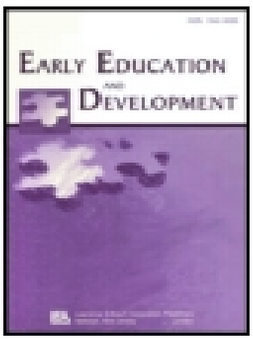

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School Readiness Beliefs of Dominican and Salvadoran Immigrant Parents

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ABSTRACT

Parents are children's first teachers, and it is critical that they understand what children need to be successful in school. This study examined the school readiness beliefs of 43 Latinx immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. Parents participated in semi-structured interviews regarding which skills their children should have before starting kindergarten, how they perceived their role in helping children acquire these skills, and how they learned which skills were necessary for success. *Research Findings*: Social and language skills were the most commonly identified school readiness skills. Approximately half of the parents mentioned math and general knowledge. Less than a third of the parents named self-care skills, motor development, and interest or motivation. Almost all parents in this study described taking an active role in fostering their children's school readiness skills. Parents typically described getting information through informal channels: either from friends and family or through experiences with older children. Only a few parents mentioned getting information from schools regarding the skills needed for kindergarten. *Practice/Policy*: Schools and policymakers should explore ways to provide parents with information about school readiness before children reach the age of five.

Parents' beliefs about which skills are most important for kindergarten readiness are important because they predict their academic socialization practices and children's later achievement (Elliott & Bachman, 2018; Puccioni, 2015; Sonnenschein, Metzger, & Thompson, 2016). Immigrant parents who lack familiarity with United States school systems may value different skills from nonimmigrant parents (Diamond et al., 2000; McIntyre et al., 2007). Parents from ethnic and cultural minority groups often have school readiness beliefs that differ from those of teachers, and these mismatches in beliefs can lead to educational difficulties (e.g., Barbarin et al., 2010). In a recent study, low-income Latinx[1] parents reported that one of the main barriers to preparing their children for kindergarten was their limited knowledge of which skills were most important and how to foster them (Peterson et al., 2018).

School readiness skills refer to the basic physical, emotional, social, language, cognitive, and behavioral competencies children need at the start of formal schooling (De Feyter & Winsler, 2009). Several studies have examined the school readiness beliefs of parents in the United States (Barbarin et al., 2008; Diamond et al., 2000; Elliott & Bachman, 2018; Piotrkowski et al., 2000; Puccioni, 2015). However, few have explicitly focused on Latinx immigrants (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2021), and even fewer have examined how parents learn which school readiness skills are expected by schools. The current study documented which skills immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic

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and El Salvador thought were needed for children's success in kindergarten, how they perceived their roles in helping their children acquire these skills, and how they learned which skills were important.

Theoretical Rationale for the Examination of Parents' Beliefs about School Readiness

Parent beliefs are ideas or knowledge that parents consider to be true (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). These include expectations and perceptions. Expectations are ideas about how children should act or what they should know; perceptions include subjective impressions of behavior or attributes (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). Parents' expectations are influenced by child characteristics such as age, gender, and competence (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Gunderson et al., 2012; Sameroff, 2009). Parent beliefs about child rearing and child development predict their parenting practices (e.g., Liew et al., 2018; Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). For example, general beliefs about how much parents should control children or support their autonomy predict controlling/supportive parenting behaviors (Kochanska et al., 1989). Specific beliefs about what skills children should develop and how they should behave also inform parenting (Elliott & Bachman, 2018; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

All development occurs within a cultural context. Understanding the cultural context is critical because it influences how parents structure the environment for their children and children's subsequent development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Harkness & Super, 1996). Super and Harkness' (1986) theory of the "developmental niche" is useful for understanding both parent beliefs and child development. The theory states that parents' theories about child development, referred to as ethnotheories, act as pathways through which development is fostered. Parents from different countries and cultural groups have different ethnotheories about the best ways to raise and educate children (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). Although most, if not all, parents want children to be well educated, different groups of parents may define education in different ways depending upon their culture (Sonnenschein, Metzger, & Gay, 2018).

Parents' beliefs about which skills children need for academic success are culturally influenced and can change according to personal values and social messaging (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992). In their seminal work on cultural differences in parent definitions of intelligence and related parenting strategies, Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) found that among Cambodian, Mexican, Filipino, Vietnamese, and native-born Anglo and Mexican American parents, values related to conformity, autonomy, and intelligence differed by country of origin and immigrant status, and predicted children's school performance. Immigrant parents may also have different beliefs about the skills children need to be successful upon school entry. It is important to understand which skills parents believe are important and how they understand their roles in helping children learn because these factors drive their parenting practices and children's achievement (Puccioni, 2015; Taylor et al., 2004). Research shows that school readiness beliefs predict parent's academic socialization practices and children's mathematics and reading scores in kindergarten, regardless of socio-economic status (Elliott & Bachman, 2018).

We ascribe to a strengths-based perspective that highlights the need to consider the unique values, practices, and funds of knowledge within families from different racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Sonnenschein & Sawyer, 2018). It is essential to understand how immigrants from different countries of origin (in this study, Dominican and Salvadoran immigrants) view school readiness so that schools and policymakers can become aware of the valuable contributions they make to children's school readiness and find ways to better partner with families to support children's school readiness.

The Importance of Studying Latinx Immigrant Families

Immigrant parents face many barriers to preparing their children for school, including lack of familiarity with the culture of United States education systems, language barriers, discrimination, and sociodemographic disadvantage (Cardoso et al., 2018; Chaudry et al., 2011). Approximately 40%

of Latinx children with at least one foreign-born parent live in poverty, compared to 28% of Latinx children of United States-born parents (Child Trends, 2018). Only 12% of Latinx immigrants who have been in the United States for 10 years or longer have bachelor's degrees (Pew Research Center, 2018). Difficulties preparing children for school may be exacerbated when immigrant parents have limited education and resources (McWayne et al., 2016). Latinx immigrant children also exhibit unique profiles of school readiness. Although they tend to score on par with or above other groups in social skills, they often receive lower scores in mathematics and reading (Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Koury & Votruba-Drzal, 2014). These differences may be related, at least in part, to parents' beliefs and practices (Elliott & Bachman, 2018).

Latinx Parents School Readiness Beliefs

Latinx immigrant parents hold distinct beliefs about child rearing and school readiness that may differ from European American parents born in the United States (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). Research shows that Mexican and Central American immigrants emphasize the importance of fostering moral and social education over pre-academic skills because they believe these competencies establish a foundation upon which to build academic skills. They focus on helping children understand the value of education, the importance of strong relationship skills, and appropriate and moral behavior (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020; Reese et al., 1995; Valdés, 1996).

The concept of being *Bien Educado* (Valdés, 1996) is central to Mexican immigrant parents' school readiness beliefs (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020). Being *Bien Educado* means displaying appropriate behavior, being cooperative, meeting role obligations, being obedient, and showing respect (Bridges et al., 2012; Harwood et al., 2002). Mexican immigrant families also value qualities that enhance family interactions (e.g., affection, communication, composure) and help children contribute to the family (e.g., self-reliance; Bridges et al., 2012). *Familismo* (importance of immediate and extended family ties) is another important cultural value (Calzada et al., 2010; Reese et al., 1995). Extensive qualitative research by Reese et al. (1995) suggests that Mexican immigrant families view moral development and good behavior as the "bedrock" upon which academic learning is achieved. They noted that the low-income Mexican immigrant parents in their study commented that children would learn more easily if they already knew how to respect others and behave appropriately.

It is also important to recognize that immigrant parents often hold bi-cultural values, meaning that they may select values from both the host country and their countries of origin to inform their socialization practices (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Aldoney and Cabrera (2016) asked 27 Latinx immigrant parents participating in Early Head Start to describe what made a good parent, the values they hoped to impart to their children, and what they did to foster the development of said values. Parents were from Central American (El Salvador & Nicaragua), Mexico, and South America (Columbia, and Peru). Results showed that parents endorsed the importance of some values prominent in their native culture, such as teaching children to respect others, and others prominent in the United States, such as being self-sufficient and independent. Such studies show the importance of examining the specific beliefs of immigrant groups, rather than combining them with non-immigrant families.

Existing studies are largely based on the views of Mexican immigrant parents (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020) or studies that do not distinguish immigrant and non-immigrant Latinx parents or the specific country of origin (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). Although Mexican immigrants still account for a large proportion of the immigrant population, there are several other large groups whose beliefs and values have not been explicated. Given that parents' beliefs about how to prepare children for kindergarten may differ among immigrant groups based on their reasons for and timing of immigration, their acculturation, and socioeconomic circumstances following immigration, studies of other Latinx immigrant groups are needed (Harwood et al., 2002).

Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant families are two of the fastest growing Latinx groups in the United States (Zong et al., 2018). However, little information has been collected regarding their school

readiness beliefs and related practices. The two countries share somewhat similar demographic characteristics (i.e., primarily Spanish-speaking, low income, and low educational attainment; Pew Research Center, 2018). On the other hand, they have distinct geographical, cultural, and historical characteristics from each other and from the other Latin American countries with which they are often combined in research (Menjivar & Gomez Cervantes, 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2018).

In the Dominican Republic, immigration in the 1970's and 1980's was stimulated by a combination of economic problems (Hernández, 2002) and displacement due to government land development (Pomeroy & Jacob, 2004). In the 1990's and 2000's, many social programs were cut including food subsidies and education services (Gregory, 2014). Economic trouble and high levels of income inequality motivated families to leave for the United States in hope of better economic opportunities and social mobility. Dominican immigrants are typically very transnational, retaining cultural and economic links with the Dominican Republic even after years living in the United States (Pita & Utakis, 2002). They often live in ethnic enclaves in the United States, return home frequently, and continually send money to friends and family (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). Although Spanish is the most popular language in the Dominican Republic, many Dominicans come to the United States having learned English in school. Public school is freely available for documented citizens and typically starts at age five. Due to its perception as the language of commerce, English language skills are prized by Dominican schools and are taught from an early age (Bartlett & García, 2011).

Whereas challenges in the Dominican Republic have been mainly rooted in economic insecurity, Salvadorans have faced both economic insecurity and a myriad of physical dangers including civil wars, military coups, and natural disasters (Boland, 2001; Menjivar & Gomez Cervantes, 2018). Many Salvadoran immigrants come to the United States specifically to escape violence and the lack of infrastructure that resulted from these decimating events (Menjivar & Gomez Cervantes, 2018). Perhaps because of the military culture that resulted from such frequent episodes of unrest, El Salvador is known to be one of the most patriarchal and, at times, chauvinistic Spanish-speaking countries (Boland, 2001). Because of this, women in El Salvador have lower levels of literacy, education, and employment and are often victims of violence and domestic abuse (Boland, 2001).

Public education is less accessible in El Salvador than in the United States or the Dominican Republic. Consequently, El Salvador has lower primary, and secondary school enrollment and lower literacy rates than the Dominican Republic (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Until the 1990's education was not nationally available in El Salvador. Schools were concentrated in cities and rural areas were severely underserved. Currently, free public education is provided nationally. However, only primary school (grades 1–6) is universally available (Boland, 2001). Compulsory education begins when children are seven years old, two years later than it does in the Dominican Republic and the United States. For the affluent, there are also independent private schools run by Evangelical Christian or Catholic churches (Boland, 2001). Many Salvadoran parents may have limited experience with formal education systems. However, Salvadorans have a vibrant oral tradition of storytelling and they often transmit cultural values through folklore. The spoken word is prized as an artform and the pinnacle of self-expression (Boland, 2001). Thus, oral communication may be a particularly salient educational value. These differences in the contexts of schooling in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador are likely to influence parents' beliefs about how to prepare children for school in the United States.

How Parents View Their Role in Fostering Children's School Readiness Skills

Research suggests that Latinx parents believe they should provide advice and guidance, monitor their children, and be good role models (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Azmitia & Brown, 2002; Reese et al., 1995). There is a small body of research documenting how Mexican and Central American immigrant mothers socialize their children's social, reading, and mathematics skills (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016;

Galindo et al., 2019; Sonnenschein, Galindo, et al., 2018). However, to our knowledge, no studies have investigated how specific groups of Latinx immigrant parents view their roles in fostering a broader array of school readiness skills.

Qualitative studies show that Mexican and Central American immigrant parents teach their children appropriate social behaviors through explicit guidance and role modeling (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Reese et al., 1995). For example, Reese et al. (1995) found that Mexican and Central American immigrant parents believed children learned appropriate behavior mainly through observation of good adult and peer role models. Further, parents explained that they discouraged misbehavior by explaining consequences and restricting peer groups so that children would only be exposed to other children with good behavior.

Generally, studies show that Latinx immigrant parents value learning and general skills such as the ability to communicate with others (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Cycyk & Hammer, 2020). However, existing research has only focused on specific categories of skills (e.g., literacy) and has not investigated which categories of school readiness parents prioritize over others. In addition, studies have not focused on parents of preschool age children who are about to enter kindergarten. Cycyk and Hammer (2020) interviewed Mexican immigrant mothers of toddlers about their beliefs and practices related to early language and learning. They found that families valued early communication skills and focused on fostering good conduct and social skills, English and Spanish language skills, and supportive relationships with other children and family members. Aldoney and Cabrera (2016) found that Mexican immigrant parents participating in Early Head Start, with children under three years old, described efforts to incorporate reading into their daily routines. Some reported reading to children for a certain amount of time each day or reading a book at bedtime. In one of the only existing studies of parent beliefs about early childhood development in the Dominican Republic, Mathieu et al. (2020) found that mothers (n = 55) of children under five years old valued behavior, educational attainment, and early literacy skills. However, they owned few books and were more likely to do activities with children such as singing, talking, and playing than reading. Parents were highly interested in early childhood education services and wanted more information about how to help their children become successful in school and in their later careers.

Latinx immigrant parents' mathematics socialization practices have only been explored in a few studies. In a mixed methods study of Mexican and Salvadoran immigrant mothers' of children in pre-k through first grade beliefs regarding the development of children's early mathematics skills, about half the mothers said their children learned mathematics through play and practice (Sonnenschein, Galindo, et al., 2018). More information is needed about which school readiness skills specific groups of Latinx immigrant parents value and what they do to foster their children's skills at home.

How Parents Learn About School Readiness Skills

Although most parents want information about how to foster their children's school readiness (Diamond et al., 2000; Peterson et al., 2018), evidence regarding how parents get such information is surprisingly scarce. Peterson et al. (2018) found that low-income Latinx parents (N = 210; 94% Latinx, 85% Spanish-speaking) reported lacking knowledge of what skills were valued by schools and that this was a barrier to preparing their children for kindergarten. Unfortunately, parents in the study also reported underutilizing community resources such as free preschool, which might have provided them with the information they sought. Diamond et al. (2000) reported that Black and Latinx parents, after controlling for income and parent education, were significantly more likely to express concerns about children's school readiness than White parents. Studies like this suggest that Latinx parents in the United States may be looking for guidance and support in preparing their children for kindergarten.

Many programs, such as Head Start and other forms of federally funded pre-kindergarten, focus on engaging families in their children's transition to kindergarten and educating them about what skills

children need to be successful in elementary school (Patton & Wang, 2012). However, families who do not send their children's to pre-kindergarten or childcare may not receive any formal information about kindergarten until their children reach enrollment age. Given that Latinx immigrant families are less likely to enroll their children in preschool and other forms of nonparental care than White and Black families, they may be particularly disconnected from sources of formal information about kindergarten (Crosby et al., 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Latinx immigrant families report getting information about childcare options mainly from their social networks (Chaudry et al., 2011). So, they also may rely on their social networks for information about school readiness. However, to our knowledge, no studies have explicitly examined how parents get information about the skills needed for success in kindergarten.

The Present Study

The current qualitative study examined the school readiness beliefs of parents who were first- and second-generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. We conducted semi-structured interviews to determine which skills the two groups of Latinx immigrant parents thought were most important for children's success in kindergarten, how they learned which skills were most important, and how they helped their children acquire these skills. The data in this paper come from a larger study investigating school readiness beliefs and related practices in several large immigrant groups in the United States (Dominican, Salvadoran and Chinese).

Our research questions were:

(1) What aspects of school readiness do Latinx immigrant parents mention when they describe the skills children need for kindergarten?
(2) How do Latinx immigrant parents view their roles in fostering children's school readiness skills?
(3) How do Latinx immigrant parents learn about what is needed for kindergarten in the United States?
(4) Do parents' beliefs about kindergarten readiness or their roles in fostering said readiness differ by country of origin (Dominican Republic vs. El Salvador)?

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from local schools, child care centers, Head Start centers, religious organizations, and other community centers from areas surrounding the two universities involved in the study: Allentown, Pennsylvania and Silver Spring, Maryland. We restricted our sample to the two largest immigrant groups in those areas: parents from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador (Zong & Batalova, 2018). To be included in the study, parents had to identify as 1st or 2nd generation immigrants from El Salvador or the Dominican Republic and be the primary caregiver of a child entering kindergarten in the next two years (meaning children were 3–5 years old). Only one parent in the family, typically the mother, participated.

The sample for the current study included 43 parents of preschool children who identified as first- or second-generation Latinx immigrants from the Dominican Republic (n = 21) and El Salvador (n = 22). Parents generally reported that they came to the United States to pursue better economic and life opportunities for themselves and their families. However, some also mentioned that their immigration was motivated by civil war and violence in their home countries. On average, parents were approximately 34 years old (see Table 1). Most were first generation immigrants who had resided in the United States for approximately 14 years. They spoke primarily Spanish at home and were generally low-income. Seventy-six percent of parents were married or living with a partner. Half (50%) were employed full time; 21% were employed part time, and 28% were not employed at all. Most

Table 1. Participant demographics.

	Total sample (N = 43)		Dominicans (n = 21)		Salvadorans (n = 22)	
	M or %	*SD*	*M* or %	SD	*M* or %	*SD*
Parent age (years)	34.46	6.91	33.10	6.52	35.76	7.18
Generation Status						
First Generation	83.7%		85.7%		81.8%	
Second Generation	16.3%		14.3%		18.2%	
Years living in U.S. (1st gen)	14.46	8.22	13.81	10.67	17.44	7.77
Highest level of parental education**						
High School Diploma/GED or Less	38.1%		30.0%		45.4%	
Associate's/Vocational Degree	45.2%		45.0%		45.4%	
Bachelor's Degree	11.9%		20.0%		4.5%	
Master's Degree or Higher	4.8%		5.0%		4.5%	
Annual Income						
$20,000 or Less	20.0%		27.8%		13.6%	
$20,000–$40,000	45.0%		38.9%		50.0%	
$40,000–$60,000	12.5%		11.1%		13.6%	
$60,000–$80,000	12.5%		16.7%		9.1%	
$80,000 or More	10.0%		6%		13.6%	
Primary Language(s) Spoken at Home						
Spanish	79.5%		76.5%		81.8%	
English	20.5%		23.5%		18.2%	
Child gender (% girls)**	48.8%		23.8%		72.7%	
Child age (months)	51.95	10.31	50.71	12.47	53.13	7.86
Number of Siblings in Home						
Number of Older Siblings	0.93	1.01	0.76	0.94	1.09	1.07
Number of Younger Siblings	0.35	0.61	0.43	0.68	0.27	0.55
Older Siblings at Home (Y/N)	62.8%		57.1%		68.2%	
Younger Siblings at Home (Y/N)	27.9%		33.3%		22.7%	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Income categories were reduced for table display. The interview question asked parents to choose their income range based on $10,000 intervals.

families were recruited from childcare and Head Start classrooms, meaning that families had some experience with early education before the start of this study.

There were no statistically significant group differences related to country of origin for generation status, parent education, marital status, employment, or languages used at home ($p > .05$). Dominican and Salvadoran parents were similar in age, income, education, and number of years they lived in the United States ($p > .05$). Children's mean age was approximately 52 months. The only significant difference between groups was child gender. Dominican families had mostly boys, whereas Salvadorans had mostly girls, X^2 (1, n = 43) = 10.29, p = .001, ϕ = .49). Thus, we tested for the effects of child gender on parent beliefs in subsequent analyses.

Measures

The measures used in this study were available in English and Spanish. Consistent with recommended practices (Peña, 2007), the questionnaires were translated and back translated by native speakers.

Demographics

We used the Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) Child and Family Questionnaire developed by Hammer et al. (2020). We collected information on parents' and children's age, generation status, length of time living in the United States, parents' educational level, family income, languages spoken in the home, and number of siblings (see Table 1).

School Readiness Beliefs Interview

Parents responded to open-ended questions (adapted from Barbarin et al., 2008), which probed for parents' notions about school readiness and how they learned about kindergarten in the United States.

Key questions included: *(1) "In your opinion, what must your child know or be able to do by the time he/she starts kindergarten?" (2) "Let's talk a bit more about the skills you mentioned in the last question. How does (child's name) learn these skills?", and (3) "People learn about school in a lot of different ways. For instance, people learn about school from their own experiences, the experiences of their children, family/friends, people from the community, books and other media. Can you tell us about the ways in which you have learned about kindergarten in the United States?"* (If parent went to kindergarten in the United States*: "I know you went to kindergarten in the United States but since then did you also learn about what goes on in kindergarten or its importance from other sources?"*).

School Readiness Beliefs Q-Sort

Parents completed a Q-sort task in which they ranked the importance of 36 school readiness skills for success in kindergarten. Items were developed based on National Educational Goals Panel (1991) school readiness dimensions and other empirical studies (Barbarin et al., 2008; Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Categories included social-emotional skills, mathematics, language, approaches to learning (e.g., *eager to learn*), motor skills, and self-care skills. Parents were asked to place nine skills into each of four categories: very important, important, somewhat important, and less important. We report here the nine most highly rated items, representing the top 25%.

Procedure

Research assistants (5 women and 1 man) were all Latinx college students with familiarity with targeted neighborhoods and fluency in Spanish. They visited recruitment sites along with the investigators in the morning and afternoon to ask parents to sign up for the study. Parents who agreed to participate were given flyers advertising the study and were asked to share them with friends who met the inclusion criteria.

Parents participated in two individual sessions approximately one week apart with a trained interviewer. Parents were given a 25 USD honorarium for their participation at each visit (a total of 50 USD). Only one parent in the family, typically the mother, was interviewed. The semi-structured interview was administered during session one and the Q-Sort was administered during session two. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English, depending on the parents' preference, with an interviewer fluent in that language. Most parents (70%) chose to be interviewed in Spanish. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and Spanish interviews were translated into English. The English translations were then checked against the original Spanish transcriptions by a native Spanish speaker to determine accuracy. Two fluent speakers resolved any discrepancies.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Coding Approach

For RQ1 and RQ3, we used an adapted form of Qualitative Consensual Coding (CQR; Hill et al., 1997). CQR is an inductive coding approach that involves a primary research team and uses constant comparison to arrive at coding decisions. Our primary research team consisted of five coders with varying backgrounds and levels of experience (3 faculty with backgrounds in developmental psychology, cultural studies, and early education, one postdoctoral associate, and one research assistant). Before coding, we deidentified interview responses and grouped them by question type. For example, for RQ1 and RQ2, we looked at responses to the questions pertaining to what parents thought children needed to know or be able to do by kindergarten and how they thought children learned. Two members of the coding team reviewed all responses using NVIVO 12 to create a list of specific codes. Then the full team met to discuss the core ideas typified by the specific codes and to form operational definitions. For example, specific codes included "knowing numbers" and "naming numbers." The core idea associated with these codes was numeracy. The full team reviewed 20

transcripts and worked together to define the core ideas and to ensure that none of them were overlapping.

Working from this coding scheme, two team members coded the core ideas mentioned by 15 parents. Coding was entered in SPSS (1 = mentioned, 0 = not mentioned) so that Cohen's Kappas could be generated to assess intercoder agreement. On the first round of coding, Cohen's Kappas were 1.00 for most core ideas; the lowest was .77. Only 4 core ideas had less than perfect agreement and there was only one disagreement per core idea. For core ideas with less than perfect agreement, the coders discussed disagreements and made adjustments to the operational definitions in the coding scheme. On the second round of reliability coding there were no disagreements. Once the coders reached perfect reliability, they coded all transcripts and entered their coding in SPSS. Four members of the research team reviewed all coding to ensure that all unique ideas were captured and that coding was correct. There were three instances in which the coding team could see statements falling into multiple coding categories. In cases of such ambiguity, one faculty member who was not involved in the coding conversation served as auditor and made the final coding decision. Once all codes and core ideas were finalized, we conducted cross analysis to organize resulting core ideas into categories (see Tables 2 and 4).

For parents' perceived roles in fostering school readiness skills (RQ2) we undertook a deductive coding strategy. We created *a priori* codes for parents' perceived roles in fostering skills based on Sonnenschein, Galindo, et al. (2018)'s work indicating that immigrant parents typically indicate active involvement and role modeling and that sources of knowledge typically include parents, teachers, children, and other adults.

Once codes were finalized, they were entered into SPSS version 26 as dichotomous variables (1 = mentioned, 0 = not mentioned). Chi-squares and logistic regressions were used to compare the proportion of parents in who mentioned specific thematic categories by country of origin and child gender. For logistic regressions, given the relatively small sample size, we removed nonsignificant covariates when appropriate.

Results

Dominican and Salvadoran Immigrant Parents' Beliefs about Kindergarten Readiness

Parents' responses fell into eight different categories: Language and literacy, social skills, mathematics, general knowledge, self-care skills, interest/motivation, motor skills, and age requirements. On average, each parent's responses represented four categories (M = 3.77, Range = 0–6). In CQR, response categories mentioned by almost all participants are considered "general," categories mentioned by over half are "typical," categories mentioned by fewer than 50% are "variant," and categories mentioned by only a few participants are "rare" (Hill et al., 2005). Table 2 provides the percentage of parents who mentioned each category and core idea by country of origin. The only category that could be described as "general" was the importance of *language and literacy* skills for kindergarten readiness (mentioned by 93%). Core ideas in this category included *early literacy skills* (77%) such as alphabet/letter knowledge, writing, and reading, *communication skills* (28%) such as the ability to express wants and needs, and *English* (14%) or *Spanish* (5%) language skills. Most responses in this category emphasized the importance of early literacy skills such as letter knowledge and emergent reading skills. The response below typifies such statements.

> At least umm recognize the letters and eh uh have a little bit of knowledge about reading. Maybe start to read books or . . . when one reads to him, repeat what he is understanding. – Salvadoran mother L

Mothers who indicated the importance of English described how English was necessary for success in school and career. Some commented on how their immigration experiences informed this value.

Table 2. Parents' perceptions of skills needed for Kindergarten.

Categories & Core Ideas	Full Sample ($N = 43$)		Country of Origin: Dominican Republic ($n = 21$)		Country of Origin: El Salvador ($n = 22$)	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Language & Literacy	40	93%	19	91%	21	96%
Early Literacy	33	77%	17	81%	16	73%
Communication	12	28%	5	24%	7	32%
English Language	6	14%	2	10%	4	18%
Spanish Language	2	5%	1	5%	1	5%
Social	36	84%	18	86%	18	82%
Social or Relationship Skills	30	70%	13	62%	17	77%
Appropriate Behavior	19	44%	10	48%	9	41%
Respect	2	5%	1	5%	1	5%
Mathematics	23	54%	14	67%	9	41%
Early Numeracy	21	49%	12	57%	9	41%
Spatial Knowledge	3	7%	2	10%	1	5%
General Knowledge	23	54%	12	57%	11	50%
Common Concepts	18	42%	10	48%	8	36%
Personal Information	7	16%	4	19%	3	14%
Self-Care Skills	11	26%	5	24%	6	27%
Eating	3	7%	1	5%	2	9%
Toileting	6	14%	3	14%	3	14%
Dressing	4	9%	2	10%	2	9%
Cleanliness	3	7%	2	10%	1	5%
Interest or Motivation	6	14%	3	14%	3	14%
Motor Skills	5	12%	2	10%	3	14%
Age Requirements	4	9%	1	5%	3	14%

> You want the best for your kids, you don't want your kids to go through what you went through. For example, I don't know how to speak English and almost couldn't get a degree or job because I didn't know the language. – Dominican Mother K

Responses related to social foundations were typical (mentioned by 84% of parents). Within this category, parents most frequently mentioned the need for *social or relationship* skills (70%) including sharing, making friends, and forming relationships with teachers, and the need for *appropriate behavior* (44%) such as following rules/directions, obeying the teacher, and having good manners and behavior. A few parents who commented about this category of skills spoke specifically about the importance of *respect* (5%), describing the importance of the teacher as an educator and authority figure. In the example below, a Dominican mother emphasized the importance of sharing and socializing with others.

> To relate with more people, to share, because until he enters school his circle is closed, only with the people from the house; so to learn about social relationships. Because we weren't created to be isolated creatures [laughs] and it is important; it is healthy sharing with other people, not being in a closed circle of only family or only yourself but instead being open to meet and share with more people, in this case more children. That will help him also in the formation of the way he sees life and of his character. – Dominican Mother E

The following response typifies comments about appropriate behavior and respecting authority.

> I think it's important for her to be able to take simple instructions . . . you know, like just like okay it's time to quiet down, she needs to understand that. When it comes time to start school, she's going to have a teacher and the simple instructions that she gets from her teacher, she has to follow. – Salvadoran Mother U

Fifty-four percent of the parents gave responses that fell into the category of *mathematics* skills. Core ideas in this category included the importance of *early numeracy (49%) such as* knowing numbers or how to count, and *spatial knowledge* (7%) such as how to identify shapes. Many parents simply said "numbers" or "mathematics." Most parents used counting as an example of an important

mathematics skill. A few parents mentioned specific counting goals, such as needing to learn to count to 20 or 100.

Another typically mentioned category was *general knowledge* (54%). This category included core ideas of *common concepts* (42%) such as knowing colors, animals, or the days of the week and being able to recall *personal information* (16%) such as parents' phone numbers, the child's full name, parents' full names, and emergency contact information).

> I think she needs to know . . . um the basics as far as my mommy's information like if in case of an emergency she's not you know there's someone she needs to get help or something she should know my phone number. Um she should know how to you know dial in case of an emergency. Um 911, the basic. – Salvadoran Mother D

Some parents emphasized the need for a category of skills which we called *self-care skills* (26%). Responses in this category referred to the ability to complete personal care tasks such as like toileting (14%), dressing (9%), eating (7%), and maintaining cleanliness (7%) without assistance from a parent or teacher. Mothers who mentioned these skills clearly believed they were critical for the development of independence and success in school.

> I would say, for him to be able to dress himself, undress himself, for him to be able to eat independently, clean up after himself. – Dominican Mother A

Approximately 14% of parents' responses fell in the category of the importance of *interest and motivation* to learn. Given that this category was mentioned by only six participants, no specific core ideas were delineated. Parents whose comments fell into this category said that they knew children were ready for school when they became more interested, excited, and motivated to learn new things. For example, one mother explained that she knew her daughter was ready to learn when she started asking questions and showing excitement about learning,

> She wants to learn more. She asks everything, learns everything, when she looks at [educational] videos she starts to sing. – Salvadoran Mother N

The category of *motor skills* was rarely mentioned (12%). Again, given the rarity of these responses, the category was not broken down into core ideas. Codes referred to being able to hold a pencil or crayon or walk independently. For example:

> He knows how to hold a pencil . . . he has been doing scribbles. – Dominican Mother O

Although not a school readiness skill *per se*, four parents (9%) also mentioned the importance of *age* for kindergarten readiness. Responses noted the connection between age and the capacity for learning or the requirement that children be five years old to attend kindergarten in the United States. For example:

> He will be one year older, and I think that would be better. Like at four years there is more capacity to be in school. – Dominican Mother O

Examination of Differences by Country of Origin and Child Gender

Chi-square tests indicated that there were no significant differences in the proportion of parents who mentioned school readiness categories by country of origin. Only one gender difference emerged. There was a significant effect of child gender on beliefs about the importance of mathematics, controlling for country of origin. A logistic regression with mentioning mathematics as the outcome and country of origin (Dominican Republic) and Gender (Boy) as the predictors indicated that parents of boys were significantly more likely to mention the importance of mathematics, $B = 2.08$, $SE = 0.79$, Wald $X^2 = 6.86$, OR = 7.98, $p = .009$. The model accounted for approximately 29% of the variance in mentioning the importance of mathematics (Naglekerke pseudo $R^2 = .295$).

Triangulation of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

In order to triangulate our coding, we compared our findings to results from the Q-sort in which parents were asked to rank 36 specific skills in order of importance. [For more information about the Q-sort findings, see Sawyer et al., 2021.] Parents rated nine cards as "very important." Consistent with the results of the semi-structured interview, parents mainly emphasized the importance of social and language skills. The nine skills most commonly rated as "very important" were: "shows respect for others" (75%), "uses good manners" (55%), "eager to learn" (50%), "obedient" (46%), "knows how to write his/her name" (45%), and "communicates well in English" (44%), "can express wants or needs in words" (40%), "is self-confident" (40%), and "knows the names of colors" (37%).

Dominican and Salvadoran Immigrant Parents' Beliefs about How Children Gain Skills

Responses were coded to determine who parents mentioned was responsible for their children's learning. If parents mentioned they were responsible, we also coded for the parent's role in fostering school readiness skills (active or role model; see Table 3). Interviewers probed for parents' beliefs about their roles with respect to academic/cognitive and social/behavioral skills. Because responses seemed to differ depending on domain, we divided parents' responses into academic/cognitive and social/behavioral skills for coding.

Who Is Responsible for Teaching?

Parents typically mentioned that they were responsible for teaching children both academic/cognitive (77%) and social/behavioral skills (74%; See Table 3). Teachers/schools were less often viewed as responsible for teaching academic/cognitive (37%) and social/behavioral skills (23%). Interestingly, almost half of the parents mentioned that children learned social skills from other children (47%). However, perhaps not surprisingly, few mentioned that other children were responsible for helping children acquire academic skills (9%). A larger proportion of parents mentioned children learned social/behavioral skills from other children (47%) than academic/cognitive skills (9%).

Parents' Perceived Roles

Parents typically reported taking an active role in fostering school readiness skills (77%; see Table 3). It was clear from their responses that they spent time engaged in a myriad of learning activities and that they worked hard to structure the home learning environment for their children. Parents shared how they taught their children and provided educational materials such as videos, storybooks, and

Table 3. Parents' perceptions of who teaches and how children learn academic/cognitive & social/behavioral skills.

	Academic/Cognitive						Social/Behavioral					
Sources/Roles	Full Sample (N = 43)		Dominican Republic (n = 21)		El Salvador (n = 22)		Overall (N = 43)		Dominican Republic (n = 21)		El Salvador (n = 22)	
	N	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*N*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Who Teaches Child												
Parents	33	77%	14	67%	19	86%	32	74%	15	71%	17	77%
Teachers/Schools	16	37%	9	43%	7	32%	10	23%	4	19%	6	27%
Unspecified	8	19%	6	29%	2	9%	5	12%	3	14%	2	9%
*Other Children**	4	9%*	2	10%	2	10%	20	47%*	11	53%	9	41%
Other Adults	1	2%	0	0%	1	5%	4	9%	3	14%	1	5%
Parent's Role												
Active	33	77%	14	67%	19	86%	28	65%	13	62%	15	68%
Role Model	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	12%	3	14%	2	9%

* $p < .001$.

workbooks. For example, one mother shared how she created a reading environment for her son and actively fostered his writing skills:

> I read to him. Yeah, and sit down with him and we work together. I have a small table in my house and we will sit and we will practice the letters. . .. – Dominican Mother B

Another explained that she provided learning materials for her children, but she also instilled in her children their responsibility for learning:

> I try to teach them, I buy them flashcards from the Dollar store, of colors and all that and they use them to play, but when they go to school they know that it is their obligation and they now try to do it because they see the other kids. – Salvadoran Mother B

Only five parents (12%) mentioned fostering school readiness by being a role model and this occurred only for social/behavioral skills development. A larger proportion of parents mentioned being a role model for children's development of social/behavioral skills (12%) than academic/cognitive skills (0%). Parents typically described how adults served as role models for shaping the social and behavioral norms of children. One mother explained the importance of maintaining civility between parents because it shapes how children understand social interactions. For example:

> If I argue with my husband or anything happens, and I do it in front of the children, they will believe that it is normal, to behave badly, to be aggressive with others. There are couples who are aggressive in front of the children, so for them that is normal to hit another child. But if they never see that in the home. . . – Dominican Mother I

Parents' Sources of Information about Kindergarten

The final research question addressed how parents reportedly learned about the skills needed for success in kindergarten (see Table 4). Responses to this question were highly variable. No one category stood out as being a general or even typical theme (Hill et al., 2005). The majority of parents in our sample (63%) had older children who attended kindergarten in the United States. So, it was not surprising that one of the most frequently mentioned response categories for this question was learning about kindergarten in the United States when *older children* started school (33% mentioned).

About a third of the parents (30%) received information about the skills needed for kindergarten in the United States from their social networks including *friends, family, and community members*. One mother noted that she relied on her family for information because she did not know where else to turn:

> You don't know. It's based on word of mouth. I found out [when child should start kindergarten] based on my aunt when she told me he's been in the home a while and why don't you find out what you need to do to find

Table 4. Sources of information about kindergarten readiness.

Categories	Full Sample (N = 43)		Country of Origin: Dominican Republic (n = 21)		Country of Origin: El Salvador (n = 22)	
	N	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Older Child Attended KG in U.S.	14	33%	4	19%	10	45%
Friends/Family/Community	13	30%	6	29%	7	32%
No Specific Source	8	19%	6	29%	2	9%
Parent Attended KG in the U.S.	6	14%	2	10%	4	18%
Professional Experience	5	12%	3	14%	2	9%
Prior Care Setting or Teacher	5	12%	3	14%	2	9%
Internet, Books, and News	5	12%	2	10%	3	14%
Future Elementary School	4	9%	1	5%	3	14%
Pediatrician	1	2%	1	5%	0	0%
Library or Community Center	1	2%	1	5%	0	0%

> a Head Start program. But it's already finished. So, I was a little bit late. There's not much resources. – Dominican Mother W

Nineteen percent mentioned *no specific source* from which they received or sought out information prior to kindergarten. Parents whose responses fell in this category generally indicated they planned to learn through experience when their children started kindergarten. For example:

> I have not had to take any child to kindergarten, here; this is my first experience that I am going to have. – Dominican Mother Q

> I still haven't learned about it (kindergarten). My child is still in pre-k. – Dominican Mother J

Fourteen percent of parents said they learned the skills needed in kindergarten from their personal experiences *attending kindergarten in the United States*. Parents who said they learned from personal experiences often noted the hardships they faced adjusting to kindergarten. For example, Salvadoran mother D said "[I learned] from personal experience. It was tough for me."

Twelve percent reported receiving information about the skills needed for kindergarten from a *prior care setting or teacher*. Two parents noted the support they received from Head Start teachers and home visitors. One mother noted that teachers from her child's early care and education center explained what they were teaching and how it related to kindergarten preparation:

> In her school they are talking about when she goes to kindergarten. The teacher is saying that they are preparing for kindergarten. They have a summer school where they focus on everything that they will learn the next school year (in kindergarten). – Salvadoran Mother H.

Twelve percent of parents researched the skills needed for kindergarten using *books or the internet*. Parents whose responses fell in this category mentioned searching for videos showing how to help children learn, reading about general education systems in the United States and trying to find similarities and differences between the education systems in their previous countries and the United States. School websites were noted as a helpful source for information:

> I think that what helped me learn was research. I looked on the school's website. That was a big thing for me because you know it kind of helps guide you a little bit. Because, I didn't know where to start. – Salvadoran Mother D

Only nine percent said they received information from their *children's future elementary schools*. However, this information appeared to be more about requirements and eligibility than school readiness. Parents also mentioned being invited to open houses shortly before the start of kindergarten.

> Well, the school sends you mail. Like, it's time for registration. You have a daughter that's um turning this and that and so you should register. And if you don't, believe me they'll make you register. – Dominican Mother R

Discussion

This qualitative study examined which school readiness beliefs two groups of Latinx immigrant parents viewed as important prerequisites for kindergarten success, how they conceptualized their roles in fostering school readiness, and from where they got their information. Existing research based on quantitative surveys on this topic has only skimmed the surface of parents' beliefs. The few qualitative studies have focused primarily on Mexican immigrant children, neglecting other large groups of Latinx immigrants in the United States (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Cycyk & Hammer, 2020; Reese et al., 1995) This study is the first to collect in-depth information about the skills Dominican and Salvadoran immigrants find important for school readiness and to triangulate the data from qualitative and quantitative sources. In addition, to our knowledge, it is the only study that has asked parents to identify where or how they learned about the skills needed for kindergarten.

Dominican and Salvadoran Immigrant Parents' School Readiness Beliefs

This study found mainly similarities between Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant parents' beliefs about the most important skills for kindergarten. When asked to describe the most important skills for kindergarten readiness, most of the Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant parents in this study mentioned language and literacy skills. These findings were echoed by quantitative ratings from the items on the Q-Sort task. When describing which language and literacy skills were important, most mentioned knowing letters or the alphabet and knowing how to communicate. This aligns with previous work showing that Latinx immigrant families value language/literacy and are aware of the importance of language and literacy for school readiness (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). Although we did not ask parents directly if they engaged in specific literacy practices, many mentioned practicing basic skills such as letter identification or reciting the alphabet and few mentioned interactive reading. Parents may appreciate more information and support around early literacy practices, given that this appears to be a highly valued domain.

It is not surprising that Latinx immigrants focused on the importance of language skills. About 80% of the participants in this study spoke mainly Spanish at home. Latinx children who come from low-income Spanish-speaking homes are less likely to receive proficient scores on holistic school readiness assessments (Quirk et al., 2013). Theoretically, this is because students who are not English proficient have trouble understanding teachers, peers, and school curricula. English skills are needed to participate in most aspects of society within the United States. Spanish is not consistently spoken in K-12 schools. Thus, students with limited English skills may not receive sufficient support in Spanish at school to understand curricula. Of course, it should be noted that socio-economic status is also likely to play a role in Spanish-speaking students' lower scores (Hoff, 2013). However, recent reports show that United States schools struggle to support young English Learners due to a lack of high-quality long-term bilingual instruction programs (Lam & Richards, 2020). Parents' emphasis on the importance of English literacy may show an awareness of this problem.

Social and relationship skills were also frequently mentioned by parents. Comments in this category often centered on the importance of sharing and forming friendships. However, parents also mentioned the importance of children demonstrating appropriate behavior and respect. Other studies also have shown that Latinx parents emphasize the importance of social and self-regulatory skills for school readiness (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Peterson et al., 2018). For example, Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) found that Mexican immigrant parents emphasized the import of social and motivational capacities for first-graders.

The emphasis on social and relationship skills is in keeping with other literature on the school readiness beliefs of Latinx parents. These Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant parents mentioned many of the aspects of *Bien Educado* (being a morally correct and well-behaved child; Bridges et al., 2012; Valdés, 1996). Previous studies have shown that Latinx immigrant parents' value skills that will help children strengthen social ties and show respect to others (Bridges et al., 2012; Reese et al., 1995). These strong values are strengths of Latinx immigrant families, because social skills, such as the ability to follow directions and share, are important predictors of school readiness (Quirk et al., 2013). Despite the growing academic demands of kindergarten (Bassok et al., 2016), there is evidence that kindergarten teachers also value social skills more than academic skills (Hustedt et al., 2018). Valuing and working to foster children's social skills may be a strength of Latinx immigrant families and a point of connection for family-school partnerships.

Only about half the parents in this study mentioned the importance of mathematics as a component of school readiness. Given that early numeracy skills are some of the strongest predictors of later achievement, more outreach from schools and communities is needed to help parents consider ways to help bolster early math at home (Duncan et al., 2007; Pace et al., 2019). Parents who mentioned mathematics in this study typically mentioned basic skills such as counting, number identification, and shape identification. Although these skills are important, there are also many other mathematics skills that can be fostered in early childhood such as measurement and basic operations (National Council of

Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2021). If parents do not know that children are expected to enter kindergarten with mathematics skills or that early mathematics skills are important for later achievement, they may not focus on fostering them before kindergarten (Taylor et al., 2004).

Parents of boys were significantly more likely to mention the importance of mathematics. This difference is notable and indicates a potential gender stereotype related to the importance of mathematics for school readiness. To our knowledge, no other studies have found such differences in parents' beliefs about school readiness skills. However, studies do suggest that Latinx parents' beliefs about education may differ based on children's gender (Tomasetto et al., 2015). Latinx families tend to have more traditional gender-related expectations and norms than White families from the United States (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). Although no studies have examined how math stereotypes influence children's performance in the early years, there is evidence that Latina mothers' math gender stereotypes influence their math practices and children's achievement. For example, one study found that Latina mother's math gender stereotypes when daughters were in fifth grade influenced their involvement in their daughters' math homework and the daughters' subsequent confidence in math in fifth and sixth grade (Denner et al., 2018).

Some parents also mentioned the importance of interest or motivation for learning. Both interest and motivation are both components of approaches to learning. Although early approaches to learning are consistently associated with later achievement (Li-Grining et al., 2010), they are not included on all measures of school readiness. Focusing on fostering approaches to learning in early education may be a helpful strategy for schools to connect with Latinx immigrant families. Bustamante and Hindman (2020) found that Latinx children outperformed children of other race/ethnicities on approaches to learning in the national Head Start FACES study and that their approaches to learning predicted scores in other academic domains. Being Latinx predicted higher scores in the fall and spring of the Head Start year and greater gains across the school year, controlling for maternal education and income. Approaches to learning also significantly predicted academic readiness, suggesting that these social and emotional skills are strengths that may bolster the development of other academic skills.

Parents' Perceived Roles in Fostering Kindergarten Readiness

All parents mentioned being actively involved in helping their children gain school readiness skills. This finding is in line with other studies which have demonstrated that Latinx parents see it as their responsibility to help children build school readiness skills (Galindo et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2018). However, it contradicts past findings that some parents, particularly those from Latinx cultural groups, view it as the teacher's responsibility to teach school readiness skills (Silander et al., 2018). This sentiment may be based on cultural values of deference to teachers as authority figures and experts on education (Reese et al., 1995).

Sources of Knowledge about the Skills Needed for Kindergarten

Consistent with previous studies, Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant families in this study turned to their social networks including family, friends, and community members to learn about kindergarten (e.g., Chaudry et al., 2011). Almost no parents described receiving messages from schools or the school system about the skills necessary for kindergarten; others sought out information on the internet, searching for articles on what children need to know before kindergarten entry. Parents who had older children reported learning from past experiences and from friends, family, and coworkers.

Based on these parents' accounts, the only clear messages from their educational jurisdictions were regarding the laws for when children should start kindergarten (e.g., five years of age). A few parents who were involved with Head Start mentioned learning about the skills necessary for kindergarten from home visitors or teachers. However, this was not the norm. Given the critical importance of school readiness for later academic achievement and career success, it is surprising that parents do not report receiving formal information about what skills are needed at kindergarten entry. In past studies, Latinx parents of pre-

kindergartners have reported that limited knowledge of which skills are most important and how to foster them was a main barrier to preparing children for kindergarten (e.g., Peterson et al., 2018). Educational jurisdictions should do more to inform parents about school readiness and encourage schools to reach out to parents before children reach the age of five. The literature on parents' experiences of the transition to kindergarten shows that families want more information about kindergarten readiness (McIntyre et al., 2007). Taken together, evidence indicates that schools have an opportunity to connect with Latinx immigrant families through the shared goal of increasing school readiness.

Strengths and Limitations

This study advances the field by examining school readiness beliefs among Latinx immigrants from two countries: the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. These are two understudied groups but are among the largest and fastest growing in the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2018). We used triangulation to show consistency in findings between the quantitative and qualitative measures of school readiness beliefs. That is, parents' views of important school readiness domains were consistent when assessed with Q-sorts and interviews. As discussed in the Introduction, there are significant historical and cultural differences between Dominicans and Salvadorans that led us to expect differences in school readiness beliefs. However, we did not find such differences, at least according to our coding strategy. We return to this point in the limitations below.

As with all studies, this one has some important limitations. One, the Salvadoran and Dominican families lived in different cities and had different life experiences and access to services. Approximately 90% of Dominican immigrant parents came from our recruitment sites near Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, whereas 100% of Salvadorans were from the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Future research should attempt to better disentangle country of origin from place of residence. Two, approximately 86% of the families reported sending their children to formal childcare centers/homes. Only 12% attended informal or relative care. This means that parents may be more connected to resources and more knowledgeable about school readiness than is typical of Latinx immigrant families in the United States (Crosby et al., 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). It also may account for why there were no significant differences, for the most part, in responses by Dominican and Salvadoran parents.

Three, we did not collect information about the school readiness resources provided by childcare and Head Start centers. Receiving home visitation services and attending parent-teacher conferences may have influenced parents' knowledge and beliefs about school readiness. Future research should compare parent beliefs about school readiness across early care and education settings. We also did not ask parents to describe the community factors that might have influenced their school readiness conceptions. Future studies should explore the specific supports that Latinx immigrant families utilize prior to their children's entry into kindergarten and how the use of those resources may shape their beliefs and practices. Finally, we did not compare parents' beliefs by generational status, acculturation, or family structure (e.g., parents of first/only children vs. families with older children in school). Future studies should compare and contrast parent beliefs across these groups to elucidate their effects.

Although we think that we captured the families' beliefs about school readiness, we caution that this should be considered an exploratory study. Therefore, future research should corroborate these findings and probe for more specific information on Dominican and Salvadoran immigrant families' experiences in the United States and needs related to early care and education. Given that we recruited through snowball sampling in two different locales our sample may be unique and less representative of the general population of Salvadoran and Dominican immigrants. Despite the limitations of this study, we think the findings are an important contribution to the field.

Implications & Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, there is a need for schools to reach out to parents to provide accurate information about school readiness skills and ways to foster them. Given parents' interest in fostering their children's literacy and English language skills, parents are likely to be receptive to receiving books information about how to improve early language and literacy. Although about 50% of children in the United States attend preschool (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019), little research has examined how schools can connect with families before their children start kindergarten. Community organizations and childcare providers may be better positioned to deliver information about school readiness to families. Current research on the transition to kindergarten has emphasized the importance of involving families in early learning settings such as center-based childcare (McIntyre et al., 2007). Parents in this study who utilized Head Start and center-based childcare described getting information from teachers. However, it is unclear whether parents who are more involved and connected with these settings are more aware of the skills schools expect children to have when entering kindergarten.

Pediatricians may be another important resource for conveying accurate information about school readiness at early ages, especially if the children are not in some form of childcare. A few programs are already capitalizing on the frequent contact families have with pediatricians during early childhood wellness visits to bolster school readiness. For example, Reach Out and Read gives parents books and helps them understand the value of reading (Canfield et al., 2020). In Healthy Steps, parents meet with a child development specialist during and between routine well-child visits and receive information about developmental milestones and school readiness (MacLaughlin et al., 2017). Perhaps local school systems should forge partnerships with pediatricians to deliver school readiness information to young families.

In sum, this study shows that Latinx parents may not be getting the support they need, particularly in mathematics, to prepare children for the increasingly academically demanding kindergarten environments (Bassok et al., 2016). However, they are keenly aware of the value of language, social skills, and appropriate classroom behavior for learning. Although our results showed that Dominican and Salvadoran parents' beliefs were similar, it is important to continue collecting specific information about family nativity and culture to inform future studies and home-school connections. Researchers and school systems should move away from reducing parents into ethnic and racial categories. Instead, they should continue asking what the specific immigrant populations in their locales need from early education systems *and* what they are already doing to foster school readiness at home.

Schools must connect with Latinx immigrant families as partners in fostering school readiness before their children start kindergarten. It may be helpful for schools to work with parents to infuse mathematics and other less frequently mentioned skills into activities they already do with children. For example, mathematics skills can be fostered in the context of math-related story books or through playing games with other children that involve numbers. Given the strong emphasis on relationships both in our findings and in past literature, it may be most helpful to foster individual relationships between teachers or other service providers and parents than to send out mass mailings or other general approaches (Gaitan, 2004). Adding more bilingual teachers and parent liaisons who can communicate and foster relationships with parents is an important first step in addressing the clear lack of connections between parents and future elementary schools. Future research should explore approaches to creating culturally responsive home-school partnerships to better tailor programs to the needs of Dominican and Salvadoran families.

Note

1. If participant country of origin was not reported in past studies, we used the term "Latinx."

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