Low-income African and Latina immigrant mothers' selection of early childhood care and education (ECCE): Considering the complexity of cultural and structural influences

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Grounded in ecocultural theory and utilizing in-depth interview data, this paper explores the experiences of 40 low-income immigrant mothers as they selected and secured early childhood care and education (ECCE) for their young children. Cultural and structural aspects of low-income immigrant families' lives and their influence in shaping these families' ECCE decision-making processes were examined. Latina and African mothers' experiences were considered, as these mothers' country of origin (COO) experiences were varied as well as their documentation statuses upon arrival in the US, with 15 of the Latinas being undocumented. Mothers discussed reasons for seeking ECCE, with maternal employment being most important. Some mothers looked to ECCE to recreate social experiences for their children similar to those in their COOs. Many mothers indicated looking for ECCE programs in which their children could learn English and interact with children from diverse backgrounds. Mothers tended to utilize social and organizational connections to secure ECCE and documentation of residence shaped the number and severity of obstacles mothers faced in securing ECCE. The findings from this study inform researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as to how both culture *and* structure shape ECCE decision making among low-income African and Latina/o immigrant families.

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1. Introduction

With nearly one quarter (24%) of US children under age eight having at least one foreign-born parent, immigrant families comprise a large proportion of all families with young children in the US (Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010). Immigrant families are diverse, particularly in terms of characteristics related to their country of origin (COO) experiences, including culture, language, documentation status, reasons for migrating, US destination area, socioeconomic situations, and access to resources in both their COOs and the US (Martin & Midgley, 2006; Singer, 2004; Terrazas, 2011). Aspects of these characteristics reflect a range of strengths and challenges immigrant families experience that are unique from native-born families.

Even in the face of adversity sometimes associated with migrating to a new country, immigrant families maintain hope and optimism for achieving upward mobility (Kao & Tienda, 1995). These families exhibit strong attachments to the labor force with 95% of immigrant fathers in the US being employed (Hernandez, Takanishi, & Marotz, 2009), cultivate important social networks for emotional, social, and financial support (Kao, 2004), raise children who are bicultural and bilingual (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007), and maintain more stable marriages (Wight, Thampi, & Chau, 2011) with a higher percentage of immigrant children living in two-parent households compared to their white, native-born counterparts (Fortuny et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2009). Despite these important strengths and the diversity of immigrant experiences, on average, immigrants tend to experience higher rates of poverty (Fortuny et al., 2010; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2011), due to low wages and limited access to work supports (Wight et al., 2011), as well as lower levels of education and English-language proficiency than their native-born counterparts (Hernandez et al., 2009).

Low-income immigrant families' experiences are examined in this paper. According to the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) (2007) the term low-income is fairly imprecise across the literature, with some studies only including families who fall below the federal poverty threshold and other research including families at or below 200% of the federal poverty threshold in this definition. Low-income in the present study is operationalized to include only those families who fell below the federal poverty threshold in 2009–2010. Despite this, the literature referenced in this paper reflects a broader definition of low-income as referenced by ASPE (2007). Challenges faced by low-income immigrant

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families, in particular, negatively impact school readiness, especially in terms of cognitive and language skills among children of immigrants (DeFeyter & Winsler, 2009). However, research indicates low-income immigrant families' strengths have potential to buffer the risks of lower academic achievement in kindergarten and later grades (DeFeyter & Winsler, 2009; Kao & Tienda, 1995). In addition, studies show that attending high-quality center-based early childhood care and education (ECCE), which is variably and broadly defined as experiences that promote children's development across multiple domains (see Layzer & Goodson, 2006 for a critical review of definitions and measures of quality in ECCE) particularly in the year before kindergarten, can ameliorate risks and improve academic success among immigrant children (Gormley, 2008; Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006).

ECCE and child care are used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to any type of non-parental care setting that young children utilize. When necessary, the specific type of ECCE will be noted (e.g., center-based; home-based; family, friend and neighbor (FFN)). Despite the established connections between high-quality ECCE and improved academic outcomes for immigrant children, nationally representative research in the US continues to show that fewer children of immigrants attend any type of non-parental care in their first five years of life compared to their native-born counterparts (Fortuny et al., 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009).

An important component of understanding both the outcomes associated with ECCE among low-income immigrant children, and limited enrollment among these children, are the factors influencing parents' decision making regarding ECCE as these help interpret the connections between types of ECCE utilized and children's developmental outcomes (Duncan & Gibson-Davis, 2006; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network & Duncan, 2003). Building on the early work of Inkeles (1968), Cohen (1971), and Ogbu (1981), which focused on how cultural and structural aspects of societies shape parents' child rearing, Lowe and Weisner (2004) espouse that mothers' decisions regarding ECCE are shaped by their ecocultural circumstances. That is, mothers' use of ECCE in their daily routines reflects structural (social, economic, and political systems that shape families' access to various resources for rearing children) (Inkeles, 1968 as cited by Ogbu, 1981) as well as cultural (beliefs and values regarding caring for children) or ecocultural components of their decision making regarding child care (Lowe & Weisner, 2004).

Immigrant mothers, in particular, negotiate a unique set of ecocultural reasons for selecting ECCE because as they navigate the process of selecting and securing child care, they do so in parallel with adapting to life in the US. Research in this area indicates that structural (Hernandez et al., 2007, 2011) and cultural (Brandon, 2002; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Uttal, 1999) factors account for immigrant families' lower use of ECCE across all income levels, with the greatest gap among low-income immigrant families (Hernandez et al., 2011). However, these studies often emphasize either cultural *or* structural influences as being more important. Earlier research tended to indicate greater emphasis on immigrant families' cultures (Brandon, 2002; Hashima & Amato, 1994), and recent quantitative studies emphasize structural or ecological reasons accounting for the majority of the gap in enrollment between low-income immigrant children and their native-born counterparts (Hernandez et al., 2011). Despite the importance of this research, it fails to show how both cultural and structural aspects of individuals' lives influence families' values and behaviors (Zhou, 2005), and thus shape immigrant parents' processes of selecting ECCE. Consequently, based on in-depth interviews of 40 low-income immigrant mothers, the present study aims to illuminate the complex interplay of cultural and structural

reasons that shape low-income immigrant mothers' processes of selecting and securing ECCE for their young children.

1.1. Importance of ECCE to low-income immigrant children and families

Research indicates that stable, high-quality early childhood care and education is important to families as it provides supports for employment, child development, and families' needs (Bromer & Henly, 2009; Cahan & Bromer, 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These benefits of ECCE may be even more important for low-income families with limited resources (Baum, 2002; Currie, 2001), and especially for low-income immigrant families who, despite possessing multiple strengths, face unique challenges (Gormley, 2008). Latino immigrants and recent African immigrants, who are rapidly increasing in numbers in the US, experience significant challenges related to poverty and, for Latinos, documentation (Hernandez, 2009; Kent, 2007), placing children in these families at risk of lower academic achievement (Kao & Tienda, 1995). Despite this, there continues to be limited research on recent, low-income African immigrants' child care experiences.

1.1.1. Employment support

Access to and utilization of ECCE helps parents remain employed. Multiple studies point to the varied connections between ECCE and parental employment for low-income families particularly in relation to the cost of child care (Baum, 2002; Bromer & Henly, 2009), type of care (Bromer & Henly, 2009; Gordon, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2008; Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Li-Grining & Coley, 2006; Udansky & Wolf, 2008) and employment stability (Bromer & Henly, 2009; Gordon et al., 2008; Henly & Lyons, 2000). The use of ECCE for parental employment reasons is particularly important to immigrant families considering 95% of immigrant fathers (equivalent to non-immigrant fathers) and 62% of immigrant mothers (less than their non-immigrant counterparts) are employed (Hernandez, 2009).

1.1.2. Child developmental outcomes

High-quality ECCE plays an important positive role in children's development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), especially in terms of cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills (Currie, 2001; Zaslow et al., 2006). The connections between ECCE and child developmental outcomes are particularly important to consider among low-income immigrant children—especially among Mexican and Central American families who experience the highest rates of poverty (Hernandez et al., 2011), as well as immigrant groups from Africa whose migration to the US in the last couple decades has rapidly risen side-by-side with their increased experiences of poverty in the US (Kent, 2007).

As risks associated with poverty accumulate, they are likely to impact children's developmental outcomes in detrimental ways (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). However, nationally representative research found that among immigrant children, preschool attendance was associated with greater reading and math skills, as well as English language proficiency in kindergarten (Magnuson et al., 2006); while a study of universal pre-kindergarten in Oklahoma indicated better cognitive and language developmental outcomes for Latina/o children who attended pre-kindergarten compared to their ethnic-racial counterparts who did not attend preschool (Gormley, 2008). Together these findings point to the importance of immigrant children being in high-quality ECCE to improve their school readiness (Hernandez, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

1.1.3. Family supports

Research indicates the important role that ECCE plays in supporting children's families beyond employment and their children's development. Studies show that ECCE provides parents with links to important housing, employment, nutrition and health, and public assistance services (Cahan & Bromer, 2003; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987; Vesely, Ewaida, & Kearney, 2013). Some argue that comprehensive ECCE programs with family supports may be particularly important among immigrants with limited knowledge of various child and family systems important for children's developmental outcomes (Fukkink, 2008). Given the links between parental employment, children's and families' developmental outcomes and ECCE, coupled with the structural and cultural vulnerabilities of many immigrant families, ECCE may be even more critical for low-income immigrant families than for their non-immigrant counterparts. Consequently, it is important to understand what shapes low-income immigrant families' use of ECCE.

1.2. ECCE use among low-income immigrant families

The majority of families with young children utilize some form of ECCE so parents can work outside the home. Nationally representative data collected in 2005 indicated 61.4% of children of immigrants aged three and 71.2% of their four-year-old counterparts were in any non-parental care (compared to 71.2% and 83.6%, respectively, of children of native-born parents) (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). These three- and four-year-old children of immigrants in non-parental care were more likely to be in center-based care than in any other type of care. Further, children of immigrants spend the most hours in center-based care compared to their native-born counterparts. However, when immigrant families' participation is stratified by income, *low*-income immigrants have lower non-parental care utilization rates than their higher income, immigrant counterparts. Preschool utilization rates of immigrant families vary from state-to-state, with the lowest care use of immigrant families in comparison to non-immigrant families in states with the highest percentage of immigrants (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Studies show that utilization of specific kinds of non-parental care among immigrants varies by COO with children of Mexican descent least likely to be enrolled in preschool (Crosnoe, 2007). Finally, despite there being over 70% of immigrant children in ECCE one year before kindergarten, a significant number of these children are still underrepresented in comparison to children with native-born parents. In support of research on immigrant families with young children and their ECCE experiences, Brandon (2004) highlighted the need for greater understanding of:

> . . .the forces determining the child care arrangements of children in immigrant families and the effects of child care on their development and early adaptation to life in the United States. Failure to pursue this research will deprive us of understanding an important possible antecedent to the documented problems some children in immigrant families experience early in their formative school years. . . (p. 80).

1.3. ECCE Decision making among immigrant families

Ecocultural theorists assert the importance of considering both cultural and structural aspects of individuals' lives, and how these shape rearing of children (Cohen, 1971; Inkeles, 1968; Ogbu, 1981) and families' daily routines (Lowe & Weisner, 2004). Cultural components include shared values and beliefs that guide behaviors and shape individuals' daily lives; while structural factors reflect social, economic, and political systems and structures (Inkeles, 1968) that shape individuals' access to "financial, material, institutional, social,

and time resources" (Lowe & Weisner, 2004, p. 150). Lowe and Weisner (2004) indicate that ECCE has to fit into families' daily routines by: (1) fitting with families' constellation of resources (economic, material, social, time); (2) aligning with parents' values and beliefs; (3) balancing parents' needs and desires with those of other family members, including children; and (4) being stable and predictable. These ways of aligning with families' daily routines reflect cultural *and* structural factors important in considering families' daily lives and the decisions they make, including selecting ECCE. Qualitative ethnographic methods are most commonly utilized to explore these aspects of families' lives because these methods are uniquely suited to uncover the depth and complexity of how ecological and cultural factors shape families' experiences (Weisner, 1997).

Reflective of Weisner's (2002) ecocultural model, earlier studies on ECCE decision making among immigrant families focused on the cultural reasons or parents' values and beliefs from their COOs for utilizing any type of child care (Brandon, 2002). More recent studies include greater consideration of structural reasons including affordability and accessibility, as shaped by economic and political structures, of ECCE that influence immigrants' selection of child care (Hernandez et al., 2011). Hernandez et al. (2011) argue that cultural beliefs play a very limited role in immigrant parents' decisions to use non-parental ECCE. This paper builds upon this literature, especially the Hernandez et al. (2011) study.

Cultural beliefs and values have traditionally been cited as reasons that immigrant families utilize formal ECCE programs at lower rates than their native-born counterparts. It is believed that families from different ethnic backgrounds may not use center-based child care as frequently as their native-born counterparts because they perceive this care to be less supportive and in some cases counter to their dominant parenting beliefs and practices (Brandon, 2002, 2004; Hashima & Amato, 1994; Uttal, 1999). Research indicates that families from cultures in which family relationships and parent–child interactions, reflective of collectivism, are emphasized, may not want their children enrolled in programs perceived as focusing on individualism. Some assert that immigrant parents prefer family members or friends from similar cultural backgrounds to care for their children for reasons of trust as well as hope for instilling their cultural values in their children (Hashima & Amato, 1994; Obeng, 2007).

Some of the studies that consider culture as an explanation for child care decisions among immigrants, utilize English spoken at home, length of time living in the US, and children's generation status—commonly used as measures of acculturation—as proxies for adoption of US cultural practices regarding parenting and ideas about using non-parental ECCE (Hernandez et al., 2011; Liang et al., 2000). Liang et al. (2000) found that after controlling for access to Head Start and preschool, Latina/os in Spanish speaking households were less likely to use center-based child care. The interpretation of this finding is somewhat problematic in that Latina/os' decisions regarding ECCE were attributed to cultural reasons rather than possible structural reasons of not being able to communicate with providers. In the same study, Liang and colleagues (2000) directly measured parents' adoption of US cultural beliefs but did not measure families' cultural beliefs regarding parenting and ECCE from their COOs that might shape their child care decisions. This omission may lead to unreliable conclusions regarding how various aspects of parents' decisions regarding ECCE shape their decisions to use ECCE in the US. Moreover, much of this research focuses specifically on Latina/o families' experiences, which may be different than other immigrant groups. Finally, this literature seems to oversimplify immigrants' experiences in terms of their adoption of US cultural beliefs as well as an assumption of values related to family and collectivism, without giving credence to other aspects of families' lives that might be tied to their use of ECCE.

The most recent research in this area espouses the importance of considering structural (affordability, accessibility) factors (Johnson, 2005) that shape immigrant families' utilization of ECCE at lower rates than their native-born counterparts (Hernandez, 2004; Hernandez et al., 2007; Hofferth, 1996). Specifically, despite immigrant fathers working full-time year-round (Chaudry & Fortuny, 2010), on average, immigrant families have lower incomes (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, & Perez-Lopez, 2003). In addition, fewer immigrant mothers work outside the home (Chaudry & Fortuny, 2010; Hernandez, 2004), compared to non-immigrant families, contributing to immigrant families' limited use of center-based child care (Booth, Crouter, & Landale, 1997). Related research highlights how low-income immigrant families in particular lack access to a variety of institutions, which sheds light on the linguistic, financial, and geographic barriers that immigrant families face when in search of services and supports like child care (Yoshikawa, Godfrey, & Rivera, 2008). Moreover, the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education of Hispanics (2007) found that in various Latina/o neighborhoods in California and Chicago, there was a shortage of ECCE programs available. Limited financial and geographic accessibility is increasingly being understood as the most common reasons immigrant families attend ECCE programs at lower rates than non-immigrant children, rather than immigrants' cultural values and beliefs (Hernandez et al., 2007).

Hernandez and colleagues (2011), using US Census 2000 data, attempted to tease out the relative influence of cultural, structural, and familial factors on immigrant parents' use of ECCE (Hernandez et al., 2011). Specifically, they examined how much cultural (immigrant situation and acculturation), structural (socioeconomic), and family contextual (household composition, maternal employment) influences contributed to the use of ECCE among families from the Dominican Republic, Central America, Indochina, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, as well as native-born families during the preschool years (ages 3–5). Based on Lowe and Weisner's (2004) definition of structural influences on families' child care decision-making, Hernandez et al.'s (2011) definition of familial characteristics, including maternal employment and household composition, reflect social and financial resources, and thus, for the purposes of this paper, can be considered structural influences. Findings indicated that structural reasons including poverty, parental education, and parental occupation accounted for the majority of the ECCE enrollment gap among children ages three and four from native-born and immigrant families of certain COOs.

Hernandez and colleagues (2011) were limited in their determination of various structural and cultural influences on immigrants' use of ECCE because of the ambiguity of some of the variables. Specifically certain variables could be considered both cultural and structural influences. For example, it is unknown if parents' language fluency indicates preference for family or maternal child care (cultural) or if it represents a barrier to English-only ECCE (structural). The Hernandez et al. (2011) study is a first step in understanding the complex relationship between cultural and structural influences on immigrant families' use of child care. It helps uncover the level of influence of structural forces on immigrant parents' ECCE decision making. However, given the method limitations, the data were unable to illuminate the interplay between cultural and structural influences on various aspects of immigrant families' processes of ECCE decision making. Further, the quantitative nature of Hernandez et al.'s (2011) study limits our abilities to understand, and in some cases broaden, conceptual and operational definitions of cultural and structural factors, in the context of immigrant families' daily lives.

The present study aims to add to the literature focused on the interplay among structural and cultural reasons immigrant families utilize and select ECCE arrangements. First, rather than focusing on immigrant mothers who *do not* use non-parental ECCE, this study focuses on a group of mothers who *do* use ECCE, to understand what brought them to initially use ECCE, and then how they selected this ECCE. Second, because the present study uses a qualitative approach, it provides greater clarity regarding how cultural and structural influences shape immigrant mothers' selection of ECCE by examining these influences not as discrete sets of variables but rather considering how these influences unfold over time and interact with each other in the context of mothers' daily lives. Third, it pushes this literature further by considering how structural and cultural aspects of immigrant parents' lives shape not only mothers' initial decisions to use any kind of non-parental care, but also mothers' processes of selecting and securing ECCE for their young children. Consequently, this paper explores the following research question: *How do cultural and structural factors together shape low-income, African and Latin American, immigrant mothers' processes of selecting and securing early childhood care and education?*

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 40 first-generation, low-income immigrant mothers whose children, at the time of the study, were enrolled in one of the three ECCE programs that were funded by Head Start or universal pre-kindergarten initiatives. All of the mothers were low-income and lived below the federal poverty threshold. Participants hailed from various African countries (Ethiopia, $n = 8$; Ghana, $n = 5$; Sudan, $n = 2$; Egypt, $n = 1$; Eritrea, $n = 1$; Morocco, $n = 1$, Somalia, $n = 1$) and Latin America (El Salvador, $n = 9$; Mexico, $n = 7$; Guatemala, $n = 2$; Argentina, $n = 1$; Dominican Republic, $n = 1$; Ecuador, $n = 1$). Mothers migrated to the US close to 10 years, on average, before they were interviewed for this study. The majority of mothers were documented when they arrived; however, about one third were undocumented upon arrival. Mothers were just over 30 years old, with two children, on average, at the time of the interview. Mothers' levels of education varied, with the majority having at least a high school degree. Participants appeared to reflect the education experiences of the larger populations of African and Latina immigrant mothers in the US, except the Salvadorian and Ethiopian mothers. The Salvadorian mothers in this study on average had completed more education (89% with a high school degree or more) than Salvadorian immigrant mothers in the US population (34.8%) (US Census Bureau, 2000). Most mothers were employed at the time of the interview and were married or cohabiting, with the percentage of single mothers being similar among both the African and Latina mothers. All but three families either spoke their native language or a mix of their native languages and English at home—and the three families who only spoke English at home indicated regret about this.

On average, mothers' first experiences with ECCE were when their first children were about three years old, with some mothers using non-parental care as early as when their children were one month and some starting to use ECCE once children already turned four. Latina/o focal children in this study began ECCE at a slightly younger age than the African focal children. See Table 1 for descriptive demographic data.

2.2. Data collection

A modified grounded theory approach was used to collect and analyze data in this study. Grounded theory, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (Daly, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is a qualitative approach that encourages researchers to allow themes and new theories to emerge from the data without the confines of predetermined ideas or theories regarding the population of interest. A

Table 1
Participant characteristics (frequencies).

	Total mothers ($N = 40$)	African mothers ($n = 19$)	Latina mothers ($n = 21$)
Maternal age			
Mean age (in years)	32.25	33.89	30.72
20–29	15	5	10
30–39	18	9	9
40–49	7	5	2
Maternal education			
Less than high school	11	4	7
High school	14	9	5
Some college	13	5	8
College	2	1	1
Income			
Income less than 100% of federal poverty threshold	40	19	21
Language(s) spoken at home			
Native language only	24	4	20
English only	3	3	0
Native language and English	13	12	1
Maternal employment			
Full time employment	22	7	15
Part time employment	8	4	4
Not employed	10	8	2
Documentation upon arrival in US			
Documented-family reunification	14	8	6
Documented-diversity lottery	6	6	0
Documented-refugee	3	3	0
Documented-work visa	2	2	0
Undocumented	15	0	15[a]
Maternal time in US			
Avg. years	9.08	9.57	8.62
SES in country of origin (COO)			
Higher in COO than in US	10	5	5
Same in COO and US	12	8	4
Lower in COO than in US	16	5	11
Child characteristics			
Focal child is 1st child	21	11	10
Avg. number of children	2.22	2.42	2.05
Focal child mean age (in months)	29.5	33.1	26.6
Child only attended HS or UPK	20	11	9
Couple relationship			
Married/cohabiting	31	15	16
Single	9	4	5

[a] Three mothers did not explicitly state whether or not they were documented. However their journeys to the US in terms of crossing borders with coyotes indicate they likely came to the US without legal documentation.

modified grounded theory approach (LaRossa, 2005) veers from the traditional grounded theory approach in that it allows for consideration of ideas and theories from prior studies as a way of informing the goals and analyses of a given study (Cutcliffe, 2005). In the present study, this approach, utilized by other scholars (Burton & Hardaway, 2012), started with the ecocultural framework as a guide for the data collection and analyses. Specifically, sensitizing concepts or guiding ideas from this framework and other concepts in the literature shaped the development of the interview protocol as well as the earliest phases of data analysis (Van den Hoonard, 1997).

2.2.1. Recruitment

Mothers were recruited to participate in this study from three ECCE programs, in a major metropolitan area, in which a high percentage (over 70%) of immigrant families from a variety of countries were enrolled. Contact with the three programs was initially made by the author through involvement with a larger project, which was being conducted by a national organization focused on the status of ECCE services for immigrant families. The author spent approximately an academic year in the field, meeting teachers, children, and parents, and observing in classrooms at three ECCE programs. All names of individuals and organizations have been changed to protect the privacy of the study participants.

At the first field site, River Banks, which is located in a suburban neighborhood, families were recruited from three Head Start classrooms within an elementary school with a high number of immigrant families, as well as children who would be transitioning to kindergarten within one to two years. These classrooms reflected recent racial-ethnic demographic shifts in the local community including an influx of many African families from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Sudan, and Somalia.

The second field site was La Casita del Saber (The Little House of Wisdom), a multisite, bilingual (Spanish and English) program, housed in an adult charter school in an urban area. At the time of the study, the majority of families enrolled in La Casita were African American and Latina/o, like the composition of the community surrounding the program. Parents were recruited from two classrooms with children who were four and five years old.

The third field site from which immigrant mothers were recruited was Time of Wonder. Despite being located in the city, Time of Wonder was situated at the edge of a large national park within a more affluent neighborhood. Consequently, the families in this program were more diverse in terms of social class than the other two field sites. Time of Wonder was funded with a combination of Head Start funds, private tuition, and grants from the city. At the time of the study there were African American, Latina/o, and white European families from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds enrolled in Time of Wonder, reflecting its location as well as funding streams.

Recruitment efforts commenced after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Inclusion criteria for this study were:

being a mother of a child who was enrolled in one of the ECCE programs mentioned above; having children who would begin kindergarten between fall 2010 and fall 2011; and, being a first-generation immigrant (i.e., the mother was born outside of the US). Within these broader eligibility criteria, mothers were purposively sampled (Patton, 1990) to ensure some variation in experience including: pre-immigration socioeconomic status (education and poverty); legal documentation upon arriving in the US; and, region of origin. These eligibility criteria and stratification plans allowed for asking certain "information rich" immigrant mothers to participate (Patton, 2002). Interviewing mothers ceased when saturation, or no longer hearing new information, themes, or stories regarding mothers' experiences, was reached.

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways including: volunteering in the children's classrooms, particularly during the time that children were being either picked up or dropped off; accompanying family service workers on home visits during the beginning and end of the school year; and, finally, visiting parent gatherings associated with the centers. In addition to these recruitment strategies, at Time of Wonder, mothers were also recruited through another focus group research project offered at the program. Prior to each interview, participants were required to read and sign an informed consent form. Participants were asked for permission to digitally audio-record their interviews, to which all participants consented verbally and in writing on the consent form. In addition, participants were made aware that they could ask questions about the study before, during, and after the interview, as well as discontinue the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant received a copy of the consent form to keep for their records.

2.2.2. In-depth interviews

Unlike quantitative research in which sample sizes are determined by confidence intervals, for qualitative studies, sample size is a bit more flexible and is dependent upon saturation, or the point at which there is no new conceptual and theoretical information being gleaned from each interview (Daly, 2007). There are various estimates of the number of interviews necessary to achieve saturation, which range from 20 (Daly, 2007) to 30 (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Because families were recruited from three distinct centers with diverse immigrant populations, it was necessary to conduct more than 30 interviews such that saturation could be reached. Specifically, data were collected from 40 mothers, 21 of whom were Latin American and 19 who were African. Data collection ceased when saturation was reached within each of these broad regional ethnic groups.

The majority of interviews were conducted in mothers' homes, while seven interviews took place at the ECCE programs due to convenience for the mother. Families' homes were considered ideal spaces in which to conduct interviews as mothers felt most comfortable in their homes, and it provided the opportunity to gain greater insight into families' daily, lived experiences. All of the interviews were digitally audio-recorded, and focused on the following topics: demographic background (age, number of children, marital status, household data, country of origin), immigration experiences, daily routines, ECCE history, parenting beliefs, mothers' ideas and interactions related to education, health care, and financial stability, social support, ideas about the future, and advice for other immigrants. Lead questions were asked regarding the aforementioned topics and were followed up with probing questions to gather more detail. For example, in the part of the interview focused on ECCE selection and history the author asked, "*Tell me about other child care you utilized prior to beginning at La Casita del Saber/Time of Wonder/River Banks.*" As mothers began to describe the child care arrangements their children utilized during early childhood the author followed up with probes to learn more about

each care arrangement including: "*How did you find out about this child care?*" "*What were some of the important things you were looking for in ECCE when you enrolled your child in La Casita del Saber/Time of Wonder/River Banks?*" (Yoshikawa, Chaudry, Rivera, & Torres, 2007) "*Why did you select this particular arrangement?*" "*Were there obstacles you faced in enrolling your child in this program?*" "*What would your child's ECCE experiences be like in your COO?*"

Interviews lasted for one to three hours, with the average interview lasting approximately two hours. The findings presented in this paper are primarily based on analyses of data related to immigration experiences, daily routines, parenting beliefs, ECCE histories, and mothers' demographic backgrounds including financial stability in the US and in COO. All of the African mothers were interviewed in English, and the Latina mothers were interviewed in Spanish with the assistance of undergraduate research assistants (UGRA) who were bilingual and bicultural. Following the interviews, the UGRAs transcribed the interviews in Spanish, and then translated these to English for analyses. The UGRAs randomly checked each others' transcriptions and translations for accuracy.

2.3. Data analyses

Throughout the data collection process, the author was engaged in memo-writing and made connections among concepts as they emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Utilizing a modified grounded theory approach, formal data analyses were divided into three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (LaRossa, 2005). Field notes and transcribed interviews were loaded into Atlas.ti, a software program designed to assist qualitative researchers with data management. During open coding, each interview was read and initially coded using sensitizing concepts (Van den Hoonard, 1997), as well as ideas that emerged from the data (LaRossa, 2005). The sensitizing concepts with which coding began were related to the authors' research questions regarding how immigrant mothers select ECCE, including: child care history; selection and navigation of the ECCE system; and, social capital gains from ECCE. A constant comparison method was used throughout open coding, such that paragraphs of text were read and then compared with previous blocks of text to determine if the new block of text was an indicator of an existing category, or if a new category needed to be created (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This aspect of the analyses yielded additional codes specific to ECCE, including: negative and positive aspects of ECCE; use of family and friends/informal care; and ECCE challenges.

During the second phase of analyses, axial coding, each of the salient categories or codes that emerged during open coding were examined by looking across cases to understand the various dimensions of each category (LaRossa, 2005). For example, to fully understand the dynamics of mothers' histories and experiences with the ECCE system, all of the coded text for this code was compiled using Atlas.ti. Next, all the pieces of text related to "ECCE history and experiences" were read to understand and code for the various dimensions of this code. Ultimately, what emerged from this phase of coding in relation to this one code were the dynamics of how mothers selected ECCE for their children, including additional codes such as, "reasons for looking for ECCE", and "connections to ECCE", which were then examined even further to understand the dynamics and aspects of each of these.

Finally, during selective coding, the last phase of analyses for this study, the main "story underlying the analysis" (LaRossa, 2005, p. 850) emerged reflecting various facets of immigrant mothers' interactions with the ECCE system. Specifically, the interplay of cultural and structural influences in shaping immigrant mothers selection and use of ECCE surfaced as the most important story underlying these data.

3. Results

Mothers discussed four aspects of selecting and securing ECCE, including: (1) reasons for seeking ECCE; (2) desired characteristics of ECCE; (3) connections to ECCE in the US; and (4) obstacles to securing ECCE. Each of these aspects highlight cultural and structural influences on mothers' decision-making processes.

3.1. Reasons for seeking ECCE

The reasons mothers gave for initially seeking ECCE reflected aspects of structural constraints on their daily lives in the US as well as cultural characteristics influenced by both COO and immigration experiences. Understanding the reasons immigrant mothers sought ECCE is important as these likely shaped mothers' selections of child care. In terms of primary reasons mothers began looking for ECCE in the US, maternal employment, a desire for their children to learn English, and support for their children's social and emotional development, were most common. Despite over half of the mothers being enrolled in some sort of English language class or college course at some point during their children's use of ECCE, only a handful of mothers discussed maternal education as a primary or secondary reason for first using ECCE. Similarly, a number of mothers were dealing with emotionally difficult and stressful situations related to immigration, but only five mentioned their own emotional stability and/or mental health as a primary or secondary reason for initially looking for ECCE, even though ECCE providers reported often providing these supports to mothers. See Table 2 for descriptive data regarding each aspect of Latina and African mothers' ECCE decision-making processes.

3.1.1. Maternal employment

Mothers' daily routines, and in turn, their needs for ECCE were constrained by their employment, which for many mothers was a shift from how their lives were in their COOs. However, mothers' discussions of the link between their employment experiences and their needs for child care, were situated within not only the structural constraints of the US, but also their cultural and structural experiences with employment and ECCE back home.

Over half of the Latinas (57.1%) and about a quarter of the African mothers (26.3%) indicated employment as a primary reason for seeking ECCE. Given this, mothers described life in the US as "...all about working, working, and well, more working", "more structured", and better if they "had [their] famil[ies] here". A number of mothers commented on how they likely would not be working in their COOs due to cultural as well as structural reasons. From a cultural perspective, mothers from both Africa and Latin America indicated that women in their COOs were expected to stay home to take care of the children and men were responsible for financially providing for the family. Guadalupe, a Salvadorian mother of one, shared that "men dedicate themselves to work...the tradition is that women do not work." However, from a structural standpoint, mothers discussed limited employment opportunities in their countries of origin, and indicated that even if they were able to find work it was likely that they could not afford child care. Desta, an Ethiopian mother of three, described this:

[I would stay home] with them, yes. Actually if you have money... you can hire the babysitter back home and they stay with you and watch [the children] for you. And if I can [find] work, I can go work. But for that you need money [to pay the babysitter].

Selena, a mother of three including one child who remained in El Salvador, echoed these ideas indicating that even though in El Salvador there was child care, it was not enough hours and unlike the US, there was no wrap around care, so for structural reasons it was difficult to be employed.

They go to school [like here], but maybe the programs are different. And in order to work over there before and after care isn't offered. If one needs to work more... over there [one month's pay] is $100. It doesn't cover everything. So the difference is that even if you want to work, you can't. In El Salvador, even if you wanted to give [your children] the basic necessities, you can't.

Given these constraints on child care, Latinas in particular, mentioned that if they did work in their COOs, their families would likely take care of their children—including bringing their children to and from school, reflecting structural reasons for using relative care in their COOs.

Despite feeling heavier time pressures related to employment and family life in the US, the majority of mothers considered their employment in the US to be positive opportunities for themselves and their families. Baduwa's daughter started in child care at the age of three months so Baduwa could return to work as a nanny for an American family. She indicated that in Ghana, she would have wanted to be employed as well, but likely would not have been able to find a job. Baduwa enjoyed the independence and strength she gained while working in the US, even though she remained nostalgic about the family support she had in Ghana.

In Ghana it is not like that. You see, we always stay with our parents until we grow, go to college, before you find a job, you need to get married before you can leave your parents. You know, here, at 18 years you have to go and find a place to work, but in Ghana it is not like that. We don't rent much because we build a house, like me, for instance my daddy had a big [house] so I didn't need to rent anything. You see we didn't pay any rent. Only thing that you are supposed to pay are utilities or your light bill, water bill, bills, but you don't pay any property taxes, none of that...

Mothers, like Valeria, a Salvadorian mother of four, saw being employed as an opportunity to give their "children what is necessary", as well as to provide for family members, including some of their own children, who were still in their COOs. Camila, a Mexican mother of two, described this when asked whether she was able to save any money,

Rarely. I have to send money to my daughter so that she can go to school and all that. And give her the same life that this one has. And to pay the bills. We save, but very little...

However, despite reflecting on family support they would receive in their COOs, many of the mothers (37.5%) were very familiar with ECCE in their COOs. About half of the African mothers (53%) and a quarter of the Latinas (24%) indicated it was not uncommon for children in their COOs to begin school at age three or four. One mother, Halima, a mother of four, even returned to Egypt when her daughter was one so she could enroll her in ECCE there to learn Arabic. Even though they paid for a "good school [in Cairo], it wasn't enough", and Halima and her daughter returned to the US. Consequently, regardless of their limited experiences with maternal employment in their home countries, the idea of using ECCE was not strange to these mothers, and some considered the availability of programs like Head Start to be unbelievable opportunities. Further, most mothers, regardless of whether or not their families were nearby, preferred formal ECCE, especially once the child was of preschool age.

3.1.2. Children's English development

The second most common reason mothers discussed in relation to seeking their children's initial ECCE arrangement was a desire for

Table 2
Frequencies of immigrant mothers' selection of ECCE (percentages are in parentheses).

	All mothers ($N = 40$)		Africans ($n = 19$)		Latinas ($n = 21$)	
Reasons for seeking ECCE						
Maternal employment	17	(42.5)	5	(26.3)	12	(57.1)
Children's English development	10	(25.0)	5	(26.3)	5	(23.8)
Children's social and emotional development	5	(12.5)	4	(21.1)	1	(4.7)
Maternal education	5	(12.5)	3	(15.7)	2	(9.5)
Maternal stress and mental health	5	(12.5)	2	(10.5)	3	(14.3)
Desired characteristics of ECCE						
Hours of operation	9	(22.5)	6	(31.6)	3	(14.3)
Language of program	6	(15.0)	0	(00.0)	6	(28.6)
Diversity of families enrolled	5	(12.5)	4	(21.1)	1	(4.7)
Connections to ECCE						
Social connections	29	(72.5)	11	(57.9)	18	(85.7)
Organizational connections	11	(27.5)	8	(42.1)	3	(14.3)
Obstacles to securing ECCE						
Waiting lists	24	(60.0)	8	(42.1)	16	(76.2)
Cost	9	(22.5)	6	(31.6)	3	(14.3)
Documentation	5	(12.5)	1	(5.2)	4	(19.0)
Knowledge of eligibility for programs	5	(12.5)	1	(5.2)	4	(19.0)

their children to learn English prior to entering compulsory schooling. This was mentioned by about a quarter of both African (26.3%) and Latina (23.8%) mothers. This desire reflected aspects of cultural beliefs of families, likely shaped by the structure of schools in the US, which are pre-dominantly monolingual English-speaking. Very few mothers in the study spoke only English at home, and among Latina mothers, all but one spoke only Spanish in their homes. Based on interactions with friends with older children in school, mothers were aware that learning English prior to kindergarten was important for both academic and social reasons. Juliana, a Guatemalan mother of one, was told by friends that if she did not put her son in ECCE,

> . . .before going to normal school that it was going to make it more difficult for him to learn the language [English]. So they told me to put him in daycare and they are going to teach him how to talk, and they will teach him the language of this country.

Other parents were concerned with their children learning English so they could socialize with other children. Maria, a Salvadorian mother of one, discussed worry about her son Emanuel's inability to speak any English and his limited ability to communicate in Spanish, as well as how this impacted his interactions with other children. Maria wanted to ensure that Emanuel would be exposed to English, so she enrolled him in Head Start. A couple of parents' intentionality regarding their children learning English prior to beginning kindergarten was illustrated when they removed their children from the care of providers who spoke only Spanish to be sure they were programs or with providers who spoke English. Marisa, a Salvadorian mother of one and her partner Pedro, who is originally from Mexico, described the importance of their daughter speaking English in school and Spanish at home.

> Because, well, it's better to go to the school and try to get some teachers, to learn the [English] because we speak Spanish only in the house, so we don't worry about Spanish, we worry about English that she can talk English in the school. But we prefer Spanish [at home], that way she doesn't forget the language. She speaks English at school whatever she wants, but when she comes here, only Spanish, in our house.

3.1.3. Children's social and emotional development

African mothers (21.1%) and one Latina (4.7%), discussed their children's social and emotional development as a primary or secondary reason for enrolling their children in ECCE. However, mothers were concerned about their children's abilities to interact with other children, regardless of whether this was their main reason for enrolling their children in ECCE. Culturally, based on the way

children were raised in their COOs surrounded by family members of all ages, African mothers in particular, believed socializing with other children and families to be important to their children's social and emotional development. However, from a structural perspective, mothers who did not have a lot of close family or friends living in the US, in particular, worried that being raised in the US their children would not have as many opportunities to interact with other young children as they would in their COOs. This was an important reason to use ECCE. Sana, a Somalian mother of four, mentioned the importance of using ECCE in the US because of structural differences in terms of how families live in the US:

> [In the Head Start] the kids will learn how to share with the other students, because when they are five years they go to the big school like kindergarten. . .[later in the interview] But in Somalia mother, the grandma, the family- everybody is [in the same house]. And we share the food and that's a something different because back home kids they learn [early] to the share in the house not the school.

Sana was unsure whether her children would gain the necessary social skills in the US by staying at home with only her, as her extended family members lived in other countries. Thus, in her extended family's absence, she used ECCE to support her children's social needs. Even mothers who had family members nearby did not necessarily prefer family care because they believed children could learn more in a formal ECCE program. Aster, an Ethiopian mother of three, compared her son's experiences in the care of his grandmother with his experiences at River Banks in terms of interacting with other children:

> If he stayed home with his grandma he is not learning anything, but he is safe—he's safe but he's not learning anything like with other kids, like sharing, communicating with others. He's learned so many things—he's changed.

Despite these beliefs, Aster relied on her mother as much as possible for child care because her oldest son experienced both abuse and neglect by two separate child care providers that Aster hired when he was a baby. Not until she found River Banks for her second child did Aster consider her children to be safe in outside child care. Thus, enrolling in River Banks provided Aster's children with the opportunity to interact with other children in a high-quality care environment.

3.1.4. Maternal education

For some participants (12.5%), furthering their own education was a primary or secondary reason they began to look for ECCE. This

reflected the structural constraints of living in the US, in terms of knowing English and the importance of advancing one's education to have greater earning potential. Arriving in the US with limited English abilities, and for some, limited educational opportunities in their COOs, mothers were enrolled in English classes as well as courses to earn certificates and college degrees. After caring for her oldest daughter who battled cancer until it was in remission, Isabel, a mother of two from Mexico, had a desire to return to school. This is what prompted her to look for ECCE.

> I wanted to go to school, and well, wanted them to learn more too. They have taught them [referring to her children] a lot and I also want to go to school.

Using ECCE to learn English was most common among Latinas. However, a few African mothers, sought care so they could work toward a college certificate or degree—opportunities many mothers were not afforded in their countries of origin because of the cost of education back home. Desta described the difficulty of trying to earn a college education in Ethiopia:

> Because of the economy. . .you finish high school. . .you can't go anywhere, so you have to stay with the family. You don't have any work at all and the GPA [needed] to go to the university is too high. Even if you [have a high GPA], you [need to] have four straight A's or something like that. So. . .when they finish the 12th grade they cannot go to the university or college. [You have to] pay for the private college, and with no money at the time [because of] no work, you have to stay with the family. . .there is no opportunity for the young family [in Ethiopia].

Desta was extremely pleased that in the US she was able to work part-time, attend classes, pay for her books and rent, spend time with her children, and as she stated, "was still able to send money back home for [her] sister and brothers" because she had access to financial aid. This was not a support that many Latinas had access to in the US because of their documentation statuses. Consequently, for many mothers the structural constraints to furthering one's education were lessened when they came to the US, and thus they sought opportunities to continue attending school.

3.1.5. Maternal stress and mental health

Finally, feelings of stress and in some cases, depression related to being in a new country, away from familial supports and familiar surroundings, were not uncommon to mothers in this study. Reflecting cultural factors shaping mothers' needs for ECCE, a handful of mothers (12.5%) mentioned looking for ECCE for their children to enhance their own mental health either related to depression or simply feeling overwhelmed and in need of support for their responsibilities as stay-at-home mothers outside their COOs. Daniela, a Salvadorian mother of two, discussed being depressed after the birth of her first child and preferring to be in the house. With her second daughter, Laura, she made sure she found child care and got out of the house. Kassa, an Ethiopian mother of four, described asking for information about ECCE because she, ". . .needed help, I had three children, and nobody gave me information, but I asked and said I need help." While other mothers did not cite depression as a specific reason for looking for child care they shared stories of isolation and limited social support. Elsa, a mother of two from Mexico, reflected on her experiences:

> But I mean it's tough, it's tough living here. Because you have to do so many things, it's different. Not things you think of before [coming here'] you know? And not being with your family, being alone. Since I only have one brother here, but no one else.

The primary reasons mothers indicated needing ECCE, including employment, children's English language skills and social and emotional development, as well as maternal education and mental health and stress, reflected the interplay of cultural and structural influences that together shaped these mothers' daily lives, and in turn their needs for ECCE. Specifically, mothers looked for the structures that would support their cultural beliefs regarding what was best for their children, themselves, and their families.

3.2. Desired characteristics of ECCE

Parents were intentional as they sought ECCE providers for their children, and referred to a host of characteristics they believed were most important in terms of education and care for their children. In particular, mothers discussed program/provider logistics, aspects of the facility, as well as qualities they desired in ECCE programs and staff. However, across these broad areas three characteristics were most reflective of the complex interplay between cultural and structural influences on these immigrant mothers' lives. Specifically, mothers discussed hours of operation (22.5%), language of the program (15%), and diversity of the families enrolled (12.5%).

3.2.1. Hours of operation

Hours of operation, reflecting structural influences in terms of access to ECCE as a resource, was a logistical concern that weighed into mothers' decisions regarding ECCE, revealed the unique structural needs of these mothers. For just under a half of the sample, a regular Monday through Friday, 8:00AM–6:00PM center-based care option was acceptable. However, for many of the Latina mothers (43%), the jobs they qualified for in terms of their English language skills and education levels, were evening shifts in local restaurants or overnight shifts cleaning office buildings. These jobs did not require expert English language skills, and for a number of the mothers without working papers, they did not need documentation to be employed. Mothers who worked evening or overnight shifts tended to rely on neighbors for child care. Esmeralda, a Mexican mother of one, cleaned office buildings from 10:00PM to 7:00AM. She hired a neighbor who lived upstairs from her to care for her daughter overnight when she went to work. Esmeralda was looking for a place that her daughter could learn during the day, which was how she found Time of Wonder. Her daughter would spend her mornings and early afternoons at Time of Wonder, late afternoons and evenings with her mother, and then would sleep overnight in a neighbor's apartment. Esmeralda described their evening routine:

> Around 7:00PM we shower and she is there [at home] for about an hour or two because she likes to play. Then five minutes before 9:30PM I drop her off at the babysitter. She eats dinner around 8:00PM or 8:30PM after she gets out of the shower. . .I eat sometimes but I usually eat at midnight at work. I come from work around 7:30AM or 7:45AM. I pick her up and I bring her [home] to get her ready for school.

Mothers who worked late into the night or overnight, would come home, prepare and bring their children to preschool, nap for a few hours or in a few cases attend English classes for a couple of hours, cook dinner that their spouses or babysitter could reheat later, pick up their children around 3PM, come home, and spend time with their children until it was time to go to work again for the evening. In some cases, these children were interacting with multiple care providers during the day. Despite their hectic, exhausting days, these mothers very much appreciated having time with their children during the day, after ECCE, and before work.

3.2.2. Language of the program

Mothers (15%) emphasized the diversity of the program, particularly in terms of languages used, formally and informally, within the programs. Seeking bilingual programs and providers, which

was particularly common among Latinas, was related to mothers' limited abilities to communicate in English and the structural convenience of having a provider who spoke the mother's language, and for cultural reasons, mothers wanting their children to maintain languages from their COOs. Latina mothers who were not able to speak or were not comfortable speaking English, in particular, discussed structural reasons for securing bilingual programs, including guaranteeing their opportunities to communicate with their children's teachers in their native tongue, and being able to understand any work the children would bring home from school. In addition, because of mothers' cultural commitments to their children learning both languages—a reason Latinas in this study did not necessarily use Spanish-speaking providers—once their children were preschool-age, they sought programs where their children could learn English and Spanish. Generally, parents wanted their children to know the languages of their countries of origin so that children could communicate with their relatives there. However, other mothers like Esmeralda who was emotionally estranged from her family in Mexico, described being bilingual as important for other reasons, including helping people in the community:

> I think it's good because wherever you go there are people who can't speak the language so you can go and help them and translate. Sometimes at the clinic there is a receptionist that doesn't know how to speak Spanish and then someone else has to come and translate. That is why I want her to learn two languages because it will help for anything.

3.2.3. Diversity of families enrolled

For a handful of mothers (12.5%), the majority of whom were African, desires for a diverse ECCE program were related to experiences adapting to life in the US, in terms of interacting with families from all different backgrounds. This reflected cultural beliefs that were, in part, shaped by families' structural circumstances of being a new country. A couple of mothers remarked on appreciating the diversity of their children's ECCE program because it helped them feel as though their family fit in, rather than being token immigrant families. Aster, an Ethiopian mother of three described this:

> [I like this program because they] don't treat you a different way [because you are an immigrant]. Like in other [child care] centers you know you are a foreigner and other people think [of you this way]. They don't treat you the same like others but at [River Banks] everyone is mixed. You are a foreigner but everybody is too.

A few other mothers (7.5%) who discussed diversity spoke about it from the perspective of considering ECCE programs to be places that could help integrate or acculturate their children. Specifically, these mothers wanted to be sure that their children were able to socialize with children from all different races and ethnicities, especially because outside of their ECCE programs many of these children only spent time with other children and adults from similar backgrounds. Teresa, an Argentine mother of two, described how she hoped her daughters would meet children from other racial backgrounds:

> . . .especially that she can make friends and to talk with different ones you know, not just the Spanish ones, but Black kids too. . .now she sees they are not different. They are friends too.

While Halima discussed that she wanted her son to know:

> . . .how to communicate with other kids because he always saw Arabic families and I want him to learn [about] other cultures and religions.

When selecting ECCE, parents considered a multitude of characteristics and weighed each carefully. Despite this, based on the

experiences of the low-income immigrant mothers in this study, convenient hours of operation, language, and diversity of programs seemed to be most illustrative of the interplay among cultural and structural aspects of families' decisions regarding ECCE.

3.3. Connections to ECCE in the US

The mothers in this study used various connections for learning how to navigate ECCE in the US. Participants used two types of connections for finding their children's first ECCE arrangements, which reflected cultural and structural characteristics of these mothers' lives, with social connections reflecting cultural influences and organizational connections reflecting structural aspects.

3.3.1. Social connections

Social connections, including friends, family members, employers, and neighbors, were used by nearly three-quarters of the mothers (73%)—especially Latinas—to find their children's first ECCE arrangement. The majority of these connections were, friends and relationships that existed prior to looking for ECCE, and acquaintances made specifically as mothers were looking for ECCE in their communities. These relationships tended to be based on mother's cultural connections, with some even being mothers' friends from their COOs. Camila learned about Time of Wonder from a friend she knew from Mexico and who coincidentally lived in the same apartment building in the US:

> . . .she recommended I check Time of Wonder because she had both of her daughters who were four and five there, and said it was a lot better [than the small Spanish-speaking child care she was using].

Social connections were used not only to *find* ECCE programs, but also to procure and complete the necessary paperwork to *enroll*. In addition it was not uncommon for friends and family members to use their organizational connections to assist mothers in connecting with and registering for ECCE. For example, Guadalupe utilized information from her sister-in-law's social worker. Specifically, the social worker helped Guadalupe's sister-in-law complete paperwork for Time of Wonder, and then provided Guadalupe with an application as well.

For some mothers, social connections, in the way of acquaintances, were created solely for the purpose of procuring ECCE. This was more common among Latina participants who more often lived in ethnic enclaves with informal networks of care and employment, than among African mothers who had greater access to organizational connections because of their documentation statuses. These ties were not as close as those connections that had longevity and were based on friendship or family relationships. However, these relationships were generally with individuals from similar linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds, who lived in the same apartment buildings or communities, which seemed to imply a certain level of trust. When parents developed these ties, they were usually somewhat desperate for an ECCE arrangement because of impending employment. Thus, these social connections, despite being new and somewhat unknown, were extremely important for mothers' abilities to find care and remain employed. Elsa described this when she arrived in a new city, and was ready to start a new job but was unable to secure ECCE for her daughter, "Well, I asked the lady that cleaned where we lived if she knew of anyone that took care of kids and she gave me the number. I called and asked if she could take care of her." Reflecting both structural and cultural influences, Elsa trusted this woman because she saw her every day, because she was of a similar ethnic background, and because she very much needed ECCE for her daughter.

Social connections were the most common means used to find ECCE in the US. Mothers used these connections to not only learn

about various ECCE options, but also to complete the necessary paperwork to apply to different programs. Characterized by trust and convenience, social connections were essential to mothers' experiences with the ECCE system.

3.3.2. Organizational connections

In addition to relying on social relationships, about a quarter of participants (27%), the majority of whom were Africans, discussed utilizing ties with various organizations including social service programs, pediatricians, ECCE programs, the public library, as well as other activities in which their children were enrolled, to learn about ECCE options for their children. Sometimes this information was gleaned from interactions with individuals, while in some cases parents learned about Head Start and other ECCE programs from fliers that were posted in public agencies and organizations in families' neighborhoods.

In terms of individuals, most often, parents interacted with social workers they met through other child and family-related programs and organizations. An Ethiopian mother of four, Kassa, first met a social worker while giving birth to her fourth child. This social worker gave her the necessary information to enroll her older children in Head Start. In addition to social workers, pediatricians were important individuals in terms of sharing information regarding ECCE. Sharon, a mother of two from Ghana described the information her pediatrician gave her about ECCE: "The pediatrician, yea, she told us about [Head Start]. When I said she was two, yea. She gave us the form and told us to enroll her before she turns three." Finally, a couple of mothers saw fliers for Head Start and other ECCE programs posted at both the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office, as well as free health clinics. In sum, the majority of Latinas used social connections to find ECCE, and Africans tended to use organizational connections and some social connections to find ECCE for their children.

3.4. Obstacles to securing ECCE

The mothers in this study faced a few structural barriers as they tried to secure their children's ECCE arrangements. In addition to being placed on waitlists and being unable to consider certain ECCE because of cost, they also faced issues related to documentation and program eligibility. This is one aspect of these mothers' child care decision-making that was far more influenced by structural factors and less so by cultural beliefs and experiences.

3.4.1. Waiting lists

Over half of the families (60%) in this study were put on a waiting list because ECCE programs they were considering were full, at some point during their children's early childhood years. Two-thirds of these families were Latin American. For some, this waiting period was only a few weeks, while other families were on waitlists for over three years. These long waitlists not only impacted children in terms of the ECCE into which they were placed while they waited for availability at the desired program, but also parents' schedules, particularly related to work and school. Daniela was unable to attend English classes because La Casita del Saber did not have space for her older daughter. Her younger daughter was able to come to English classes with her, but her older daughter could not, based on program rules, so she needed to find ECCE for her older daughter before enrolling in English classes.

So after I had Laura I told myself I wanted to take English classes. It was then a lot harder because I had two daughters. There was not any room for two girls of different ages. I waited until one day they called me from La Casita del Saber because I wanted to enroll Deirdre into La Casita del Saber. . .three years later they called me and told me they had room for her. . .when the space

was available for Deirdre in La Casita del Saber then I could enroll myself in the other program [English classes]. While I studied they took care of Laura.

During the time that Daniela was waiting for her daughter to be admitted to La Casita del Saber, she took care of both daughters at home, but was unable to attend English classes for three years without this care. Being on a waitlist not only reduced her children's time in ECCE, but also delayed Daniela's progress toward improving her own employment and education prospects.

3.4.2. Cost

Close to a quarter of the mothers, the majority of whom were African, specifically discussed cost as a barrier to securing ECCE, indicating that they would "just be working to pay the babysitter," quoting prices of $150 and $250 per week, which were outside of their budgets. These mothers discussed being deterred from considering certain programs that may have been of higher quality because they were not affordable, while at least one mother, prior to accessing Head Start, enrolled her child in a more expensive program for reduced hours. For others, like Aisha, an Ethiopian mother of one, it was in discussing with others in her social network her inability to pay, that she discovered Head Start.

. . .you see, in our community people usually share information. The first thing is that most of the parents cannot afford to go to child care. . .it is very expensive, like $150 a week, which you cannot afford. So you just start asking people, people who have kids, and they tell you, there is such and such program. So yes, through friends [I learned about Head Start].

In some cases mothers' friends not only gave them information regarding publicly funded ECCE but they also helped mothers complete the necessary paperwork to apply for funding. Juliana shared her experience learning about child care vouchers after she discovered the costs of ECCE.

. . .the cost [of child care] was too much. [It was] $150 per week. So I said I can't afford that, because they didn't tell me that he could get a voucher, nothing. . .A friend of mine had her daughter in La Casita del Saber. . .I said how did you do it because those daycares over here cost so much money. . .And she said no, La Casita del Saber is a place where. . . they do a lottery so that your child can qualify for a voucher. And I said, 'what is that?' It's a help that they give kids who were born here. . .they'll help you there. [She said], 'if you want we can go and do the papers'. She took me. . .I didn't know otherwise I would have entered my son a long time about in the daycare and I didn't know. And now he's three years [old].

3.4.3. Documentation

Paperwork, and specifically providing documentation regarding state of residence, was a structural barrier, some mothers (12.5%), particularly Latinas, faced in securing ECCE for their children. A need to provide documentation proving they lived in a certain state or county only occurred as parents began to look for center-based care. In-home providers, generally, did not ask for any residential information. Some parents had either recently moved from another state and did not yet have any documents to prove their residence, while others lived with friends or family members, and consequently, did not have the appropriate paperwork to prove residence. Inability to prove residence was an issue that was somewhat unique to undocumented immigrants with citizen children in this study. Some ECCE programs asked for more documentation and paperwork than others, which deterred parents from utilizing these programs. Marisa and her partner, Pedro, shared their frustration with the paperwork required by ECCE programs:

The one thing in La Casita del Saber I am not happy with, I don't agree with them. . .when we try to get some space for any child, they give us too m[any] obstacles, too much. . .too many challenges, too many obstacles to get into the program. First of all, they ask for too many papers, you have to prove everything. So I told them, 'How am I going to prove that I live [here]?' Sometimes we don't pay bills because we rent houses and the owner, we don't pay bills, only rent, so we don't have proofs. . .the landlords don't give us any papers to sign and they pay water and electricity so we don't have any bills in our name. . .it is special for us Hispanic immigrants because a lot of people don't have papers, so that's why they can't rent an apartment because you have to show your social security number and proof you are legal. That's why we try to find rooms in houses, and the landlord don't ask for anything. . .not the school, the system, they ask too much.

3.4.4. Knowledge of eligibility for programs

Finally, some parents ran into challenges securing care because of their limited knowledge of programs including Head Start and the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and their specific program eligibility rules. Juliana described how she was unaware of the assistance that was available to her son because he was born in the US:

. . .since the beginning I didn't know anything about the help that the government gave. When you start here you think that one doesn't have the help of the government for being an immigrant. My son grew up without the help of the government. So we paid for everything with our salary. . .

Ultimately Juliana utilized CCDF, but only because her friend told her about this assistance as well as an ECCE program where she could apply for and utilize these vouchers. The majority of African mothers did not know about CCDF despite their heavy use of organizational connections and their need for financial support for ECCE, especially during the summer.

4. Discussion

Immigrant mothers' processes of selecting ECCE, including reasons for seeking ECCE, consideration of the characteristics of ECCE they believed most important for their children and their families, and utilization of various connections to secure care in the face of varied obstacles to enrollment, reflected a dynamic interplay among ecocultural influences on these mothers' daily lives. Specifically mothers' country of origin experiences, as well as their documentation statuses and socioeconomic situations after arriving in the US, played important cultural and structural roles in these mothers' selection and use of ECCE. Consequently, even though all of the mothers in this sample were low-income, with similar education backgrounds, and rates of marriage and cohabiting, the areas in which mothers' experiences differed across this process reflected varied COO and immigration experiences. These findings underscore the importance of examining the contexts of low-income, immigrant mothers' lives in greater depth to better understand how they think about and make decisions regarding their children's ECCE. By highlighting the interplay between cultural and structural aspects of low-income immigrant mothers' daily lives, these findings add to the literature focused on understanding why the gap in ECCE enrollment exists between low-income immigrant families and their native-born counterparts.

First, this study sheds light onto mothers' familiarity and comfort with formal ECCE based on their COO experiences. Over a third of participants indicated that children in their COOs are often in center-based ECCE beginning at ages three or four. This finding is juxtaposed with previous research that indicates immigrants of both Latin American (Buriel & Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000) and African (Obeng, 2007) descent have preferences for parents or family members for child care that endures from COO experiences (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987).

Second, the interplay of cultural and structural factors emerged as significant in shaping the reasons mothers sought ECCE. All of the reasons mothers cited for seeking ECCE were embedded within important COO experiences of mothers as well as structural constraints of US society including documentation and economics, providing greater insight into the dynamics of low-income immigrant mothers' decisions regarding ECCE. In particular, the findings indicate that some of the mothers sought ECCE to fulfill certain support roles their families would play in their COOs. In particular, African mothers mentioned using ECCE to support their children's social and emotional development. Mothers recognized that unlike in their COOs where it was common to live with and/or in close proximity to other family members and thus spend time with a lot of other children in similar developmental stages as well as other adults informally, in the US their children did have these opportunities. Consequently, they used their children's ECCE programs as a way to ensure their children were surrounded by other children and adults such that they developed social and emotional skills necessary for later success. This finding adds to what Obeng (2007) found in her study of African immigrants who used center-based care because they felt that with the presence of multiple providers, like back home when their extended family would care for the child, their children's safety was ensured. However, other previous research showed immigrant mothers not utilizing ECCE because they were concerned about their cultural values *not* being upheld (Hashima & Amato, 1994). On the contrary, some mothers in this study were using ECCE to help maintain important cultural values related to interacting with other children that they could no longer support on their own in the US.

Further, a few mothers looked to ECCE for their own physical and emotional support. In particular, these mothers sought ECCE because they were stressed and overwhelmed by parenting in the US without family support, which they lamented they would have if they lived in their COOs. They saw ECCE as a support that could, in a way, recreate for their children and themselves, the supports of family and friends that they would have back home. Moreover, mothers used ECCE to pursue employment and educational opportunities, which were not available to them in their COOs, to improve their financial stability and independence in the US. Mothers discussed a strong desire to be employed in their COOs, but structural and cultural constraints, including limited employment opportunities coupled with lack of affordable child care for some, as well as traditional gender expectations held in their COOs, made working outside the home impossible. Despite an emphasis on employment among the mothers in this study, previous research indicates lower rates of employment among immigrant mothers compared to their native-born counterparts. This rate varies based on region of origin with African immigrant mothers generally being employed at higher rates than Mexicans (Chaudry & Fortuny, 2010). Mothers in this study offer insight into the experiences of employed immigrant mothers, shedding light on the lives of immigrant mothers who do not completely reflect traditional gender roles, and who have the structural supports to pursue employment.

Third, mothers discussed characteristics of ECCE that were most important to them including desires common to many mothers such as cost, location, and trustworthiness of providers (Chaudry et al., 2011). These desires aligned with previous research on all families (see Weber, 2011 for a full review). However, mothers in this study discussed two characteristics of ECCE that were especially shaped by mothers' COO experiences, immigrant status, and socioeconomic situations: (1) diversity of the programs and

providers; and (2) providers' hours of operation. Mothers noted the importance of ECCE providers being diverse; however Latinas and Africans defined and considered this diversity somewhat differently. Latinas discussed diversity in relation to language and having more opportunities to communicate with ECCE providers if they spoke Spanish. Previous studies indicate greater ease in forming relationships between parents and ECCE providers when both parties speak the same language and programs are sensitive to families' cultural backgrounds (Halgunseth, 2009; Lynch & Hanson, 2011; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). However, Africans described the importance of diversity of ECCE providers in terms of race and ethnicity, to help their children adjust and acculturate to living in US society. This finding adds to the richness of the literature on the cultural reasons immigrant parents select ECCE. Specifically, previous work indicates that parents who are more acculturated are more likely to use ECCE compared to those who are less acculturated (Liang et al., 2000). However, the findings from the present study indicate that for some parents' use of ECCE may be a mechanism *for* adjusting to the US rather than a result of this adjustment. Moreover, some parents explained that it was not necessarily important that ECCE programs be comprised of families from like cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as much as it was desired that programs were generally diverse to ensure no one felt like outsiders or the token family from a different culture. This finding adds to literature on parent engagement in ECCE, much of which is focused on cultural and linguistic sensitivity (Halgunseth, 2009; Lynch & Hanson, 2011), and their importance for helping parents feel comfortable in ECCE. Consequently, this finding suggests that generally increasing an ECCE program's diversity may help immigrant parents feel more comfortable.

Latina mothers in particular mentioned the need for evening and overnight child care as they tended to work during non-traditional hours because of both documentation, as well as language reasons. These mothers relied on neighbors to provide overnight care, and in looking for this care, were most concerned that it was reliable and located in their apartment buildings. Some mothers' spouses and partners were without working papers and in turn, earned lower wages than their worth. Consequently, without late night and overnight child care, these mothers could not work, threatening their families' already tenuous financial situations.

Fourth, this study shows how mothers used social and organizational connections to learn about ECCE, and how the development of these connections was shaped by mothers' documentation status, a structural constraint for some mothers. Aspects of these findings reflect previous research on immigrant families' social networks that grow over time and across generations, particularly among Mexican families, due to living within close proximity of one another in the US (Becerra & Chi, 1992; Keefe & Padilla, 1987). This study sheds light on how this process unfolds, particularly when family members are not present in the US Latina mothers, especially those who were undocumented and arrived in the US with no formal organizational support system and no close family or friends, turned to acquaintances of similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Latinas tended to use social connections more than African mothers, particularly because of Latinas' documentation challenges, which limited their access to organizational supports. In contrast, mothers who were documented, and especially the few mothers who came to the US as refugees from African countries, were provided with organizational resources in terms of community and public assistance upon arriving in the US. Moreover, even though African mothers in this study lived in close proximity of other immigrants, they still tended to rely on organizational connections for ECCE information, which may be related to structural factors (e.g., documentation status) and resulting access to services.

Finally, mothers faced obstacles to securing ECCE including availability of publically funded programs as well as documentation

issues. Lack of access to publically funded and/or affordable ECCE were reflected by mothers' extensive experiences with structural barriers, including waiting lists, limited or incorrect information regarding programs, and for some Latinas, documentation issues. Waiting lists for child care are experienced by many mothers, and particularly low-income mothers seeking publically funded ECCE (Kloosterman, Skiffington, Sanchez & Kiron, 2003; National Head Start Association, 2008; Schulman & Blank, 2010). However, the findings from this study highlight the unique implications of limited availability of affordable, high-quality ECCE, for low-income immigrant mothers. Latinas, and particularly Latinas with limited English language skills, who could not find affordable ECCE and faced long waiting lists, were often left no choice but to put off their own as well as their children's development. Like other studies have found (Matthews & Jang, 2007) documentation presented challenges for some of the families when applying for child care. However, this study illustrates how undocumented mothers' selection of child care for their citizen children, was shaped by what documentation was needed to apply, rather than the quality of the program desired by the mother. Further, the findings shed light on limited knowledge and in some cases incorrect information regarding ECCE programs that some of these mothers possessed.

4.1. Limitations

Despite the important results that emerged from this study, it is necessary to note the limitations of these findings based on some of the methodological limitations of the study. First, given the small, unrepresentative nature of the sample, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of low-income immigrant families with young children. In qualitative research, generalizability is generally not a goal but rather to provide greater depth and insight into the process, contexts, and meaning of phenomena in individuals' lives, such that these phenomena can subsequently be studied in larger, representative samples. However, qualitative studies do attempt to ensure *transferability* of methods (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002) and findings, or the ability to apply the methods and/or findings of the study to contexts similar to that of the context of the original research (Krefting, 1999). This study employed the strategy of thick description by keeping extensive field notes regarding both methodology and emerging analyses, and audio recording interviews, used to gather quotations from mothers regarding their ideas and experiences to ensure transferability (Krefting, 1999).

A second limitation is that the African interviews were conducted in English rather than mothers' native tongues due to logistical and financial constraints of the study. Certainly, mothers' abilities to express themselves might have been better if they were given the opportunity to do so in their first languages, adding to the richness of the data. Despite this limitation, this study makes an important contribution, as there are very few studies focused on low-income African immigrant families' ECE experiences.

A third limitation of this study is that mothers in this study were already using child care. Consequently, the data collected regarding mothers' decision-making processes were retrospective. Because mothers were recalling not only their children's arrangements but their reasons for selecting these, some of this information may be less accurate than if mothers were asked when they made these decisions. Further, because of the retrospective, non-representative nature of the data, meaningful distinctions among how and why mothers chose various types of care including center-based, home-based, and family, friend, and neighbor care could not be made. Given the difficulty in gathering longitudinal, prospective, qualitative data,

studies using these methods in relation to immigrant families are limited. Thus, the findings from the present study, despite being retrospective, and non-representative, provide an important foundation from which future prospective studies can build.

4.2. Implications for future research

Findings from this study imply the need for further qualitative and quantitative research focused on immigrant parents' navigation of the ECCE system. The experiences of selecting and securing ECCE often varied among African and Latin American families in this study, particularly based on cultural and structural factors including, COO and immigration experiences, as well documentation and socioeconomics of families. Consequently, using qualitative methods to understand how navigating the ECCE system may be similar and different for other immigrant groups is important. For example, limited research indicates that Chinese families see child care as places where their children can begin their education that will benefit them later in life, shaping their desires for ECCE (Becerra & Chi, 1992). However, less is known about their processes of selecting and securing child care and how structural aspects of these families' lives may shape these cultural beliefs and families' abilities to enact on these beliefs regarding child care as a place of education. Knowing about and understanding the differences and similarities across various large immigrant groups can help policy makers and practitioners create effective, culturally competent ECCE policies and programs for immigrant families with diverse experiences.

Additionally, all aspects of the processes these mothers underwent to secure ECCE should be explored further using quantitative methods. Specifically, reasons that immigrant mothers sought care as well as the characteristics of ECCE that they believed were most important should be explored more to understand their pervasiveness across larger, more representative samples. For example, research that can further explain the ways immigrant mothers use ECCE to make up for experiences their children may not be having in the COOs can help ECCE program developers create programs that are most meaningful for immigrant families. In addition, future research should aim to continue to unpack how immigrant mothers think about the language and diversity of their children's ECCE programs, such that program developers can consider how to respond in ways that increase immigrant families' enrollment in ECCE.

4.3. Implications for ECCE policy and programming

The findings of this study provide ECCE policymakers and practitioners who work with Latin American and African immigrants with more information about the complexity these families' lives. Some mothers indicated having limited information, and in some cases misinformation, regarding important early childhood supports, implying the importance of providing parenting education regarding community supports and resources available. Certainly, this information can be provided in traditional ways including fliers and media. However, utilizing immigrants' social and organizational connections to provide families with important information may have a wider reach and may be less expensive and more effective than other common techniques of providing parents with information and resources. Individual members of the community who act as liaisons between researchers and community members are often used in participatory action research, but there is no reason that these individuals could not be hired on a contract basis to mobilize and utilize immigrant families' social connections to share information among these families most effectively. These connections could provide information on early childhood

in general and other programs and policies pertinent to families with young children. For undocumented families, using social connections may work best and relying on organizations and close social connections to provide parents with information would be most effective for documented, or more specifically, African families.

Not surprisingly, families' foci on learning English—for parents and children—shaped how mothers sought ECCE. All of the mothers in this study, particularly when their children entered preschool age, were extremely intentional about finding ECCE programs where their children could learn English, and some Latinas sought bilingual programs. Although African mothers spoke less about a desire for bilingual ECCE programs they too wanted their children to maintain their native African languages. Consequently, these findings illustrate the importance of using a bilingual model either at the ECCE program or classroom levels, as well as incorporating a greater diversity of languages represented in these programs. For example, ECCE programs that are situated in areas that work with many African as well as Latina/o families, may consider creating a classroom that is English and Arabic speaking, and one that is Spanish and English speaking (see Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011, for discussion of an ECCE program piloting this model). At the very least these findings point to the importance of training teachers and staff to effectively honor immigrant families' native languages and support parents in raising their children bilingually.

In addition to considering a more pointed focus on language development of immigrant children, programs and policymakers might consider the importance of offering English classes for parents at their children's ECCE program. Given that many Latina mothers secured ECCE so they could take classes to improve their own English speaking abilities, providing these kinds of classes at ECCE programs may be most effective at meeting low-income immigrant families' language and ECCE needs. ECCE programs could partner with community-based adult and family literacy programs including Even Start, to provide parents with classes onsite.

Finally, some of the Latina/o families were particularly challenged and frustrated by the residency documentation that some ECCE programs required. Programs might consider other methods of determining residential eligibility including accepting a combination of informal documents (certified and notarized letter from the landlord, any other processed mail sent to families, proof of local library card) rather than only utility bills and leases or mortgages. Head Start has utilized alternative procedures for obtaining enrollment documentation from other vulnerable populations, including homeless children (Office of Head Start, 2012). It is these kinds of creative measures that could be taken to ensure the immigrant children most in need are being served despite lacking traditional documentation of residency. Further, to help parents prove residency, programs might help parents change their auto registrations with the Department of Motor Vehicles and their addresses with the post office.

5. Conclusion

This study adds to the literature focused on immigrant families' use of ECCE. Specifically, it sheds light on immigrant mothers' selection of ECCE and how these reflect cultural and structural aspects of immigrant families' lives. Mothers looked for ECCE that would support their children's acculturation through learning English and interacting with children of other races and ethnicities. For some they sought care that would support not only their children's development but also their own development in terms of employment and education. Moreover, mothers were sensitive to creating experiences for their children through ECCE that reflected the kinds of

social experiences they might have in their COOs. Mothers used various connections to find ECCE, while facing barriers related to documentation and eligibility. These findings may provide practitioners and policymakers with concrete examples of how to reach out to low-income immigrant families, and the information they need to provide to these families to maximize their use of ECCE.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A.

Interview topic	Questions
Basic demographics and background information	• How old are you? • How many children do you have? How old are they? • How many children are living in the US with you? • Who is living in your household? • Are you married?
Immigration history	• How is it that you came to this area? • Tell me about coming to the United States? ○ From where did you migrate? ○ What made you come to the US? ○ What was the journey like? ○ Did you leave family or friends? ○ Did you join family or friends in the US?
ECCE history and selection	• Tell me about other child care you utilized prior to beginning at the Center. (How did they find out about this child care? Gather a child care history from the time the child was born to now. What type of care was it? Why the mother chose this care? How they found out about this care?) • Are you currently or did you ever use child care subsidies? If so, how did you find out about these? Whom did you pay with these subsidies? • Tell me about how you decided to enroll your child in ECCE, and specifically this program. How did you find out about this program? • Were there any challenges or obstacles to enrolling your child in the Center? • How old was your child when they first came to the program? • What would your child's ECCE experiences be like in your COO? • Overall how would you describe your experiences with this program? • In what ways has this program helped you and your family? • Are there any things you would change or add to the program to make it better? • Are you friends with or do you spend time with other parents from your child's ECCE program? • Other than the center is your child in any other care throughout the week?
Social support	• From whom do you receive emotional support? • Who can you count on (in an emergency) if you need help with the children? • Who are the friends or family members that you spend time with regularly? What kinds of activities do you do with them?
Culture and language	• What languages do/would you like your children to speak at home? School? • What aspects of your culture do you hope your children maintain? • Why are these things important? How will you make sure of this?

Interview topic	Questions
Daily routines	• Can you walk me through your day yesterday, from the time you woke up to the time you went to bed? Why are these important activities? How is your daily routine different from what it would be in your home country? Is there anything you wish were different in your daily routine or your children's? Are there certain things you wish you could do with your child throughout the day? Are there certain things you wish you could do for yourself throughout the day? [Gather details on the parent's daily interactions with the child who is in ECCE, whether the parent is working, their interactions with the ECCE program as well as their family, friends, or other parents]. How are weekend days different?
Looking toward the future	• If you were able to look at your life and your child's life 15–20 years from now, what would you like to see? • What would your family look like? • What would your children be doing? • What would you be doing? • How would you know that you were successful as a parent?
Final thoughts	• What advice would you give to other families migrating from your country to the US? As they prepare for their journey and as they arrive and settle in the US?

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