable, definitely to make them feel comfortable, like open, open up a conversation to make them more comfortable to communicate with you or more willing to communicate with you.

Another teacher shared that for parents to engage and become more active in communication with the teachers, there must be an honest and trusting relationship:

So, what makes good communication? I would say, I think on my behalf being open and honest with the parent, I'm starting off a trusting relationship with the parent and the child. So, they're able to come to me with any questions or concerns.

### **Results of Interviews with Parents**

The second part of the results contains the findings from the analysis of the interviews with the parents of children enrolled in a Head Start program. Through this study, I established that most parents acknowledged the existence of a communication barrier between themselves and teachers. They also recognized that the teachers could adjust to the parents' communication styles and strategies. At the same time, they believed that the quality of communication could still be improved. They suggested the need for increased communication between parents and teachers to receive constant reminders and updates about their children. Similar to the previous interviews, only the themes with 50% and above participant references was discussed in detail while themes with limited references may need further research to solidify their trustworthiness. Table

11 contains the complete breakdown of themes from the interviews with the parents.

RQ1 was: What are parents' perspectives on the quality of their communication in Head Start programs? The first research question asked about the parents' perceptions of the quality of communication between them in a Head Start program. From the thematic analysis of the interviews, most parents identified that there was a communication barrier between themselves and teachers addressing RQ1 of the study.

***Theme 1: Parents Believe That There are Communication Barriers Between Themselves and Teachers***

The theme under the first research question from the parents' interviews is that parents believe that there are communication barriers between themselves and teachers. This was mentioned 26 times by all the seven parents. On the existence of communication barrier, Parent 1 stated,

Like other people, they don't communicate. You find things out through other people. The people you're supposed to find out things from, you don't. ...With language and stuff, they communicate pretty well. Except what I think they should start doing is putting out the calendar of events at the end of the month before. So then I know that school is going to be closed on a certain day...they need to get on their toes and start communicating with the parents directly instead of having someone do their dirty work or their work.

Parent 6 also reported about communication barrier, noting that there little to no contact in directly communicating or providing feedback to parents. This parent desires that communication is directly from the teachers and not through third party regarding their

child. Specifically, this parent stated,

I think it should be, um, I understand that teachers are incredibly busy and they have large class sizes, but I think a parent shouldn't go no more than 1 day of hearing from their {teacher}, from hearing, um, back from the teacher if they're trying to communicate with them.

Parent 6 added,

So, when my child was in the specific program that he was in, I didn't feel that, uh, the teacher did the greatest job in communicating with the parents. I got a lot more, um, feedback from the assistant, which I thought, you know, I know it's a, it's definitely a collaborative effort. Um, but I, I didn't hear enough from his main teacher... to be honest, I wasn't satisfied. I wasn't okay. Yeah. With the teacher, the assistant teacher, I would say again, did way more of, of the work in communicating.

Five of the seven parents added that teachers also have hectic schedules and cannot respond quickly to their queries and needs. Parent 5 shared how she tries to adjust to and understand the slow response from the teachers, saying,

So as long as they stay open with that, or if they do... Say they get back to me 72 hours instead of the 48 hours through the email, I'm like, "Okay, I understand, but at least you still reached out and you let me know that you were busy, you got caught up, it may have slipped your mind. Understandable."

Meanwhile, Parent 7 echoed how she tries her best to be as understanding to the teachers' busy schedules and many responsibilities, stating,

Same, I think it should be, um, I understand that teachers are incredibly busy and they have large class sizes, but I think a parent shouldn't go no more than 1 day of hearing from their, their, from hearing, um, back from the teacher, if, if they're trying to communicate with them.

Meanwhile, Parent 6 shared what a "good communication" is or how a "good communication" should be:

I think it's good to communicate with the teacher and the parent, because communication is always important. I don't want the teacher feel like, as a parent, they don't care about their child. You know what I mean? I want to talk to the teacher that I care my child. I would like to work with my kids, so the teacher can see your perspective.

Yeah, because I always ask a teacher's question or like how she doing that in school and what she up to during dismissal, so I think that's good.

RQ2 was: What are parents' perspectives on how they can improve the quality of their communication in a Head Start program in a high-poverty area in a Northeastern state in the United States? The second research question explored the parents' suggestions for improving communication between themselves and the teachers. From the analysis, most participants noted that communication could be enhanced with the presence of more constant contact to provide updates and reminders to parents. Parents preferred the teachers to be more open and honest about the needs and concerns of the children. Five parents also called for a mutual understanding of children's goals; parents believed such collaboration could further reinforce learning at home. Meanwhile, four

participants respectively emphasized the need to build trust and confidence between parents and teachers through a more open and friendly relationship and having parent-teacher conferences more frequently. Besides, the parents also suggested that teachers should use a variety of methods to communicate with them. Themes 4 and 5 emerged from the parents' interviews on how communication between themselves and teachers could be improved in a Head Start program.

***Theme 2: Parents Believe that Communication can be Improved Through More Open and Frequent Communication with Teachers, Building Trust and Confidence, Holding More Parent-Teacher Meetings, and Developing a Mutual Understanding of Goals***

The second theme is that parents believe that communication between them and teachers can be improved in a Head Start program through more open and frequent communication with teachers, building trust, and also by developing a mutual understanding of goals for the children. This was mentioned 37 times by all seven respondents. Specifically, the parents called for teachers to be open and honest as they communicate with one another. Parent 2 believed in the effectiveness of confident teachers, ones who can relay both the positive and negative aspects of the children to their parents. This participant stated,

Them being confident in themselves and in their teaching skills them being confident speaking their mind, you know, and, and not sugarcoating anything and, you know, just being truthful and honest and, you know, so that we can come up with a solution that, you know, we can work at both school and home so that, you

know, whatever they do in school, I do the same thing at home.

Parent 4 believed that good and effective communication could be achieved when two parties are open and comfortable. This participant narrated,

I think just the fact, I feel they've made it comfortable enough where they have, it's an open-door policy. You should never feel that you're ... You should always feel that they have, even if it's just five minutes, to listen to what your concerns are, even if at that moment, they can't give you fully what you're looking for. But they take into consideration what you've asked and say, "Hey, let me give this some thought, let me see what I could do," and then always follow up. You always come back and follow up, because you don't want to feel that what your concerns are doing or they're falling on deaf ears.

Parents also shared their desire and suggestion to have more parent-teacher conferences so that the two parties could meet and discuss the needs and issues of the children personally and more frequently. For Parent 4, these types of meetings could also help build relationships between parents, promoting a more collaborative learning style for everyone:

I understand with COVID, there's a lot of restrictions on things you can do, but something where they do maybe, one afternoon, have just parents come in, so parents can get to know one another. Sometimes they may feel more comfortable talking amongst each other, and then have maybe a person that would then relay if there's any concerns.

According to the parent participants, trust and confidence between the teachers

and parents were also crucial. In the study, the parents expressed their preference of having a more open and friendly relationship. Parent 1 then provided the following example:

So, you're calling me, but the in between relationship that builds the trust. And that makes me feel like my child was great in your class because me and you have that communication and he's doing well, that's the part that I feel like is missing. So, if they were able to have that time, a lot of, at least once a week to kind of give parents a check-in call, I think that that would increase the communication and the trust. So, I think that they should allow it on that time once a week to be able to build that relationship with parents.

The parents also mentioned the importance of a mutual understanding of the children's goals. Parents believed that cooperation must exist for the school lessons to be followed-up and continued at home. Parent 1 provided her personal example and experience on why a common method between teachers and parents is crucial, saying,

So, based on the parent teacher conference that I have with my child's teacher at school, um, they're explaining some type of like assessments or benchmarks or places where my child should be and I'm asking them, how can I get my child there? Is it like a workbook that I can use? Is there like flashcards or something? Um, so I'm asking how I can bring my child up support or have him stay on the level that's needed. So, it increases that because it now pushes me to now be aligned with his teachers. Like how can we make this fun now at home? How can I bring this into the home or into a park until on our way home? So, it, it pushes

me as a parent to now step outside of the general box that I have and try to inter um, incorporate what his teachers are doing at school with him.

As Parent 5 noted, a common understanding of the goals is useful for parents to reinforce learning at home. This participant then explained the following:

So just being able to see her growth at home with the puzzles, and then increasing the number of puzzles. So, if she was doing 20 pieces in school, and then the teacher said, "Let's increase it," so we did a 50-piece puzzle. So, seeing her growth in being able to put those puzzles together at home, and then she's doing the same thing in school. So now we're up to a hundred pieces at school with her completing puzzles. So, her love for puzzles, we always try to make sure she has puzzles in the home.

***Subtheme 1: Quality Communication can be Improved by Having Language***

***Interpreters for Face-to-Face and Print Translations***

Teacher 1 talked about communication barrier that she experiences with parents who cannot speak the English language. Because language is usually used in communication, language barrier is part of communication barrier. This participant indicated,

Definitely the language sometimes for certain families, because I, I could only speak English, Chinese, and most of the family from, from the area that I, I work at, they speak Spanish. I try to help them using their translation systems, but sometimes they get, it is not as accurate. So, I always need to ask some, somebody else to help me with communicating with them. And I could see their

frustration at the, through the parents. They, they, there are a lot of questions they wanted to ask, but they just can't because I don't speak their language.

Meanwhile, Teacher 3 had the same experience and shared how Google Translate and family workers are the primary tools employed to assist in communication despite the presence of language issues. This participant reported,

I think it's the language, the language barrier, you know, because a lot of my parents are Asian, so okay. It's easier for them to text because they could use the, the Google translate. Well, we try a couple of times, if not, we'll get the family worker involved, you know, get her to try to get through to parents.

***Subtheme 2: Quality Communication can be Improved by Using Technology to Adapt Modes of Communication***

Teachers identified the role of technology as a way to adapt modes of communication that improves the quality of communication between teachers and parents. For the teacher participants, technology has allowed them to easily reach their parents when they have urgent concerns or issues. Teacher 5 shared that from experience, virtual and online communication has gained much popularity over the years and noted how the parents had become more technologically inclined as well:

So, I feel like the communication has been really good for me this year as a teacher, compared to my previous years, when I didn't use the virtual platform, I didn't get as much responses back for even any of my activities that I would do in the classroom or anything like that. The responses were not as great as I'm getting now. So, I feel like my communication this year is really good with my parents.

The participants indicated about a lack of effort from the parents, especially younger ones. From the interviews, it was reported that teachers would typically feel a lack of interest and even care from some parents. Teacher 2 explained that one barrier was the parent's lack of communication, contact, and actual effort to speak with the teacher:

So, I think that that could definitely be a barrier if they [young parents] aren't feeling like maybe we aren't doing as much as we can or maybe they don't really care to be as involved because they just want to drop their kid at the door, know that the kid's in safe hands, and then pick the kid up and may be not be as concerned about what's happening during the day.

Meanwhile, Teacher 6 narrated how she finds the younger generation parents to be more challenging to communicate with and manage, saying,

The younger generation was very challenging for me because a lot of them didn't know what to expect or they were just... How do I say it? They've just didn't understand and their mindset was just like, "Oh, this is the school. They just do whatever they want. I'm just here to pick him or her up and then take them home. This is not a real parent teacher conference. You're just a head start. You're just a baby thing," because that's what I would get from my younger generation parents.

Parents believe that communication between themselves and teachers can be improved in a Head Start program if the teachers use multiple ways to communicate with them such as ClassDojo, text, email, phone calls, and in-person face-to-face communication among other ways. This was mentioned 29 times by six respondents. Parent 1 reported that her child's teacher uses ClassDojo, calls, and messages, depending

on the responsiveness of the parent. The first parent participant provided the following example:

Um, I would say mostly through, um, ClassDojo, which is a system that they use at the school. So that's been the main, um, resource of communication. Okay.

Sometimes if the teachers call my phone and I don't answer and I'm not available for them, um, then they'll send me a message. And most of the time I'm may be able to reply back to them, um, within the same day or maybe like the next, the next day early morning.

Moreover, the parents agreed that there are different communication channels that can be employed to maintain quality communication between the two parties. Parent 2 commented, "Like the best communication that I've had with teachers, like through [Class]Dojo, also through text on phone call or in person a lot, a lot of in person." Meanwhile, Parent 3 suggested the use of "ClassDojo and texting me directly."

From the interviews, the positive impact of ClassDojo on the communication between teachers and parents was reported as well. According to Parent 1, ClassDojo has created an effective system of communication:

Um, I would say mostly through, um, ClassDojo, which is a system that they use at the school. So that's been the main, um, resource of communication. Okay.

Sometimes if the teachers call my phone and I don't answer and I'm not available for them, um, then they'll send me a message. And most of the time I may be able to reply back to them, um, within the same day or maybe like the next, the next day early morning.

Meanwhile, Parent 2 echoed, “Like the best communication that I’ve had with teachers, like through dojo also through text on phone call or in person a lot, a lot of in person.” Finally, Parent 4 also acknowledged the positive effects of ClassDojo, especially during the height of COVID-19:

There is ClassDojo. I mean, they do send communication via ClassDojo. I mean, as reminders, or there’ve been certain instances where they’ve had to take a few days off because of COVID outbreaks, things like that. So, they do, things that they need to let you know, let’s say, last minute, or a reminder, that goes out with more than enough time, but sometimes things have come up where they have to let you know something in the moment, but at least you have that. The ClassDojo is a great tool, I think. Plus, they send you pictures and all that throughout, things that they do throughout the day. So, it’s nice to see that those are just things they like to share what they’re doing with the children, as well.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported four trustworthiness criteria in qualitative studies; these are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In qualitative research, credibility pertains to the believability and authenticity of the data. Some of the steps that I executed to warrant the credibility of results were: (a) acknowledgment of researcher bias, (b) maintaining an audit trail, (c) reporting exhaustive accounts of participants’ (parents and teachers) shared responses, and (d) performing member-checks by re-sending interviews for participants to confirm or disconfirm their recorded responses (Anney, 2014).

Anney (2014) described transferability as the extent to which data can be applied to other settings while maintaining the initial study's results. I then included rich and meaningful explanations of the research process and the actual findings. As seen in the chapter, coding tables were provided to show how themes were generated. At the same time, the themes were supported with my own analysis along with the verbatim responses of the participant. According to Nowell et al. (2017), the provision of thick descriptions of the findings could help other researchers interested in performing a similar study. In this way, they can transfer and apply the findings in their preferred site or location (Nowell et al., 2017).

Another technique was the dependability of data, which Anney (2014) referred to as the reliability of data over time. To allow other researchers to conduct a similar study in the future, I explained the detailed steps, including the coding and raw data supporting the final results. Finally, confirmability was the extent to which other researchers could substantiate the study's results. Nowell et al. (2017) explained that confirmability entails clear presentation of the process of findings, describing and presenting how the conclusions and interpretations were attained. In this case, by completing the three other criteria, I established confirmability as well.

### **Summary**

The fourth chapter of this study contains the findings of the thematic analysis of the 16 interviews with the teachers and parents. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the Northeastern region of the United States and explore how quality

of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. While organizing the data NVivo12 by QSR assisted me in establishing the study themes. These themes were documented in my reflective journal to address two research questions. For RQ1, the findings reveal that both teachers and parents believe that there are communication barriers. Teachers interviewed perceived there is limited effort from younger parents which negatively affects the quality of communication hence they would try to adjust to the communication preferences of the parents. WeChat, WhatsApp, Class Dojo, in-person, and calls were some suggested methods to maintain and improve quality communication. The findings also revealed that parents believe that there are communication barriers between themselves and teachers and also made recommendations for how teachers can communicate with them. For RQ2, the findings show that both teachers and parents believe that communication can be improved in a variety of ways, such as by developing a mutual understanding of goals for children between them and parents, and by parents having trust, confidence, and respect in teachers. They also demonstrated that parents believe that communication between themselves and teachers can be improved in a Head Start program through more open and frequent communication with teachers, building trust, confidence, holding more parent-teacher meetings, and by developing a mutual understanding of goals for the children. Interview data revealed that both teachers and parents suggested multiple ways the quality of communication between them can be improved. Subtheme 1 indicated interpreters are needed for parents who speak a language other than English in the home for face-to-face and print translations. Subtheme 2 indicated different modes of

communication are needed that include the use of technology, for instance through the use of ClassDojo, phone calls, text, and email. By combining the themes from the separate interview data collected from Head Start parents and teachers, I arrived at the following two overarching themes and two subthemes to address the two research questions of this study:

- Theme 1: Parents and teachers perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between them.
- Theme 2: Barriers to quality parent-teacher communication can be improved by developing mutual understanding of goals, trust, respect, confidence, and cooperation.
  - Subtheme 1: Quality communication can be improved by having language interpreters for face-to-face and print translations.
  - Subtheme 2: Quality communication can be improved by using technology to adapt modes of communication.

A major limitation is that because the responses were based during Covid-19, this may have skewed the data. Additionally, all the respondents were female and none were male. In the next chapter, the themes were discussed in relation to the literature. The recommendations, implications, and conclusions are presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Communication between parents and teachers is essential in fostering children's academic and social development (Leenders et al., 2019); however, parent-teacher communication is often less coordinated, especially for parents with low SES (Puccioni et al., 2019). Ineffective communication between parents and teachers may negatively impact children's performance in Head Start Programs (American Psychological Association, 2022). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the quality of parent-teacher communication in programs that serve low SES students in the northeastern United States and explore how quality of parent-teacher communication in Head Start programs might be improved. Researchers have suggested that parent-teacher communication positively influences children's well-being (Barger et al., 2019); however, communication between parents and teachers does not always occur (Leenders et al., 2019; Wang, 2020). Parent-teacher communication is not well understood or universally promoted by school authorities, teachers, or parents (Leenders et al., 2019; Wang, 2020). Therefore, I explored parents' and teachers' perspectives regarding the quality of their communication with each other and their thoughts on how communication might be improved in participants from a high-poverty area in a northeastern state in the United States.

A basic qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study. The fundamental qualitative research design consisted of interviews as the primary data source. The interviews were semistructured, one-on-one, and open-ended. The interviews were conducted with both teachers and parents. The participants included eight teachers

and eight parents who met the inclusion criteria of (a) parents whose child was enrolled in an early childhood program (3–5 years old) attends a Head Start school; OR (b) a teacher who teaches early childhood education at a Head Start school; (c) an adult older than 18 years; and (d) having teaching experience of at least 5 years. Based on the purpose of the study, open-ended questions in a systematic interview protocol were used to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives on the quality of their communication with each other and their thoughts on how communication might be improved in high-poverty areas.

Based on the interviews, I determined that teachers perceived a communication barrier between them and their parents. They expressed concern regarding the lack of effort from younger parents, which has a detrimental impact on the quality of communication. Moreover, the findings highlighted that teachers believe enhancing communication between themselves and parents can be achieved through establishing a shared understanding of children's goals and fostering trust, confidence, and respect from parents towards the teachers. Further elaboration of these findings was provided in the subsequent section.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Two themes and two subthemes emerged from the data analysis, which addressed the two research questions:

- Theme 1: Parents and teachers perceived there are barriers to the quality of communication between them.
- Theme 2: Barriers to quality parent-teacher communication can be improved

by developing mutual understanding of goals, trust, respect, confidence, and cooperation.

- Subtheme 1: Quality communication can be improved by having language interpreters for face-to-face and print translations.
- Subtheme 2: Quality communication can be improved by using technology to adapt modes of communication.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question addressed in this study focused on exploring the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the quality of communication within a Head Start program. Through the analysis, it was evident that teachers made efforts to adapt to parents' communication styles and strategies to ensure a satisfactory level of communication. The teachers identified the primary communication barrier as English being a second language for many parents. Furthermore, the responses highlighted that the quality of communication was negatively affected by the perceived lack of effort from younger parents.

The parents interviewed in this study shared similar experiences regarding the perceived barriers between them and the teachers. One parent, Parent 6, expressed dissatisfaction with teachers' lack of direct communication and feedback. Interestingly, this finding contradicted the existing literature, which typically supports the importance of regular communication between parents and teachers. Other parents in the study acknowledged the teachers' busy schedules and multiple responsibilities, understanding that immediate responses to their questions might not always be feasible. The

participants' sentiment underscores the significance of establishing clear goals and expectations at the beginning of the school year, ensuring mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers in supporting children's learning, and providing feedback. A teacher's role includes educating children and facilitating parent education and learning (Guo & Kilderry, 2018). Teachers are seen as possessing more knowledge and authority regarding children's education, making their collaboration with parents crucial for students' success.

The teachers' endeavors to adjust their communication styles in response to parents' preferences align with previous research emphasizing the need for teachers to alter how they engage with parents and overcome communication barriers that can impede children's academic performance (Rattenborg et al., 2019). The finding that younger parents were perceived to lack effort may be attributed to the communication methods employed by the teachers. Technological advancements for parent teacher communication are increasing (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). Families and teachers are comfortable with utilizing digital tools to communicate, and traditional resources such as email and phones continue to be the preferred method of communication (Laho, 2019). In the present study, digital technologies such as ClassDojo enhanced communication between parents and teachers, thereby addressing the language barrier. The use of technology aligns with the growing trend of leveraging technology to facilitate communication and bridge gaps in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. By embracing digital platforms, the Head Start program offered multiple communication channels that accommodated parents' preferences and improved accessibility for non-English-speaking

parents.

Furthermore, openness and empathy are important in fostering effective communication between parents and teachers (Hamblin & J. Lin et al., 2019). These qualities were invaluable in promoting collaboration and establishing a solid parent-teacher relationship. The findings of the current study emphasized that parent-teacher communication was pivotal in enhancing learners' academic performance and overall educational outcomes.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question that was answered in this study was how parents and teachers can improve communication between parents and teachers in a Head Start program. The analysis revealed that teachers suggested the need to create a mutual understanding of goals for the benefit of the children. The teachers also called for parents to have trust, confidence, and respect in teachers to facilitate improved communication. Teacher 5 expressed that with the children's growth and improvement in mind, the community and its stakeholders must work together to achieve the best possible outcome. The statement by Teacher 5 was supported by research indicating that early childhood education learning outcomes were positively influenced by teacher-parent communication and parental participation (Syuraini et al., 2022).

The teachers also called for the parents to have more trust and confidence in them while maintaining respect as they communicate. For these teachers, this helps to develop more effective communication and relationship for the benefit of the children, which was supported by previous research (Hamblin, 2018; J. Lin et al., 2019). The parents in this

study noted that communication could be enhanced with more constant contact to provide updates and reminders to parents. The parents preferred the teachers to be more open and honest about the needs and concerns of the children. The parents in the study also suggested multiple ways that teachers could communicate with them, such as ClassDojo, text, email, phone calls, and in-person face-to-face communication. The advancements in technology have expanded how parents and teachers can communicate, with preferred methods being email and phones (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Laho, 2019).

### **Findings Concerning the Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) provided a valuable framework for understanding the study's results. This theory emphasizes the importance of examining multiple levels of influence on individuals and their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The microsystem refers to the immediate environments in which individuals interact directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the study context, the microsystem includes the interactions between parents and teachers within the Head Start program. The current study findings suggest a communication barrier between these two groups. The microsystem perspective explains how factors within this immediate environment, such as language barriers and lack of effort from younger parents, can impact the quality of communication and parent-teacher relationships. The mesosystem examines the interactions and relationships between different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This study's mesosystem encompassed the connections between the Head Start program and other contexts that parents and teachers navigate, such as the home environment or community resources. Understanding the mesosystem helped to

identify how factors may influence the communication barrier in the Head Start program in other settings, such as parents' familiarity with the education system or the availability of support services.

The exosystem includes external contexts indirectly influencing individuals' development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the study, the exosystem included policies, regulations, and cultural norms that affected communication practices within the Head Start program. For instance, limited resources or support for teachers to engage in effective communication strategies can impact their ability to establish quality communication with parents. Examining the exosystem can show how larger social structures and systems influence parent-teacher communication. The macrosystem refers to the broader cultural and societal influences that shape individuals' experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the study, the macro system encompassed cultural attitudes towards education, language diversity, and expectations placed on parents and teachers. By considering the macrosystem, researchers can understand how cultural factors, societal norms, and educational policies influence the communication dynamics between parents and teachers in the Head Start program. The chronosystem recognizes that individuals' experiences and contexts change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Applying this perspective to the study provided an understanding of how the quality of communication between parents and teachers in the Head Start program may evolve or be influenced by different factors over time. For example, policy changes, demographic shifts, or increased resources for language support may impact communication practices and outcomes.

Applying the ecological systems theory, the study was analyzed within a broader framework considering the dynamic interplay between individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors. The analysis allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the communication barriers and challenges identified in the study and provided insights into potential interventions and strategies to promote effective communication and positive outcomes within the Head Start program.

### **Findings Concerning the Model of Parental Involvement**

The model of parental involvement provided a framework for understanding the results of this study. This model focuses on different dimensions or levels of parental involvement that can influence children's educational outcomes (Epstein, 2011). The model highlights the importance of parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's education (Epstein, 2011). The current study revealed that younger parents may exhibit less effort in communication, suggesting that their expectations and aspirations for their children's education may differ. Understanding this dimension of parental involvement can shed light on the communication challenges between parents and teachers. Effective communication between parents and teachers is a crucial component of parental involvement. The study indicated that teachers perceive a communication barrier due to language differences. This dimension of parental involvement emphasizes the need to develop strategies that bridge the communication gap, such as utilizing translation services, bilingual staff, or culturally sensitive communication methods. Enhancing parental engagement through regular and meaningful communication channels can strengthen partnerships between parents and

teachers.

The model of parental involvement emphasizes the importance of parental support for children's learning at home (Epstein, 2011). The study findings suggest that younger parents may be less proactive in communication. The model also emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership between parents and teachers (Epstein, 2011). The current study findings highlighted the need for developing mutual respect and trust. This dimension focuses on building positive relationships, valuing diverse perspectives, and involving parents in collaborative decision-making processes. Promoting a sense of partnership can enhance communication, support parental involvement, and create a supportive educational environment for children.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Upon completion of the data collection phase, several study limitations emerged that warrant consideration. The first limitation pertains to the timing of the interviews, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging that the pandemic significantly impacted the educational landscape, potentially influencing the participants' responses was essential. In particular, parents faced numerous challenges, such as managing multiple children learning from home simultaneously. The additional responsibilities parents faced may have hindered their ability to be proactive and fully engaged with each child's education.

Additionally, some parents continued to work outside the home, resulting in a lack of support for their children's remote learning. These pandemic-related circumstances could have influenced the parents' responses and consequently affected the

study's outcomes. Similarly, teachers encountered considerable stress during the pandemic due to the abrupt transition to digital teaching formats and the disruption of traditional classroom settings. The immense pressure and strain experienced by teachers during this period may have influenced their responses during the interviews. The impact of these stressors on the teachers' perspectives and insights cannot be overlooked and should be considered when interpreting the study's findings. Another limitation of the study relates to its regional scope, as I solely focused on teachers and parents in the Northeast region of the United States. Consequently, the transferability and generalizability of the results to other geographic areas across the country may be limited. Given the potential variations in educational systems, cultural contexts, and language demographics in different regions, it is essential to exercise caution when applying the findings of this study to other locations.

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations for future research could be made due to conducting this study and the results. One of the communication factors that the participants cited was the language barrier. Future researchers could explore the language and cultural factors contributing to the communication barrier between teachers and parents. Investigating the impact of language proficiency and cultural differences on communication quality could provide insights into practical strategies for bridging the language and cultural gaps. The teachers in the study also noted that the younger generation was very challenging to communicate with because many did not know what to expect. Investigating different strategies and interventions to enhance parental

engagement in the Head Start program would be beneficial. Future scholars could explore innovative methods for involving parents in their children's education, such as utilizing technology platforms, community outreach programs, or workshops designed to enhance parental involvement.

The parent-teacher relationship was also significant for teachers in this study. A more relaxed and collaborative communication was effective for both parties. Future research efforts could focus on parent-teacher relationship building. Researching effective strategies for building strong relationships between parents and teachers would be beneficial. Researchers could explore how trust and rapport can be established, particularly with parents who may be younger or less experienced in navigating the education system. Future studies could center on the impact of relationship-building activities such as home visits, parent-teacher conferences, or parent-teacher organizations. Teacher 6 in this study explained, "Usually, if they are not communicative, we try to use a different platform that they are most comfortable with. So, let's say a phone call is not comfortable for them, I could ask them if they want to speak to me on Zoom, or ClassDojo, or email, whatever is more comfortable for them or whatever suits them the most." Parental communication preferences are another area of future research that could be beneficial for fostering more positive communication between parents and teachers. Investigating the communication preferences of parents in the Head Start program, including their preferred channels (e.g., in-person meetings, phone calls, emails, or digital platforms), could provide information that would help teachers collaborate more effectively with parents. Assessing the effectiveness of various communication

methods and technologies in improving the quality and accessibility of communication between parents and teachers could be beneficial.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have several potential impacts on social change at various levels. By identifying the communication barriers and challenges between parents and teachers, the study opens the door for developing strategies to improve collaboration and create a more supportive educational environment. Improving strategies can lead to enhanced cooperation, shared decision-making, and increased parental involvement, ultimately benefiting children's educational outcomes. Understanding the impact of language and cultural factors on communication can help to promote cultural sensitivity among teachers and parents. Educators can create inclusive learning environments that celebrate cultural differences by recognizing and valuing diverse backgrounds. These inclusive environments can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive education system, fostering positive social change by breaking down barriers and promoting understanding and respect. The study's recommendation to build mutual respect, trust, and relationships between parents and teachers can potentially transform the dynamics within the Head Start program. Parents and teachers can form strong partnerships that positively impact children's educational experiences by focusing on relationship-building activities and effective communication strategies. Building trust and relationships can lead to better collaboration, increased parental engagement, and improved student outcomes.

Effective communication strategies can encourage greater parental engagement in

their children's education. When parents feel valued and empowered to participate, they are more likely to be actively involved in school activities, support their child's learning at home, and advocate for their educational needs (Hamblin, 2018; J. Lin et al., 2019). Increased parental engagement can improve student attendance, academic achievement, and overall school success. The study's findings can contribute to long-term educational benefits for children in the Head Start program by addressing communication barriers and promoting effective communication practices. Improved communication between parents and teachers can lead to a better understanding of children's needs, early identification of learning challenges, and tailored support. Improved communication can positively impact children's educational trajectories, leading them toward academic success and positive social change in their lives. Overall, the study has the potential to promote positive social change by fostering collaboration, cultural sensitivity, trust, and parental engagement within the Head Start program. Addressing communication challenges lays the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and effective early childhood education system.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review conducted for this study revealed several key themes regarding quality of Head Start parent-teacher communication. These themes included perceptions of communication, need for quality parent-teacher communication to expand children's academic success and the benefits of parent-teacher communication. The researchers of multiple studies (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Gisewhite et al., 2019) have explored parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding communication in

the educational context. These studies emphasized the importance of effective communication for positive educational outcomes. The literature also highlighted that parent-teacher communication is vital in promoting academic success (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Willemse et al., 2018). Studies have shown that when parents and teachers collaborate and maintain open lines of communication, it positively influences students' academic achievement (Sheridan et al., 2019). Regardless of differences in study settings, methodologies, and approaches, the literature consistently supports the notion that parent-teacher communication is a crucial factor that impacts educational outcomes (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Willemse et al., 2018).

The literature review findings align with the current study's results. The study identified a communication barrier perceived by teachers in their interactions with parents. These teachers expressed concerns about the lack of effort from younger parents, adversely affecting communication quality. Furthermore, the study revealed that teachers believed that improving communication could be achieved by establishing a shared understanding of children's goals and cultivating trust, confidence, and parental respect toward the teachers. The convergence between the findings of the literature review and the current study adds to the existing body of knowledge on parent-teacher communication. It reinforces the importance of effective communication between parents and teachers for positive educational outcomes. The findings suggest that efforts should be made to address the identified barriers, such as the lack of effort from younger parents, to enhance the quality of communication and promote successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To further contribute to the field, future research could explore

specific strategies and interventions that effectively facilitate and strengthen quality parent-teacher communication. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of improved communication on students' academic performance, social-emotional development, and overall school success would provide valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers.

Effective quality communication between parents and teachers is crucial for promoting children's academic and social development (Leenders et al., 2019). Unfortunately, parent-teacher communication is often less coordinated, particularly for parents with low SES (Puccioni et al., 2019). When communication between parents and teachers is ineffective, it can negatively affect children enrolled in Head Start Programs (American Psychological Association, 2022). On the other hand, children whose parents are more involved in their education tend to exhibit positive attitudes toward school, perform better on tests, and complete homework more consistently (Barger et al., 2019). The findings of this study have the potential to bring about positive social change by aiding stakeholders in understanding the most effective modes of communication between teachers and parents. By reviewing the results and identifying potential similarities or discrepancies, stakeholders can modify their current communication practices to provide more meaningful and effective communication with parents. Better communication practices can lead to improved collaboration, increased parental engagement, and better support for children's learning and development.

Parents can benefit from enhanced communication practices resulting from the study's findings. Clear and meaningful communication with teachers can help parents

better understand their child's progress, educational goals, and any areas that require attention or support. Effective communication empowers parents to be more actively involved in their child's education, make informed decisions, and provide appropriate support at home. The ultimate hope is that the improved communication practices fostered by this study would positively impact students' academic achievement. When parents and teachers establish effective lines of communication, students are more likely to receive consistent support, encouragement, and guidance from home and school environments. This holistic approach to education can contribute to tremendous academic success, improved social-emotional well-being, and enhanced overall educational experiences for children.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol for Parents

**On the day of the interviews, I made arrangements at least 30 minutes ahead of the first scheduled interview to do the following:**

- Ensure the USB Voice Recorder works well. I will use my iPhone XS as a backup should the voice recorder not function well.
- Have notebooks, writing utensils and paper available
- Be prepared to start promptly on time

**Before Starting the Interview:**

- Ask participants to confirm their identity
- Thank the participant for agreeing to take part in the interview
- I will inform the participant that:
  - “Just tell me when you want to take a break so that I can turn off the recorder for that period.”
  - “Before starting the interview, I just want to reconfirm your permission to audio record the session. Please be advised that I may make notes as well.”
  - “Let us go through the informed consent form you consented to electronically to make sure that you have all your questions answered.”
  - “If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time by informing the researcher of your decision.”
  - “If you have no further questions, we will now start the interview.”
- Then I will put on the voice recorder

**Interview Questions for RQ1**

1. What are the common methods and means you use to communicate with teachers? Please elaborate.
2. What are your expectations regarding your communication with teachers? Please tell me why.
3. What are your opinions on the quality of your communication with teachers? Please elaborate.
4. What do you consider to be the factors that contribute to quality parent-teacher communication? Please give me an example.
5. How satisfied are you regarding your communication with the teacher? Please tell me why.
6. To what extent do you think parent-teacher communication provides

you with opportunities to be involved in your children's education? Please tell me why.

7. Is there anything else about this topic you would like me to know?

### **Interview Questions for RQ2**

1. What do you consider to be barriers in your achieving quality communication with teachers? Please tell me why these are barriers.
2. What are your suggestions to overcome these barriers? Please tell me more.
3. What do you consider are the most important elements to target for improving the quality of your communication with teachers. Please tell me more.
4. Do you have any other suggestions for improving communication that you would like to share?

### **Concluding the Interview Session**

- Do you have any further observations you would like to talk about?
- Thank you for taking part, I appreciate your time immensely.

### **After the Interviewer has Left the Conference**

- Immediately make/complete the notes
- Place the written documents into an envelope, marked with the code name of the participant and secure it in a locked briefcase
- Place the audio recorder into a secure mode to avoid accidental erasure
- Prepare for the next interviewee

### Interview Protocol for Teachers

### **On the day of the interviews, I made arrangements at least 30 minutes ahead of the first scheduled interview to do the following:**

- Ensure the USB Voice Recorder works well. I will use my iPhone XS as a backup should the voice recorder not function well.
- Have notebooks, writing utensils and paper available
- Be prepared to start promptly on time

### **Before Starting the Interview:**

- Ask participants to confirm their identity
- Thank the participant for agreeing to take part in the interview
- I will inform the participant that:
  - “Just tell me when you want to take a break so that I can turn off the recorder for that period.”
  - “Before starting the interview, I just want to reconfirm your

permission to audio record the session. Please be advised that I may make notes as well.”

- “Let us go through the informed consent form you consented to electronically to make sure that you have all your questions answered.”
- “If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time by informing the researcher of your decision.”
- “If you have no further questions, we will now start the interview.”

- Then I will put on the voice recorder

### **Interview Questions for RQ 1**

1. What are the common methods and means you use to communicate with parents?
2. What are your expectations regarding your communication with parents? Please tell me why.
3. What are your opinions on the quality of your communication with parents? Please elaborate.
4. What do you consider to be the factors that contribute to quality parent-teacher communication? Please give me an example.
5. How satisfied are you regarding your communication with the parents? Please tell me why.
6. To what extent do you think parent-teacher communication provides you with opportunities to be involved in your student’s education? Please tell me why.
7. Is there anything else about this topic you would like me to know?

### **Interview Questions for RQ 2**

1. What do you consider are the barriers in your achieving quality communication with parents? Please tell me why.
2. What are your suggestions to overcome these barriers? Please tell me more.
3. What do you consider are the most important elements to target for improving the quality of your communication with parents. Please tell me more.
4. Do you have any other suggestions for improving communication that you would like to share?

### **Concluding the Interview Session**

- Do you have any further observations you would like to talk about?
- Thank you for taking part, I appreciate your time immensely.

**After the Interviewer has Left the Conference**

- Immediately make/complete the notes
- Place the written documents into an envelope, marked with the code name of the participant and secure it in a locked briefcase
- Place the audio recorder into a secure mode to avoid accidental erasure
- Prepare for the next interviewee