

# **Navigating the socio-cultural context of first-generation migrant parents: a case study of parental engagement in Moerwijk**

*Master's Thesis*

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## **Abstract**

Parental engagement is widely acknowledged in the literature as having the potential to significantly enhance children's educational outcomes. This has resulted in its prominence in school reform policies across various Western countries in the last decades. However, a noticeable research gap exists regarding parental engagement patterns for marginalized communities, particularly migrant groups. Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on parental engagement among migrant parents. Specifically, this study examines the parental engagement of first-generation migrants in the P. Oosterlee school in Moerwijk and investigates the sociocultural factors that influence their participation, including language and (cultural) literacy, work situations, school attitudes towards parents, household situations, and different approaches towards parental engagement. Through a series of insightful focus groups involving 11 mothers and subsequent individual follow-up interviews, this research reveals the significant impact of sociocultural factors on various aspects of parental engagement, both positively and negatively. Home-based engagement remained largely unaffected, while parent-school communication encountered challenges. Additionally, parental expectations regarding their children's education were found to be positively influenced by the studied factors, but sociocultural factors posed barriers to parental involvements in school activities. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of immigrant integration and participation within school settings. The study highlights the disadvantages faced by migrant parents in engaging in the education of their children while emphasizing the diverse interpretations of parental engagement. By building upon these insights, it becomes possible to foster an inclusive educational environment that fully harnesses the potential of parents, teachers, and students, thereby enhancing the educational experience.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Hague Southwest is an area of The Hague that suffers from severe socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, health problems, and poor educational outcomes. The area comprises Moerwijk, Morgenstond, Bouwlust, and Vrederust, hosting nearly 15% of the The Hague's population (Zuidwest, n.d.a). The vulnerability that the area and its residents face has been highlighted by the political and non-political actors of the region. Moreover, the complexity of issues existing in the region has been considered to be in need of urgent action (Gemeente Den Haag, 2022a). Indeed, to address some of the existing socio-economic issues in the region, the Dutch government and the municipality of The Hague formulated the 'Regiodeal Den Haag Zuidwest' (Governance of Migration and Diversity, n.d.). This agreement aims to ensure that the quality of life of the residents of The Hague Southwest in areas such as education, safety, or social cohesion, is equal to the average of the residents in the city as a whole (Gemeente Den Haag, 2022a).

Another point to consider is the existing diversity in The Hague Southwest, especially in terms of the migratory origin of its residents. Among the four neighborhoods, Moerwijk is the one with the highest proportion of residents with a migratory background. Specifically, more than 75% of the residents have a migratory background, mainly from Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese origins (Zuidwest, n.d.b). The need to incorporate migrants into the existing societal institutions has been considered essential to ensure their integration into the host society (Alba et al., 2011). Indeed, the ability of a state to enable the incorporation of migrants has been considered as having the potential not only to foster social cohesion and solidarity within a society but also to reduce poverty. Participation in societal institutions includes different spheres, such as education or the labor market, and has been widely connected to variations in poverty (Eugster, 2018).

Indeed, as poverty increases in several European countries, scholars have maintained a considerable interest in the relationship between education and poverty. Importantly, educational gaps are recognized as a major obstacle to addressing inequality and deprivation (Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Van Laere et al., 2018). Similarly, education is seen as a means for individual social and economic advancement through human capital development. This has brought education in recent decades to the center of the fight against poverty (Tarabini, 2010). Following the urge to tackle

educational issues, the connection between educational attainments and the effective involvement of parents has been repeatedly raised in the literature (Alameda-Lawson, 2010). This idea has been embraced by policymakers and educators to improve children's educational outcomes (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Notwithstanding, the literature has also pointed to the existence of various barriers challenging parental involvement, affecting most strongly families with migratory backgrounds because of their particular socio-cultural context (Vinopal, 2017).

Despite the extensive research carried out regarding parental engagement, the particular position of migrant parents remains understudied. Moerwijk represents an interesting case to study the situation of first-generation migrant parents, due to the high percentage of residents with a migratory background in the neighborhood. Furthermore, despite the prevailing recognition of the positive impact parental engagement can have on educational achievements of children, both parental engagement and educational outcomes in the neighborhood remain low. To make use of the potential of parental engagement, the factors inhibiting this engagement need to be identified and understood to design mechanisms capable of properly tackling them. To do so, this thesis will explore *the sociocultural factors shaping parental engagement of first-generation migrant parents by focusing on the P. Oosterle school in Moerwijk*. In order to do so, the following research question has been formulated:

*"How do sociocultural factors influence parental engagement levels among first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk regarding the education of their children?"*

This research is relevant to the existing knowledge from a societal and academic point of view. The societal relevance of this study is represented through the educational indicators of the neighborhood and the emphasis that the literature has placed on parental engagement as a way to enhance educational outcomes. Indeed, the need to urgently tackle the low level of parental engagement has been raised by the actors of the neighborhood. Likewise, the academic relevance of this paper rests in the contributions that this study offers to the existing literature on parental engagement and migrant participation. The specific parental engagement among migrant communities remains widely understudied, as well as the way in which the socio-cultural context of these parents shapes their engagement. Importantly, the predominance of residents with a migratory background in Moerwijk turns it into an ideal case study to explore these dynamics. All

in all, this paper delves deeper into the societal integration of immigrants by focusing on parental engagement. Understanding the engagement of first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk will benefit policymakers and educators in the region aiming to improve parental engagement as a tool for educational reinforcement.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing literature and lay down the theoretical foundations of this study. First, the existing literature on immigrant integration and participation is explored. Second, the contextualization of parental engagement is examined, followed by the existing theoretical foundations of the socio-cultural context surrounding parents and their engagement. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion summarizing the main points discussed.

### **2.1. Immigrant integration and participation in schools**

In recent decades, Western societies have undergone demographic changes due to ongoing migratory flows (Dörr & Faist, 1997; Marschall, 2006). These societal transformations have brought immigrant integration to the forefront of attention for migration scholars and policymakers (Khoudja, 2018). Various approaches have emerged concerning the concept of immigrant integration, influenced partly by different strategies and models of integration (Berry, 2011). This is reflected in the existence of different policies that range from identity-blind policies, following assimilationism ideas, to identity-conscious ideologies like multiculturalism (Uzelac et al., 2022). Notwithstanding, there is a widespread consensus that the incorporation of settled migrants into societal institutions, such as the labor market, is crucial (Alba et al., 2011). Families with immigrant backgrounds have been considered more vulnerable to experiencing social and institutional isolation and exclusion, which further hinders their participation in society (Crul et al., 2013). Therefore, several authors have emphasized the importance of preparing and facilitating the robust membership of newcomers in society (Alba et al., 2011). The acquisition of sociocultural skills necessary to navigate the new sociocultural environment is seen as an indicator of adaptation to the host culture (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Within the broad field of immigrant integration, a significant portion of the literature has focused on educational integration. One of the reasons for this emphasis is that many children of immigrant origin face significant educational disadvantages compared with students of native backgrounds (Alba et al., 2011; Heath & Cheung 2007; Heath et al., 2008). However, some authors have also highlighted potential educational advantages stemming from the migratory background of students. For instance, Barac & Bialystok (2011) highlight the developmental benefits of bilingualism for children. Notwithstanding, Turney and Kao (2009) argue that the educational achievement of

immigrant-origin families serves as an indicator of immigrant integration. Education parity is therefore not only valued as a specific type of immigrant adaptation but also for its connection to inclusion in other societal domains (Castells et al., 1999; Gries et al., 2021). For instance, Alexiu et al. (2010) highlight education as a key strategy in improving access to employment, housing, health, and other forms of societal participation. Similarly, Gries et al., (2021) emphasize that educational integration is tied to social mobility, as lower educational attainment can limit upward mobility and perpetuate barriers to integration across generations.

To address the interplay between immigrant integration, social inequality, and schools, policymakers and researchers have increasingly focused on enhancing parental involvement (Turney & Kao, 2009). Vinopal (2017) expands the connection between integration and education to the parental sphere, positing that parental engagement serves as an indicator of parents' social capital and community involvement. Similarly, Portes (1998) views parental engagement as a form of social capital due to the benefits derived from networks and connections. Additionally, UNESCO promotes the inclusion of immigrant families in the children's school context as a measure of social integration (Blanco & Umayahara, 2004). However, the literature reflects that educational institutions encounter greater challenges when attempting to engage ethnic minority parents (Pels, 2003). Hence, boosting parental engagement has been identified as a potential tool for reducing ethnic educational inequality (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016).

This thesis will not focus on endorsing or validating a specific model of integration but will instead examine integration as a process and opportunity to acquire the sociocultural skills necessary for active participation in the surrounding sociocultural context. Furthermore, the thesis will place particular emphasis on educational integration through parental engagement, which will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2. Parental engagement**

Research on parental engagement in schooling has significantly increased in recent decades (Marschall, 2006). Numerous studies have highlighted a positive connection between parental involvement and various indicators of student achievement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2007; López et al., 2001). As a result, parental engagement has gained prominence in school reform policies in many Western countries (Bernhard et al., 1998;

Vinopal, 2017). This has been driven in part by concerns about the lack of engagement among parents, especially among families with a migratory background and vulnerable groups (Khalifaoui et al., 2020; López et al., 2001). Indeed, Vinopal (2017) considers that policies targeting parental engagement represent a low-cost intervention with a large potential of narrowing educational achievement gaps. Accordingly, improvements in educational outcomes across different ethnicities are aimed at considering the diversity of the school (Hornby & Witte, 2010; Wilder, 2014).

The definition of parental engagement has sparked various academic debates within the literature. López (2001) argues that the concept of parental involvement has traditionally been tied to a scripted role that parents are expected to perform, rather than encompassing the spontaneous and routine activities practiced by parents. This has limited parental engagement to certain legitimate acts, neglecting and obscuring culturally specific perspectives of minority populations (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Marschall, 2006). Similarly, Schneider & Arnot (2018) criticize this traditional understanding of parental engagement as an erroneous ‘one size fits all’ attempt based on normative assumptions about “good parenting” often rooted in middle-class strategies and resources. Some of the traditional involvement approaches may be outside the cultural repertoire of some parents, which pushes them to the “uninvolved” and “uncaring” category (Chavkin, 1993). Indeed, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) highlight that for parents to engage in these socially accepted routines, they require not only willingness to do so but also prior knowledge of these expectations and opportunities. Consequently, marginalized forms of parental engagement have been studied as both a challenge to the rigidity of socially established practices and a source of counter-story (López, 2001). In pursuit of a more inclusive approach, some scholars have conceived parental engagement as a multidimensional construct, acknowledging that it can take various forms (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2019; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009). More flexible conceptualizations have included inside parental engagement any parental participation in their children’s educational process (Jeynes, 2007), or any type of dedication of resources from the parent to their children (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994). Additionally, some authors propose that parental engagement is not only a one-way process but rather a two-way interaction and mutual exchange between the home and the school (Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

The discussions regarding the definition of parental engagement have been accompanied by a diversity of perspectives on what elements compose parental engagement. For instance, Epstein

(2010) identifies six types of involvement from the teacher's perspective: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. However, this conceptualization has been criticized for overlooking inequalities and differences among parents, making it challenging for some parents to meet these expectations (Lareau, 1987). As a result, there has been a growing demand for more inclusive opportunities for engagement and recognition of different conceptions of participation (López, 2001). This call for new conceptualizations is also evident in the literature, with some authors expanding upon existing frameworks, such as home-based involvement or communication, to promote inclusivity (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Vinopal, 2017). Similarly, other authors have introduced additional types of parental engagement that encompass broader participation, such as parents' expectation for their child's education (Davis-Kean, 2005) and parents' knowledge about their child's education (Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

This thesis aims to adopt a more inclusive definition and conceptualization of parental engagement. Consequently, a variety of approaches raised in the literature are taken into consideration in the operationalization section.

### **2.3. Socio-cultural context and parental engagement**

The lack of extensive research on effective parental engagement strategies for marginalized groups has been reflected in the minimal efforts by schools and policymakers to explore non-traditional forms of engagement (Delgado-Gaitán, 1993). Finders & Lewis (1994) emphasize that immigrant and minority families are left with confusion and discomfort within a system that misunderstands them and hinders their active involvement in the education of their children. To this end, the concept of 'hard-to-reach' families has gained traction in both literature and policies related to parent engagement. García-Carmona et al. (2020) define 'hard-to-reach' families as those who are eligible for services or programs, such as parental engagement, but who encounter barriers that impede their access. However, Landy and Menna (2006) argue that in order to effectively engage with these families labeled as "hard-to-reach" it is crucial to understand the factors that either hinder or facilitate their engagement.

The literature has examined socio-demographic factors, as well as language and cultural influences. Firstly, some studies have highlighted the impact of the parents' educational level (Vinopal, 2017),

family structures (Bengtson, 2001), lack of childcare for other children, and employment conditions on parental engagement (Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Similarly, other studies have emphasized the role of socioeconomic status (Turney & Kao, 2009). For instance, Berzin (2010) underscores that parents from low-income families are often less involved in the academic activities of their children. More specifically, Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2005) argue that attention should be given to the varying resources associated with socio-economic status, such as time, energy, knowledge, and skills. Similarly, Muller & Kerbow (2018) point to the need to focus on the availability of resources and opportunities for parents. Secondly, the literature has discussed linguistic and cultural factors from different theoretical perspectives. Vinopal (2017) introduces the concept of cultural capital to link limited familiarity with the language and style of the educational system to a decreased likelihood of parental involvement. The unfamiliarity with the system has been discussed regarding a lack of understanding of the implications of the track choice of the students, the subject's content, or the assessment system (Alba et al., 2011; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Language fluency challenges have been particularly noted among migrant families, making it difficult to communicate with teachers, comprehend notices sent by the school, or assist their children with homework (Alba et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2012; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Similarly, Carlisle et al. (2005) argue that a language mismatch between parents and teachers can create discomfort for parents and push them away from getting involved. Diverse perceptions of the roles of teachers and parents in children's education have also been explored as a barrier to parental engagement (Bernhard et al., 1988; Marschall, 2006). These differences can arise from cultural dispositions toward education or even from differences in patterns of living derived from contrasting socio-economic statuses (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Gordan, 1968).

Similarly, institutional challenges have also been extensively discussed in the literature, often intertwined with issues of discrimination and exclusion. The experiences parents have had with the educational system, including past interactions with members of the school, have been argued to impact parental engagement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Turney & Kao, 2009). The literature emphasizes that social and cultural differences often shape how are parents perceived by teachers (Vinopal, 2017). López et al (2001) assert that this has resulted in some parents being perceived as lacking the means or willingness to engage meaningfully. Consequently, problems of miscommunication and mislabeling of parents can result in families feeling disconnected, stigmatized, and excluded (Alba et al., 2011; Chavkin, 1993; Delgado-Gaitán, 1991; López et al.,

2001; Ramirez, 2003). Similarly, other studies suggest that disadvantaged parents are likely to feel coerced and intimidated by socioeconomic status differences and the authority of teachers (Bernhard et al., 1988; Moles, 1993). Furthermore, Bernhard et al. (1988) emphasize that these dynamics must be understood within the broader societal patterns of subordination that affect specific cultural and racial groups.

This study incorporates a range of diverse factors discussed in this section. However, these factors are not only examined as potential inhibitors of parent engagement but also as factors that have the potential to positively influence parental engagement.

Overall, this chapter has discussed the main debates of the literature surrounding immigrant integration and participation in schools, the conceptualizations of parental engagement, and the effect of the socio-cultural context on parental engagement. While existing literature has explored the topic of parental engagement, there are still gaps that this thesis aims to address. Firstly, there is a need to understand why certain parents are less involved compared to others, from the parents' own perspective. Despite the emphasis on parental involvement in educational reform projects, this aspect has not been extensively studied. Additionally, there is a limited volume of literature specifically addressing parental engagement in the context of first-generation migrant communities. Due to the unique circumstances faced by these parents, it is crucial to incorporate their perspective. Lastly, the majority of the research has focused on the context of the United States of America, leaving the Dutch context relatively understudied.

### 3. Research design

In this chapter, the research design is presented. First, the research question and sub-questions are stated. Second, the operationalization of the variables is presented through the operationalization table. Third, the method of data collection and analysis, and the sampling method that are used in this research are explained. Finally, the limitations and ethical considerations surrounding the study are discussed.

#### 3.1. Research question

This study explores the following research question: *“How do sociocultural factors influence parental engagement levels among first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk regarding the education of their children?”* To approach this question, the following sub-questions will be researched *“How do first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk engage with the schooling of their children?”* and *“How do sociocultural factors affect the integration of first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk into the educational institution?”*

#### 3.2. Operationalization

Variables	Conceptual definition	Dimension	Indicators	Source
Parental engagement	Two-way interaction process between parents and school actors that promotes the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Marschall et	Home-based engagement (Epstein, 2010; Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016)	Importance attributed to and frequency of talking with their children about school	Focus groups/interviews with the parents
			Engaging in at-home learning activities	
			Establishing a home environment that supports learning	
		Parent-school/teacher communication (Fleischmann & de	Talking to teachers or school mentor	
			Attending parent-teacher individual meetings	

	al., 2012; National Education Goals Pannel, 1999; Scheneider & Arnot, 2018)	Haas, 2016; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Vinopal, 2017)	Attending parents' evenings	
			Returning communication attempts from the school	
		Parent expectation of child's education (Davis-Kean, 2005)	Importance attributed to their children reaching high levels of education	
		Parent engagement in school activities (Epstein, 2010)	Volunteering in school activities	
			Getting involved in school decision making	

Table 1: Operationalization of 'Parent engagement'

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Dimension	Indicators	Interview question(s)
Sociocultural factors	Aspects of the social or cultural background of the parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005)	Language & (cultural) literacy (Alba et al., 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009)	Ability to comfortable communicate in local language	Focus groups/interviews with the parents
			Understanding of the educational system	
			Parent's education	
		Work situation (Schneider & Arnot, 2018)	Incompatibility of engagement with work schedule	
		School attitudes towards parents (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018;	Perception of school's staff attitude towards parents	
	Previous negative experiences with the school			

		Turney & Kao, 2009)	Experiences of different treatment in the school because of their background	
		Household situation (Schneider & Arnot, 2018)	Household situations affecting engagement	
		Different values and approaches to parental engagement (Bernhard et al., 1988; Marschall, 2006)	Perceived difference in expectations with the school regarding parental engagement	

*Table 2: Operationalization of 'Sociocultural factors'*

### **3.3. Methodology**

As far as methodology is concerned, a qualitative approach was employed. This facilitated the interpretation of the possibilities for parental engagement of first-generation migrants, acknowledging the complexity of reality and the subjective perspectives of individuals (Robert & Gaudet, 2018). The chosen methodology was an instrumental case study, focusing on a specific instance to gain deeper insights into the issue (Babbie, 2018; Stake, 1995). This allows for a comprehensive examination of contextualized facts and perceptions (Gagnon, 2010). The study focused on a single case, namely the sociocultural factors influencing parental engagement among first-generation migrant parents in the P. Oosterlee school. The selection of this case followed purposive judgmental sampling, driven by the possibility to select the case based on the personal judgment of the researcher (Babbie, 2018). The school's student demographics, institutional characteristics, and emphasized values made it a highly relevant case study for this research. Additionally, the school has highlighted their efforts in enhancing parent engagement (P. Oosterleeschool, 2019). A single case study was chosen to gain in-depth understanding of the parental engagement within this specific group of participants, rather than to compare realities across schools (Yin, 2003).

For the data collection, desk research was used, and focus groups and semi-structured interviews were carried out with the parents (see appendix 1 for participant list). Desk research involves gathering information from published sources, to contextualize and deepen the understanding of the topic (Woolley, 1992). This method included academic articles, government reports, and school reports. This offered the possibility to incorporate additional points of view to the study, by considering the academic perspective as well as the perception of the school and other actors in the neighborhood. This contextualization informed the section of Contextual Background, as well as facilitated a more engaged discussion in the focus groups. Focus groups provided a safe space for parents to share ideas and opinions, fostering discussion and capturing diverse interpretations of parental engagement among first-generation migrants (Cyr, 2019). Four focus groups, consisting of 2-4 parents each, were conducted with sessions lasting between one and a half to two hours. Open-ended questions and activities explored various dimensions of engagement and the sociocultural factors affecting them. Additionally, art-based methods were also integrated, where participants expressed their views through drawings, allowing for deeper reflection and understanding (Finley, 2008). An informal semi-structured interview was carried out with one of the participants to further explore her comments from the focus group. This participant was invited to take part in a follow up interview to clarify one of the points discussed during the focus group. Two translators attended two of the focus groups to facilitate the communication between the participants and the researcher.

There are some limitations related to the use of focus groups as a research method. Firstly, participants might be inclined to follow the dominant discourse raised in the focus group (Smithson, 2000). Additionally, due to the presence of various participants and the interactive style of the answers, the information gathered might be broad in nature but not capable of offering an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the participants (Gibbs, 1997). In order to counter these possible limitations, a neutral and unbiased stance was adopted by the researcher throughout the discussion, allowing participants to express their diverse perspectives. Furthermore, participants were explicitly informed since the beginning that there were not correct or incorrect responses. To mitigate the issue of shallow information, follow-up questions were posed to clarify and delve deeper into the topics discussed. When necessary, individual follow-up interviews were conducted after the focus group.

Snowball sampling was used in combination with a purposive sample to select the participants for the research. Namely, contact with entrepreneurs and social workers of the neighborhood was established, who provided information on how to locate participants for the research. Additionally, direct contact on the street and social media were also used to reach first-generation migrant parents of the school. This facilitated the inclusion of a diverse group of participants in the research, enhancing the scope of perspectives considered. In order to obtain a representative sample of the parental body of the school, parents of different migratory origins were included in the data collection. As a result, eleven first-generation migrant parents from seven different countries of origin took part in the focus groups. Consequently, four focus groups were organized considering the country of origin of the participants, resulting in a focus group with mothers of North African origin, another with Sub-Saharan African mothers, another with Latino mothers, and a final one with mothers of Caribbean origin. This ensured that the sample had similar distribution characteristics as the parent community in the school considering their migratory origin (Babbie, 2018). A deductive approach was employed for the analysis, for which a priori codes were used to analyze the transcribed interviews with Atlas.ti. This facilitated a focused analysis of the information (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005).

### **3.4. Expectations**

Based on the theoretical framework, several expectations emerge. Firstly, parents with fewer sociocultural factors limiting their integration into the educational institution are expected to exhibit higher levels of parental engagement across all variables studied. Secondly, parents facing more sociocultural factors limiting their integration in the educational institution are anticipated to demonstrate lower levels of engagement in the variables of parent-school/teacher communication and parent engagement in school activities (Epstein 2010), which are considered in the literature as traditional dimensions of parental engagement but may not be universally applicable (Chavkin, 1993). Additionally, the migratory context of these parents is expected to have a greater impact on these particular dimensions due to its demands on time and cultural and social resources. Thirdly, it is expected that a higher number of sociocultural factors limiting parents' integration into the educational institution will have a less significant effect on the dimensions of home-based engagement and parents' expectations of their children's education, which are encompassed in a more inclusive conceptualization of parental engagement and therefore would be less affected by

factors connected to societal integration. Finally, the study expects that parents who are highly affected by the sociocultural factor ‘different approaches to parental engagement’, will display low overall levels of parental engagement under the dimensions studied. Similarly, these parents will perceive that their unique methods are not adequately represented in the subdimensions explored in this study.

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

This section addresses ethical considerations in the study. Firstly, the chosen qualitative approach, unlike quantitative methods, does not allow for statistical generalization (Babbie, 2018). Nonetheless, it still provides valuable insights into the factors influencing parental involvement among first-generation migrants in the education system. Additionally, field research may introduce reliability concerns due to the researcher’s personal biases when interpreting focus groups data. To mitigate this limitation, rigorous coding mechanisms were implemented to analyze interview responses (Babbie, 2018).

Prior to the data collection, it is essential to acknowledge the negative framing of immigrants in public opinion and the media, which might have influenced research on families with an immigrant background. This awareness is crucial during fieldwork, as migrant families often face vulnerable societal positions. Therefore, carrying out research that reviews the challenges that they might suffer for engaging in the education of their children might lead respondents to discomfort (Birman, 2006). To mitigate potential risks associated with this, respondents were informed about the study’s purpose, the focus group process, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their ability to withdraw at any time (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). Similarly, after the process of data collection, data has been securely stored, ensuring confidentiality. During the data analysis, the researcher was mindful of personal bias, ensuring a consistent approach with the developed indicators. Finally, privacy and plagiarism concerns will be carefully considered during the publishing stage.

## **4. Contextual Background**

### **4.1. The Hague Southwest**

The Hague Southwest is an area in the city of The Hague suffering from various socio-economic issues, such as unemployment, debt, radicalization, feelings of insecurity, and health problems (Gemeente Den Haag, 2019b). Among these social issues, education has been highlighted as being particularly problematic in terms of outcomes. Especially, Moerwijk reflects the highest educational disadvantage of the four neighborhoods. This considers dimensions such as level of education, risk of falling behind in school, cito scores, and drop-outs (Zuidwest, 2022b).

To tackle some of these problems, the municipality of The Hague developed in 2019 an agreement called the Regio Deal (Zuidwest, 2022b). Considering the diversity among the residents of the region, the policy places a strong emphasis on emancipation and integration. This has been reflected in the development of programs guiding new residents toward work, language, and educational participation (Gemeente Den Haag, 2019b). With the aim to create a better future for the residents of The Hague Southwest, the agreement highlights that the conditions that youth are surrounded by in their present determine the future they will have. Ameliorating the education of the children is perceived as being a starting point for improving other dimensions, such as residence and work. The Region Deal believes that enhancing these interacting dimensions is key for the future development and social mobility of the residents of The Hague Southwest (Gemeente Den Haag, 2022a).

The financial and educational situation in The Hague Southwest, particularly in Moerwijk, remains under stress. For instance, 19,5% of households in the neighborhood rely on social assistance compared to 8,3% citywide. Additionally, 69,7% of households in Moerwijk fall into the low-income category, while the citywide figure is 48,1% (Gemeente Den Haag, 2022d). In terms of education, 47% of students in Moerwijk only complete the lowest level of high school, compared to 30% citywide. Similarly, 48% of toddlers and primary school students in Moerwijk face a significant risk of educational disadvantage, compared to 27% in The Hague (Gemeente Deen Haag, 2022c). Importantly, local actors of The Hague Southwest have identified the challenge of achieving an adequate parental engagement in the schooling of their children.

Indeed, parental engagement has been highlighted by the Regio Deal as a precondition for successful education for the youth in The Hague Southwest (Gemeente Den Haag, 2019a). The municipality of The Hague has shown a concern for low parental engagement among the parents of the four neighborhoods and therefore has directed some efforts to target this concern. This has involved for instance the promotion of parent officers, who are in charge of encouraging parents to participate in different activities as well as providing educational and career guidance (Gemeente Den Haag, 2022a). Similarly, the Childcare Participation Target Group aims to facilitate the engagement and participation of parents by offering them childcare support (Gemeente Den Haag, 2021).

#### **4.2. P. Oosterlee school**

P. Oosterlee School is a public Christian educational center located in Moerwijk, the neighborhood in The Hague Southwest with the largest proportion of residents of non-Dutch origin (Zuidwest, n.d.b). Similarly, 70% of the students at the school come from families with a ‘non-Dutch cultural background’. Additionally, the school has also pointed to the existence of issues of diverse nature suffered by the families of many of the students (P. Oosterleeschool, 2019).

Another important factor to consider is that the school has placed enhancing parent engagement as one of its short- and long-term objectives (P. Oosterleeschool, 2019). The center believes that the active involvement of parents in the education of their children is important for the educational achievement of the students. For this reason, enhancing the communication of the school with the parents and their efforts to support parents in their engagement is one of their aims. This has led to the establishment of various initiatives and councils to achieve this objective, such as the creation of Dutch courses for parents to improve their language skills, as well as the establishment of a Participation Council (P. Oosterleeschool, 2019).

## **5. Empirical findings and analysis**

This chapter delves into the findings derived from the research process. The section follows the general structure provided by the sub-questions and the operationalization table. Therefore, the first part of the chapter analyzes the way that first-generation migrant parents in the P. Oosterlee school engage in the education of their children. The second part of the chapter explores the sociocultural factors of the parents that affect their engagement.

### **5.1 Parental engagement of first-generation migrant parents**

Following the line of reasoning presented in the operationalization table, this section presents the findings relating to the different dimensions of parental engagement. Doing so, this section will answer the first sub-question “*How do first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk engage with the schooling of their children?*”

#### *5.1.1. Home-based engagement*

The findings from the four focus groups point to high participation in home-based activities by all the participant mothers. This included activities frequently mentioned in the literature and common to the four focus groups, as well as others more specific and different across the different sessions. All of the mothers expressed their role in supporting the education of their children through activities such as puzzles, games, drawing, and revising together the content learned in class. Additionally, they also stressed their role in supporting their children in following their passions as well as in encouraging them to work hard to improve themselves and excel.

However, it is important to consider that the different focus groups also brought forth unique strategies of home-based engagement, specific to their personal experiences and cultural background. For instance, the Sub-Saharan African mothers stressed the importance of controlling and managing the screen time of their children to avoid their overuse of electronics. In order to do this, there was a strong encouragement to engage in creative or academic activities instead. Conversely, in the group represented by the Moroccan mothers, homework was emphasized as an essential tool for the educational achievement of their children. The mothers would take all the available opportunities to bring their children to the homework club taking place in the Wijkcenter and support them with revising the school content with online resources as well. Similarly, the focus group composed of the Latina mothers emphasized the importance of communication with

their children. A strong emphasis was placed on talking with their children about their progress at school, as well as instilling in them the value of education and its importance in determining the outcome of their future.

Moreover, some practices were shared among various focus groups. For instance, in the focus groups comprising the sub-Saharan African mothers and the Latino mothers, the importance of instilling certain conducts or norms of good behavior emerged as a significant practice. This involved behavior towards other individuals in society, such as teachers. For instance, one of the mothers stated: *“Aside that they are your teacher, they are other people’s mommies. So you don’t call them by their name. You don’t say their names straight. You say “Juf” (Miss) and then you add the name.”* Enforcing good behavior in the household, such as cleaning up after yourself or being on time for curfew; was also used by the mothers to show their children wider lessons of society, such as the value of education for reaching economic well-being, or the importance of rules for peaceful cohabitation in society. Similarly, the importance of teaching them the value of hard work was also commonly highlighted in both the focus groups of sub-Saharan African mothers and Moroccan mothers. In contrast, a common strategy emphasized in both the focus groups of the Latino mothers and the Caribbean mothers was emotional support. Showing trust in their capabilities and supporting their children in whatever they wanted to achieve without lowering their self-esteem in case of unexpected results was identified as a means of better assisting them with their education.

#### *5.1.2. Parent-school/teacher communication*

The focus groups comprised by the Moroccan mothers and the Caribbean mothers demonstrated a strong connection with the school, attributing a high importance to a frequent communication with the teachers. Aside from the trimestral meetings with the teachers, other communicative instances with the teachers were attempted to check up on the children’s progress. The Moroccan mothers emphasized an active communicative initiation to check up on the progress of their children or the outcomes of an exam. The Caribbean mothers, however, claim to be able to achieve less engagement than they would have desired because of certain challenges in communication, such as limited attention received by the teachers or different communication styles.

Conversely, the insights from the focus groups with the sub-Saharan African and Latino mothers point to a more infrequent communication with the school. For the sub-Saharan African mothers, communication with the teachers primarily occurred during the trimestral report pick-up and additional contact instances were reduced to matters of misbehavior or illness of the child. Additionally, the mothers with online presence highlighted the school website and email as an additional method of communication. Aside from the trimestral meetings, the Latino mothers also reflected a willingness to make use of any available communication channel to tackle urgent matters, such as bullying incidents, despite the existing bureaucratic challenges. Furthermore, nonattendance to parents' evenings or gatherings was a common insight gained across all the focus groups, motivated by a lack of opportunities.

### *5.1.3. Parent expectation of child's education*

The importance attributed to education emerged as a significant theme, reflecting the shared belief among the participant mothers of the transformative power of education for the future of their children. The Moroccan mothers view education as a means to ensure a future economic stability in the life of their children and enable them to purchase their own house. This could have been further accentuated by their migratory background, shaped by their hope to offer a better life for their children. Similarly, the insights from the sub-Saharan African mothers' focus group frame education as a gateway for their children to reach their career aspirations and pursue their passions. Similarly, the importance of determination and encouragement for academic excellence was also observed, including reaching higher education. For instance, one of the sub-Saharan African mothers expressed *"I did not go to school. I want my baby to go to school to learn and be something in the future. I don't want to stop anything from her. If anything comes her way, she can do it for herself. And then she can be a doctor, a lawyer, and yeah."*

The Latino mothers also considered education as a precious tool with the potential to open doors for the future of their children. Education was perceived as instrumental in shaping the type of jobs that the children would have, which in turn would influence their overall life prospects. Additionally, education was also perceived as a tool for personal self-development. The well-being of the children was another important consideration, with the mothers emphasizing the importance of supporting and encouraging the children to reach their full potential without being discouraged by societal pressures or teachers' attitudes. The perceived diverse range of career possibilities was

seen to encourage one of the mothers to allow their children to follow their passions, even if it did not involve pursuing higher education but engaging in manual work instead.

Similarly, the Caribbean focus group underlined a perceived strong correlation between education, securing a good job, and achieving an economically successful future. Similarly to the Moroccan mothers' perspectives, education was also viewed as a means to achieve the goal of homeownership. Moreover, it is important to consider that the mothers reflected a desire to not impose rigid expectations on their children, but to encourage and support them in their journey towards improvement instead. Education was also seen as a catalyst for personal growth, fostered by motivation and hard work, and as a tool for understanding societal norms.

#### *5.1.4. Parent engagement in school activities*

The sub-Saharan African mothers reflected notably low level of participation in school activities, which seems to be strongly affected by a perceived lack of opportunities to engage and to participate in decision-making processes in the school. In contrast, the focus group with the Latino mothers pointed to a higher level of participation, particularly in field trips organized for the students. However, their participation was expressed to be declining due to a perceived reduction in opportunities provided by the school. In other activities designed for parents and in decision-making processes of the school, their engagement remained relatively low.

Similarly, the insights from the focus group with the Moroccan mothers indicate a moderate level of participation. Their willingness to participate stemmed from their motivation to support their children, practice their language skills, and connect with other parents of the school. However, they also expressed a sense of limited opportunities available, echoing the concern raised by the sub-Saharan African mothers. Notably, their engagement was more prominent in school activities taking place in partnership with the Wijkcenter, such as attending and volunteering in the homework club or participating in workshops for parents.

Lastly, the Caribbean mothers exhibited a remarkably high level of participation in school activities. They eagerly seized opportunities, particularly in volunteering in field trips, and one mother held multiple roles among the parent body, including being a member of the Parents' Council, a Classroom Parent, and an active volunteer in the Wijkcenter, engaging in activities involving the children of the school. Their active presence in school activities was driven by their

children's contentment, a desire to support fellow parents and a wish to leave a positive legacy within the school community. Additionally, the mothers recognized the potential of this engagement for supporting parents' language learning and personal development.

To conclude, this section addresses the first sub-question. The focus groups with the first-generation migrant mothers from different geographical origins revealed a diverse range of parental engagement approaches, showing varying levels of involvement across the four explored categories and demonstrating unique strategies. Home-based engagement included common activities such as homework revision and puzzle-making, yet each group displayed unique approaches and interpretations to home-based engagement, highlighting the significance of the diversity of viewpoints. Parent-school communication varied, with some mothers reflecting active communication with the teachers while others faced some barriers. The insights from the focus group consistently highlighted high expectations among the mothers, framing education as a pathway to a better future, comprising personal growth, career aspirations, and economic stability. Furthermore, engagement in school activities showcased great variation among the mothers, with certain groups, like the sub-Saharan African women, reflecting lower participation due to perceived limited opportunities, while others actively engaged in school activities to make a positive impact within the school community.

## **5.2. Socio-cultural factor affecting parental engagement**

This chapter describes and analyzes the sociocultural factors affecting the experiences of first-generation migrant parents in the P. Oosterlee school. Doing this will answer the second sub-question: *“How do sociocultural factors affect the integration of first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk into the educational institution?”*

### *5.2.1. Language & (cultural) literacy*

The analysis of the data collected from the focus groups reveals distinct patterns and challenges related to the role of language and cultural literacy in shaping the mothers' experiences. Across the groups, language proficiency and literacy emerged as influential factors in their experiences. The sub-Saharan African mothers' group stressed the challenges on navigating a different educational system than their own. Language proficiency was a concern, with some mothers showing difficulty in writing and communicating their thoughts effectively in Dutch. The

confluence of limited language proficiency and perceived constraints in accessing comprehensive school information due to digitalization processes, presented additional challenges to their experiences with the school. Nevertheless, their command of the English language, stemming from their background, also facilitated in some respects their engagement within the school. Within the focus group comprised of Moroccan mothers, language barriers were prominent. Limited Dutch proficiency as well as low computer literacy were identified as having a large impact in their experiences. These mothers expressed a desire to improve their Dutch command, indicating their motivation to overcome these language-related challenges.

Despite reflecting fewer challenges in language literacy, the focus groups comprised by Latina mothers and by Caribbean mothers revealed the presence of other barriers related to cultural literacy shaping their integration into the educational institution. In the focus group comprised by the Latina mothers, a similar trend of adjusting to a different educational system was noticed. Differences in teaching methods, particularly in subjects like mathematics, represented a challenge for these migrant mothers. Furthermore, one mother conveyed her struggle with assertive communication due to her partial Dutch proficiency, leading her to rely on family members for support in navigating such interactions. Additionally, another mother perceived bilingualism within their household as a handicap for navigating certain situations compared to native speaker families. The Caribbean mothers' focus group presented a high level of Dutch proficiency, shaped by their migratory origin, that facilitated their daily experiences regarding the education of their children. However, they recognized the potential impact of language barriers on other mothers' engagement and underlined the cultural nuances that could affect the experiences of migrant mothers in the school.

### *5.2.2. Work situation*

The Moroccan mothers in the focus group generally did not work or expressed that it was not a significant factor that affected them. Similarly, the sub-Saharan African mothers did not work or work part-time, indicating that their work did not directly influence their engagement. Within the Caribbean mothers' focus group, the mothers had made the decision to stop working to be able to give more time and attention to their children. They perceived that combining work, household responsibilities, and attending to their children's needs was challenging. Similarly, among the

Latina mothers' focus groups, work was not perceived as challenging their experiences regarding their children's education.

Importantly, the significance attributed by the mothers to the complicated balance between work and their engagement cannot be overlooked. For some mothers, especially those in the Caribbean mothers and African mothers' focus group, the decision to work or not work was often tied to their ability to dedicate enough time to their children. In these cases, the decision to leave the workforce or reduce the working hours was driven by a desire to be more present in their children's life and to ensure that they could more actively participate in their education. Similarly, among the Latina mothers' focus groups it was emphasized that work would never impede their engagement since anything related to the children would take precedence.

### *5.2.3. School attitudes towards parents*

The attitudes of school towards parents played a significant role in shaping the experience of these first-generation migrant mothers. At the same time, varying perceptions and experiences across the different groups can also be highlighted. On one hand, the focus group composed by the Moroccan mothers generally expressed contentment and a positive relationship with the school staff, facilitating their integration. However, clashes in character between teachers and parents were perceived, potentially linked to cultural differences. The lack of diversity among the school staff was also highlighted as a hindrance to a complete understanding of the school towards the migrant parents. The Caribbean mothers focus group pointed to relatively positive school's attitudes towards parents, however with some concerns being raised. One mother shared her daughter's experience of suffering bullying with racist undertones, which was not resolved as quickly as it should have been by the school. It is important to note that the perceptions of the director were mixed, highlighting that some mothers might have expressed feelings of intimidation due to her strong demeanor, while her efforts to support non-Dutch speaking parents in engaging with her were acknowledged and appreciated. Additionally, the group expressed a shared sentiment that some teachers showed little interest in engaging with parents, especially with those from non-Dutch backgrounds. This differential treatment also extended to the attention given to non-Dutch children, leading to similar divisive dynamics among the students.

On the other hand, the perspectives shared by the sub-Saharan African mothers and Latina mothers reflect a more adverse impact of the school's attitudes towards parents. Among the sub-Saharan African group, some mothers expressed a sense of being misunderstood or unheard by the school. For instance, one mother voiced her concern about the school's decision to provide tablets to all students, despite notifying them that her child already had one at home. This made her feel as if the school had disregarded her input, potentially resulting in financial burdens if the device were to be damaged. Furthermore, there was a perception that the school's attitude towards parents is to support children "according to their abilities", which was perceived by the mothers to discourage children to strive for improvement. However, overall, the sub-Saharan African mothers claimed to feel welcomed in the school environment. Within the Latina mothers' focus groups, there was a perception of bias from the school, especially regarding considerations of the parents' migratory background and skills when making decisions about students, such as determining their level placement. Some mothers also expressed that the teachers' rigid teaching methods limited their ability to support their children with schoolwork. While there were instances of unsatisfactory interaction with the director, the Latina mothers did not perceive that they received differential treatment because of their migratory background. However, there were concerns about the school's lack of inclusivity and insufficient respect for cultural differences.

#### *5.2.4. Household situation*

Among the sub-Saharan African mothers, a lack of trust in childcare services was observed to be a prevailing concern. Several mothers shared negative experiences, highlighting issues such as inadequate attention or lack of notice regarding their children's ill-being. These accounts reflect a common skepticism towards external care arrangements and a preference for direct maternal involvement in childcare. However, this was not considered to be challenging their integration into the educational institution.

In contrast, the focus group composed by the Moroccan mothers pointed to challenges related to limited resources and space within their households. The constraints of living in two-room apartments emerged as a recurring theme, challenging adequate study environments for their children. Additionally, time constraints and household responsibilities were raised as an extra challenge affecting their experiences.

Among the Caribbean mothers' focus group, single motherhood emerged as an important factor. Participants emphasized the challenges associated with balancing multiple responsibilities, including addressing mental health issues. Additionally, societal expectations of being present at home when husbands are around and the need for personal time after dropping off the children at school were considered potential factors affecting some of the mothers at the school. Conversely, the focus groups with the Latina mothers did not perceive any specific household situation significantly influencing their experiences.

#### *5.2.5. Different values and approaches to parental engagement*

Different values and approaches to parental engagement also emerged as a significant aspect influencing the experiences of the participant mothers. The data revealed a variety of perspectives and potential tensions between the mothers' approaches and the school's expectations. The sub-Saharan African mothers demonstrated a clear contrast in child-rearing practices between their country of origin and the Netherlands. Some of the mothers expressed difficulty in instilling their own cultural ways of upbringing due to the influence of the Dutch societal norms. This discrepancy manifested in conflicting views on engagement, especially concerning academic expectations. While they felt that the school emphasized supporting their children "according to their capabilities", some mothers desired to push their children to strive for greater achievements. Additionally, differences in manners and behavior between their own culture and the Dutch culture were underlined, which further accentuated the contrasting interpretation of parental engagement. Similarly, the focus group with the Moroccan mothers also shed light on the differences in child-rearing practices between their culture and the Dutch context. Moreover, there was a prevailing sentiment that the school had difficulty understanding parents' needs and ways of supporting their children's education, potentially stemming from the lack of diversity among school staff.

Within the Latina mothers, concerns were raised regarding the perceived leniency and slower pace of education in the Netherlands compared to their own cultural backgrounds. In addition, a key aspect of their engagement in the education of their children was prioritizing the happiness of their children and providing them with the necessary support to achieve that goal. The mothers emphasized the importance of teaching them values and life skills at home as a fundamental aspect of their engagement, which was not often acknowledged by the school. They also expressed a desire for their children to engage in more creative assignments, contrasting with the structured

educational approach they perceived in the school. Furthermore, the mothers felt that the school's emphasis on technology contradicted their own intention to limit their children's attachment to electronic devices.

The Caribbean mothers also shared unique insights into their understanding of parental engagement. They expressed the belief that being present for their children and fulfilling their transportation needs for appointments and activities was a significant way for them to engage in their children's education. These mothers also highlighted the contrasting styles of giving feedback, perceiving the Dutch approach too harsh and direct compared to their own cultural norms. Additionally, similar to the insights shared by the sub-Saharan African mothers, the Caribbean mothers felt that their approach involved motivating their children to strive for improvement and exert greater effort in their studies, in contrast to what they perceived as a more lenient approach of the school.

To conclude, this section responded to the second sub-question. Five key factors were examined: language and cultural literacy, work situation, school's attitudes towards parents, household situations, and a difference in values and approaches to parental engagement. Language and cultural barriers presented challenges for communication and understanding, while school attitudes affected parental experiences due to a lack of diversity among the school staff and inadequate understanding and support for diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the different values and approaches to parental engagement stemming from diverse cultural backgrounds shape the mothers' interactions with the school and their participation in the education of their children, leading to tensions and misunderstandings. The work situation of the parents played a role in shaping their availability and involvement in their children's education. Likewise, within the household situation factor, the living conditions and the structure of the household, including the presence of extended family members or the absence of a support system, had an impact on their experiences.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

### 6.1. Conclusion

After analyzing how do first-generation migrant mothers in the P. Oosterlee school engage in the education of their children and the ways in which sociocultural factors affect their integration in the educational institution, the main research question can be answered: *“How do sociocultural factors influence parental engagement levels among first-generation migrant parents in Moerwijk regarding the education of their children?”*

The analysis of the two sub-questions uncovers the substantial influence of sociocultural factors on some aspects of parental engagement, both positively and negatively. However, these factors appear to have minimal influence on other aspects. Firstly, home-based engagement remained largely unaffected by the sociocultural factors examined. All mothers stressed high engagement in home-based activities, employing conventional strategies frequently mentioned in the literature like homework assistance and reading together (Epstein, 2010). Additionally, the focus groups highlighted additional actions undertaken by the mothers that are rarely acknowledge among the mainstream discussions of home-based engagement. These included engaging in communicative and performative acts to show them the value of money and hard work, as well as fostering a positive atmosphere surrounding their children’s educational journey. While certain factors influenced the experiences of the mothers, they did not impede their overall engagement. For instance, despite facing language and educational barriers when assisting their children with homework, the mothers found alternative ways to engage, such as utilizing the homework club at the Wijkcenter. The household situation had mixed effects, with limited resources and space posing challenges, while the presence of extended family members provided additional support, particularly in terms of helping with homework. Conversely, work situations and school attitudes towards parents did not significantly negatively impact home-based engagement. Indeed, some mothers claimed that to give more attention and time to their children, they had chosen to stop working altogether. Similarly, different values and approaches to parental engagement did not affect the overall home-engagement of the mothers but offered diverse perspectives on this dimension.

Regarding parent-school communication, the findings reveal a nuanced role of sociocultural factors. On one hand, language barriers and cultural differences posed significant challenges for some parents in effectively communicating with school staff. Despite their active presence in the trimestral meetings, limited fluency in the Dutch language might have hindered other communication instances. These findings align with Vinopal's (2017) notion of cultural capital, as the mothers' limited familiarity with linguistic and cultural aspects potentially impeded their engagement in communicative interactions. However, the mothers displayed resourcefulness and resilience in finding alternative ways to overcome these barriers, such as seeking assistance from other family members. School attitudes reflected both positive and negative effects. Some mothers highlighted the school's efforts to facilitate the communication with non-Dutch speakers, while others mentioned a possible mismatch and tensions between the mothers and the school staff, as acknowledged by Carlisle et al. (2005), potentially alienating the mothers. Similarly, some mothers claimed an insufficient respect from the school towards cultural differences, which might have also pushed them away. The household and work situations had varying effects, with a few mothers experiencing challenges attending school meetings due to their household or work circumstances. However, these factors did not significantly impact parent-school communication in most cases. This could be attributed to the perceived positive arrangements made by the school to accommodate diverse situations or to the mothers' prioritization of ensuring effective communication. Similarly, the interaction between mothers and the school may have been influenced by different values and approaches to parental engagement, including cultural differences in understandings communication with authority figures, as expressed by Bernhard et al. (1988) and Moles (1993).

In terms of the mothers' expectations for their child's education, sociocultural factors had varied influence. While some factors had limited impact, others exerted a significant positive influence. The parents' cultural background, educational experiences, and social expectations positively shaped their aspirations for their children's academic success. Education was considered as an essential tool for achieving important elements in life, such as homeownership, personal growth, or economic stability. Work situation and school attitudes had minimal impact, although cultural literacy played a significant role. The mothers frequently emphasized instilling a strong work ethic and motivation in their children to excel, reflecting their deep-rooted aspiration to provide them with opportunities they themselves had not had. Similarly, the impact of household situations was

evident through their migratory background and the desire for a better future for their children. This influenced their expectations and fueled their determination for their children to excel. Additionally, different approaches to parental engagement also influenced their expectations, with mothers taking a proactive role in encouraging their children to strive for excellence, contrary to the perceived lenient approach of the school.

Lastly, regarding parental engagement in school activities, sociocultural factors had significant impacts. Factors such as time constraints due to work obligations and language barriers could limit parent's active participation. Similarly, previous negative experiences with the school were perceived to influence some of the mothers' participation. Household situations, such as distrust in external care facilities might have similarly limit their participation. However, despite these challenges, many mothers remained committed to engaging in school-related activities, driven by a desire to be actively involved in their child's educational journey. Although the direct influence of different values and approaches to parental engagement on school activities was not explicitly identified, it is possible that the absence of interest among certain mothers could be influenced by divergent values.

In conclusion, the findings revealed significant impacts of sociocultural factors on parental engagement. Home-based engagement remained largely unaffected, while parent-school communication faced challenges derived mainly from cultural and linguistic differences, although resourcefulness helped overcome them. Parental expectations of their children's education was found to be positively affected by the studied sociocultural factors, especially by the mothers' cultural and educational background and the household situations. Conversely, sociocultural factors had the strongest impact on parent engagement in school activities, as language barriers and school's attitudes towards parents were found to challenge their participation in these activities.

#### *6.1.1. Reviewing expectations*

Having answered the main research question, the expectations formulated in the theoretical review can be examined. Firstly, regarding the expectation that parents with fewer sociocultural factors limiting their integration into the educational institution would exhibit higher parental engagement, the findings generally support this notion. In dimensions characterized by significant variations in engagement, such as engagement in school activities and communication, it was observed that

mothers who actively participated the most also expressed being negatively affected by fewer sociocultural factors. However, when considering the dimensions of parent's expectations of their children education and home-based engagement, the expectation is not supported. Mothers affected by fewer sociocultural factors did not show higher engagement in these dimensions compared to those affected by more factors.

Secondly, the expectation that parents with a higher number of sociocultural factors limiting their integration would have lower levels of engagement in parent-school communication and engagement in school activities was partially supported. The findings indicated that language barriers and cultural differences, as well as previous negative experiences with the school, posed challenges for some mothers in effectively communicating with the school. Similarly, the mothers with lower engagement in school activities were affected by a higher number of sociocultural factors, such as language barriers, schools' attitudes, and household situations. This suggest that these forms of engagement may not be universally applicable, despite being considered as traditional dimensions of parental engagement in the literature (Epstein, 2010). However, it is important to note that despite these challenges, many mothers displayed resourcefulness and resilience in finding alternative ways to overcome the barriers. Even though the studied sociocultural factors influenced these dimensions, they did not necessarily lead to a complete absence of engagement by the mothers, which reflects a process of social integration (Blanco & Umayahara, 2004).

Thirdly, the expectations that a higher number of sociocultural factors affecting their experiences would not seriously impact home-based engagement and mothers' expectations of their children's education was supported by the findings. The insights highlight that despite encountering certain barriers, the mothers found alternative ways to engage in the home environment. Additionally, the mothers' expectations for their children's education were positively shaped by their background and experiences.

Lastly, the expectation that mothers who perceive different approaches to parental engagement as a relevant sociocultural factor would show lower overall engagement, was partially supported. While a direct influence on overall engagement was not identified, it is possible that a low engagement in some of the dimensions could have been influenced by divergent values. Despite

this, their engagement was not perceived to be inadequately represented in the explored dimensions, reflecting that the dimensions considered for this study were comprehensive and inclusive enough to encompass the various strategies employed by the mothers.

## **6.2. Discussion**

This final chapter provides a reflection of the main findings, outlining its main contributions and limitations. Lastly, recommendations for future research and policy makers will be laid out.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the way that first-generation migrant parents engage in the education of their children and the effect that sociocultural factors had upon it. Overall, the findings revealed that sociocultural factors had a significant impact on various aspects of parental engagement, both positively and negatively. The negative impact of sociocultural factors was of diverse nature and align with the observations made by several authors in the literature (Bernhard et al., 1988; Marschall, 2006; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Vinopal, 2017). However, this study also highlights the positive effects that these sociocultural factors had on parental engagement, which differs from the prevailing perspective commonly discussed in the literature.

The findings of this study also provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of immigrant integration and participation in schools. The insights point to the disadvantages faced by migrant mothers for engaging in the education of their children, which could translate into the educational disadvantages of immigrant-origin children acknowledged in the literature (Alba et al., 2011; Heath & Cheung 2007; Heath et al., 2008). This aligns with the emphasis placed by Alba et al. (2011) and Sam and Berry (2010) on the importance of providing support to migrant families for acquiring sociocultural skills that enable their full integration into society. However, building on Vinopal's (2017) perspective, this study also highlights that immigrant integration should not be solely linked to a predetermined model of parental engagement. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of multiple interpretations of parental engagement that effectively support the children's education and acquisition of cultural capital, ultimately facilitating their integration through educational achievements (Turney and Kao, 2009). Similarly, the findings of this study align with López's (2001) argument viewing marginalized forms of parental engagement as a source of counter-story. The findings present that the mothers are already involved in their children's education, including creative ways not widely acknowledged. The diversity of

aspirations, expectations and strategies used by the mothers reflect funds of knowledge with a potential to positively impact the educational journey of the students. Validating and searching for better ways to capitalize on marginalized forms of involvement could better promote success for all students.

This study provides valuable contributions for the field of parental engagement and immigrant integration, as well as for policy makers and school managers. Based on the identified gaps on the literature, research contributions have been identified. Firstly, gaps in the existing literature are addressed by examining why certain parents are less involved than others. Specially, the research methodology employed in this study places the experiences and perspectives of the parents at the forefront. The use of focus groups facilitated the data collection of firsthand insights from a diverse range of mothers, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of their viewpoints. Secondly, this study contributes to the understanding of parental engagement specially focusing on first-generation migrant communities, a field understudied in the literature. Given the increasing diversity of cities influenced by changing migration patterns, it is crucial to recognize the challenges faced by migrants engaging in their children's education. Thirdly, existing research on the topic has largely focused on the contexts of the United States of America. This research expands the existing body of literature on parent engagement by focusing specifically on the Dutch context, with a special emphasis on the neighborhood of Moerwijk. Considering the municipality of The Hague's efforts to enhance immigrant educational integration and improve educational standards in the region, this study holds significant relevance.

### *6.2.1. Limitations*

Despite the interesting insights and contributions, this study has limitations to consider. Firstly, the selection of participants for the focus group relied on purposive judgmental and snowball sampling, which may have resulted in an inaccurate representation of the overall parent population at the school. The researcher faced challenges reaching mothers and relied heavily on local contacts and networking strategies, potentially excluding voices of mothers with low social capital or limited community centers contact. Accordingly, there are implications regarding representation, encompassing not only migratory background but also diverse social circles and lifestyles (Qin, 2017). This represents a threat to external validity and therefore to the generalization of the results. Nevertheless, the study attempted to address these limitations by including participants from

diverse backgrounds and using multiple recruitment strategies. Secondly, it is important to consider the potential bias and shaping of responses due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and existing societal pressures and expectations (Smithson, 2000). This could have been further accentuated by the employment of focus groups instead of one-to-one interviews, as the presence of the researcher and other participants may have influenced participants' responses (Daley, 2013). This might have made the participants prone to following the dominant perspective discussed in the focus group rather than sharing their own perspectives. However, efforts were made to promote homogeneity among the focus groups participants based on regional backgrounds to enhance comfort and encourage participation (Liamputtong, 2011). It is important to consider that this approach may inadvertently lead to a "collective" voice rather than a diverse range of opinions (Krueger, 2014). To mitigate this, participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, and they were encouraged to freely express all their thoughts and perceptions.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

From this study, several recommendations can be made for future research. Firstly, future studies could incorporate mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative data on engagement levels with qualitative data capturing the perspectives of parents, teachers, and children. This could involve additional methods such as shadowing, interviews, and surveys. This approach would provide a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of parental engagement, allowing for a holistic insight into the complex dynamics involved. Secondly, future research could consider the inclusion of fathers in the study to explore their role in their children's education. This could incorporate a gendered lens, to better understand the lived realities of gender difference. Lastly, an examination of parental engagement across diverse educational settings would be of great value, including different schools within a country, but also across countries. These comparative studies can provide a broader perspective on effective strategies fostering parental engagement.

Considering the significance of the topic, this study also presents recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions. Firstly, the findings highlight the importance of implementing culturally responsive practices in schools to incorporate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of families. This could involve supporting professional development opportunities for teachers focusing on cultural competency and culturally responsive teaching strategies. By providing teachers with the necessary training and resources, they would be able to effectively

engage with diverse families, gain a deeper understanding of their cultural contexts, and foster strong partnerships. Additionally, the integration of culturally relevant materials and resources could further enhance parental participation by fostering a more welcoming and inclusive environment. Furthermore, it is recommended to prioritize the recruitment of a diverse staff within schools, which could greatly improve understanding and communication.

Secondly, another crucial recommendation revolves around ensuring clear and effective communication between school and parents regarding expectations for parental engagement. A perceived lack of engagement may stem from parents' lack of awareness or understanding of what is expected from them, as well as a limited support and recognition for their existing efforts. To address this, a comprehensive guideline outlining specific expectations could be developed. These guidelines should be communicated to parents in culturally sensitive and accessible manners, while simultaneously recognizing and valuing various forms of parental engagement. Furthermore, schools should establish effective channels of communication to foster and facilitate collaboration between parents and school staff.

Thirdly, a need to recognize and value different forms of parental engagement is essential. Policymakers and schools should acknowledge and value the diverse ways in which parents engage in their children's education. Rather than solely focusing on traditional measures such as attending parent-teachers' meetings or volunteering in school events, it is important to recognize that parents contribute to their children's education in multifaced ways. By recognizing and valuing these diverse forms of parental engagement, parents will feel more acknowledged and respected for their unique contributions, which could serve as a motivation to further increase their engagement and work together with schools as partners in the learning process of the children.

To conclude, the aim of this study was to explore the ways in which first-generation migrant parents engage in the education of their children and the sociocultural factors that affect their engagement. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of parental engagement, valuing diverse contributions, and providing the necessary support and resources, a more inclusive and effective educational system can be created that empowers both parents and children. It is crucial to acknowledge the shared aspirations of mothers and teachers in making a meaningful contribution in the educational journey of children. As expressed by one mother during a focus group discussion,

the universal desire for a child's success resonates strongly: "Who does not want her child to excel?". Looking ahead, it is essential to build upon these insights and continue working towards creating an inclusive and encouraging educational environment that fully harnesses the potential role of parents, teachers, and students in enhancing the educational journey.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: List of Participants

Name	Origin	Participant type
1	North-African	North-African origin focus group
2	North-African	North-African origin focus group
3	North-African	North-African origin focus group
4	North-African	North-African origin focus group & interview
5	Sub-Saharan African	Sub-Saharan African origin focus group
6	Sub-Saharan African	Sub-Saharan African origin focus group
7	Sub-Saharan African	Sub-Saharan African origin focus group
8	Latino	Latino origin focus group
9	Latino	Latino origin focus group
10	Caribbean	Caribbean origin focus group
11	Caribbean	Caribbean origin focus group

## Appendix 2: Consent form

# Information sheet and consent form

## Information sheet

### Introduction

My name is Paula Medina Agromayor and I am a master's student of the program Governance of Migration and Diversity at Erasmus University. For my master's thesis I am researching parental engagement of first-generation migrant parents in the P. Oosterlee school. I would like to learn about the different ways that parents engage in the schooling of their children and the sociocultural factors that are engaging their engagement.

If you would like to know more about my research, you can contact me at [paula.medinaagro@gmail.com](mailto:paula.medinaagro@gmail.com)

### Data collection

The questions that the participant will be asked are about their engagement in the schooling of their children, such as their communication with the school or home-based engagement. Similarly, other questions will refer to sociocultural factors affecting their engagement, such as language and cultural literacy, perception of the school's attitude towards them, or differences in understanding of parental engagement.

The data will be collected through focus groups and interviews if necessary. The conversations will be recorded and then transcribed to facilitate the analysis of the information.

### Potential inconvenience & risks

There are no physical, legal, or economic risks associated with your participation in this study. It is not mandatory to answer all questions. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time.

### Reimbursement

Participation in this research study on parental engagement will not include any financial compensation or incentives for the participants. The purpose of this study is to enhance the education of the children by establishing a better understanding of the parental engagement perceptions and the challenges faced by parents in getting involved in their children's education. The data obtained from the interviews and focus groups will be used to create recommendations to strengthen the relationship between migrant parents and schools. Your contribution to this study is extremely valuable and your participation will have a positive impact on the education of future generations.

### Confidentiality & data protection

The collected data will be used for an aggregated analysis and no confidential information or personal data will be included in the research outcome. The data will be stored in a secure location and will be kept for 10 years.

### Data sharing

I will share the data with my thesis supervisor Mark van Ostaijen and Erasmus University for the purpose of researching and writing my master thesis mandatory for completion of my studies at Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Erasmus University.

### Voluntary participation & individual rights

Your participation is voluntary and you can stop at any time. When you participate in the research, you have the rights to request more information about the data collection, analysis or withdraw the consent and ask data erasure before the dataset is anonymized or manuscript submitted for publishing. You can exercise your rights by contacting Paula Medina Agromayor at [paula.medinaagro@gmail.com](mailto:paula.medinaagro@gmail.com)

If you have any complaints regarding the processing of personal data in this research, please contact Paula Medina Agromayor

## **Consent form *Parental engagement of first-generation migrant parents***

Upon signing of this consent form, I confirm that:

- I've been informed about the purpose of the research, data collection and storage as explained in the information sheet;
- I've read the information sheet, or it has been read to me;
- I've had an opportunity to ask questions about the study; the questions have been answered sufficiently;
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research;
- I understand that the information will be treated confidentially;
- I understand that I can stop participation any time or refuse to answer any questions without any consequences;
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent before the dataset is submitted for approval.

Additionally, I give permission to:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
I give permission to audio record the interview		
I give permission to use quotes from my interview		

Name of research participant: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature:  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Focus group structure

### 1. Introduction

Welcome participants and invite them to partake in refreshments. Introduce myself. We do a round where everyone says their name and one thing that they like doing in their free time [*icebreaker*]. When everyone is seated > vaguely introduce my research project > *'My project seeks to understand the ways that first-generation migrant parents engage in the education of their children'*.

Explain the ground rules for focus group

- Read the focus group declaration out loud
- Highlight that their participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous; there is no right answer, their answers will be taped
  - o Their answers will appear anonymously in any publications
- Participants must knowingly consent to these things >> when fully informed, they can sign the consent form.

### 2. Initial questions

[*Art-method used to start the discussion*]

- 'In this piece of paper, you have to draw whatever comes to your mind when you think of the idea of parental engagement. There is no right answer, and it does not have to be a specially beautiful drawing. It is just to bring ourselves into the mindset and topic of this focus group. After a couple of minutes, we will briefly share with each other what we tried to represent in our drawing.'

### 3. The heart of the focus group

'From here we are going to move into reflecting about different ways of engagement. Firstly, I would like all of you to think about the ways you engage in the education of your children in the home setting. Particularly, I would like you to focus on three things. How important it is for you and how frequently you talk with your children about school; your engagement with their homework; and the ways in which you create a home environment that supports the learning of your children. I'll give you a minute or two to think about it, and then we can go around the table to share your thoughts with each other. You are welcome to think of other ways in which you engage with their school in the home setting.'

'What about the communication with the teachers and the school? I'm curious about how you approach this topic. In this case I would like you to focus on how frequently you talk with the teachers or school mentors, how frequently do you attend individual meetings with teachers, how frequently do you attend parent's evenings and how frequently do you return communication attempts by the school. For each of the four topics, think of how frequently you do this, rarely, sometimes, or frequently; and why, and note it down if you would like to. After a minute, we will go around the table, and I would like you to elaborate on your answers.'

'Now, I would like you to think about your expectations for your children regarding education. Why do you think education is important? What do you expect from your children regarding school? How important is it for you that your children reach high levels of education?'

‘I would like you to engage with your artistic self again. I would like you to think of what is it that your children like about school and try to represent it in a simple drawing. After a couple of minutes, we will go around the table and explain what you drew to each other.’

‘Reflecting on your own practices, how important do you think it is for parents to know about how are their children doing in school and why?’

‘Now I would like to know about your engagement in school activities. I would like you to think for a minute if you engage in any activity at the school itself to support the education of your children.’

‘In what activities do you engage in the school itself?’

‘Do you volunteer in any of the activities that the school organizes?’

‘Do you try to get involved in any of the decision-making processes of the school?’

*[5 MINUTE BREAK]*

‘In this second part I want you to reflect on the factors that influence your engagement in the schooling of your children. I am going to give you four sticky notes to each of you and you are going to write in each of them a factor that negatively or positively affects your engagement in the education of your children. You should write between 1-3 words in each sticky note, each sticky note being one factor. When you are finished you will give them to me, and I will spread them randomly around the table. You will then as a group have to organize them by groups or categories, that we will discuss later.’

- *[If some of my dimensions included in the operationalization table are not identified, they will also be brought into the discussion.]*

‘One of the dimensions is language and cultural literacy. How do you feel that your language skills affect your engagement with the education of your children?’

‘I would like to understand if parents are well-informed of the complicated tracking system in The Netherlands. Students in The Netherlands have to choose between different tracks in the school. Are you aware of these different tracks and how do they differ from each other? Do you think that these choices are important? Do you think that enough information is provided for you to understand the educational system of the NL?’

‘Still within this category, I would like to understand the role in all this of the education of the parents. In what ways do you think that your own educational experience positively and/or negatively affect your engagement in the education of your children?’

‘Another of the identified dimensions is work. Do you feel that your work schedule affects your parental engagement? If so, in what ways?’

‘Another category from your answers refer to the school attitudes. I would like you to think about your experiences in the school. How welcome and comfortable do you feel at school? What makes you feel that way?’

‘Do you think that the school staff behave differently towards you because of your background? Have you experienced situations of discrimination in the school?’

‘Do you think that previous negative experiences with the school affect your engagement?’

‘Certain situations related to your households seem to also affect your engagement. This could refer to situations such as availability of childcare for your other children, having dependent family members, etc. Do you think that certain elements of your household situation positively or negatively affect your parental engagement?’

‘Finally, the last factor I would like you to discuss brings us back to the first drawing you did in the beginning of the session. We saw that there are different interpretations of what does parental engagement mean. Considering this, I would like you to take a minute or two to think about the following questions. Do you feel that there are differences in expectations between you and the school regarding parental engagement? In what ways? What do you think are the implications of this?’

(Final, reflective question) ‘Is there anything else you’d like to mention about your engagement in the education of your children? Something you’d like to add that hasn’t already been mentioned?’

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