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Navigating Collaboration: Newcomer Parents' Perceptions and Experiences with Norwegian Schools

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the perceptions and experiences of six newcomer parents from different countries (Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Chile, Russia, and Ukraine) regarding their collaboration with Norwegian schools. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, ranging from 55 to 80 min, were conducted in participants' native languages and English. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Four major themes emerged, as follows: (1) "Journeying Through Integration within the Norwegian Educational Landscape"; (2) "Collaboration: Dialogic or Monologic?"; (3) "Language and Communication Barriers"; and (4) "Navigating New Horizons". The findings highlight that despite the challenges, participants expressed appreciation for the support they received from schools and teachers. The findings also indicate the need for schools to improve communication and cultural understanding to foster meaningful collaboration with newcomer parents. Schools must also provide more opportunities for parent involvement in decision-making processes. This study adds to the limited literature on newcomer parents' perspectives on school collaboration and provides insights for policymakers, educators, and school administrators to enhance the educational experiences of newcomer students and their families in Norway.

Keywords: newcomer parents; perceptions; experiences; Norwegian schools; integration; language and communication

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1. Introduction

Effective collaboration between parents and schools is essential for ensuring that children receive the support they need to succeed academically and socially. The collaboration between schools and parents is a crucial aspect of promoting children's academic success and overall wellbeing (Bang 2011; Epstein 2010, 2018b). According to 2024 data from Statistics Norway (SSB 2024), 16.8% of the Norwegian population—around 931,081 people—have a refugee background. Additionally, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2023) reports that in 2023, 22.6% of primary school students in Norway were from immigrant backgrounds. For newly arrived minority parents, however, navigating the education system in a new country can be a daunting and overwhelming experience (Smith et al. 2020). This qualitative study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of newcomer parents in their collaboration with Norwegian schools. By understanding the challenges and opportunities for collaboration from the newcomer parents' perspectives, this study seeks to shed light on how schools can better support and empower newcomer families in their children's education. This study makes three key contributions: first, it addresses the scarcity of research on school–newcomer parent collaboration. Second, it critically highlights areas where current practices need revision in these collaborations. Thirdly, the findings from this study can inform the development of interventions and policies aimed at improving the collaboration between newcomer parents and schools.

As children spend a significant portion of their day in school, it is crucial for parents to be able to engage in meaningful collaboration with their children's schools. This collaboration is critical for ensuring that parents have the necessary information and support to help

their children succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. However, newcomer parents face unique barriers to effective collaboration with schools. For instance, language barriers can make it difficult for parents to communicate with school staff and understand important information regarding their children's education (Lea 2012; Sibley and Brabeck 2017; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2015). Cultural differences can also play a significant role, as expectations and norms around parent–school collaboration can vary widely across different cultural contexts. In particular, language and cultural barriers can significantly impact their ability to engage in meaningful collaboration with their children's schools. Despite these challenges, effective collaboration between schools and newcomer parents is essential for ensuring that children receive the support they need to succeed academically and thrive socially and emotionally. Research has shown that parental involvement in education is a critical factor in improving academic outcomes for children, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Trzcinska-Krol 2020; Sheldon 2019; Sibley and Brabeck 2017). Moreover, collaboration between schools and families has been linked to a range of positive outcomes for children, including increased academic achievement, higher self-esteem, and improved social–emotional development (Epstein 2010). Given the critical importance of collaboration between schools and families, it is essential to understand the experiences and perceptions of newcomer parents in this context. By exploring the challenges and opportunities for collaboration from the parents' perspectives, this study aims to shed light on how schools can better support and empower newcomer families in their children's education. Hence, this paper posits and explores two research questions:

> How do newly arrived immigrant parents perceive and experience collaboration with schools in the Norwegian context?
>
> What types of support and challenges do newly arrived immigrant parents encounter in their engagement with their children's education?

This study provides insights into the experiences and perceptions of newcomer parents from diverse cultural backgrounds in collaborating with schools in a Norwegian context. This study contributes to the existing literature in this field by highlighting the challenges newcomer parents face and sheds light on areas where schools could improve their communication and support for these parents. The findings of this study provide important information for schools and policymakers to address these issues and improve the overall experience for newcomer parents.

2. Earlier Literature

In the Norwegian welfare state, inclusive education is officially promoted as a primary objective. However, there exists a strong emphasis on a middle-class, intensive parenting model, which presumes high levels of parental involvement in children's education. This model implicitly assumes a uniform approach to parenting, irrespective of the diversity in parents' social and cultural capital (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2023). Consequently, it places the responsibility for inclusive education increasingly on individual families rather than the state, potentially undermining the ideals of equitable educational opportunities for all children in Norway. The expectation of uniform parental involvement may disadvantage those parents—especially newcomer families—whose cultural and social resources differ from those typical of the middle class. This approach risks marginalizing parents who cannot meet these expectations, thereby impacting their children's educational experiences (Schneider and Arnot 2018). As D'Angelo and Ryan (2011) argue, for cultural capital to be truly "validated" or valued, newcomer parents need to be provided with opportunities to participate in both the majority culture's institutions (like schools, workplaces, or government services) and in migrant or ethnic community networks. This involvement helps to make their cultural capital relevant and respected within the new society. Newcomer families' involvement in their children's education is crucial for their academic success and overall wellbeing. However, studies have shown that newcomer families often experience challenges in collaborating with schools due to

language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge about the education system (Devine et al. 2023; Lee et al. 2018; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2015). Language and communication barriers are among the most significant challenges for newcomer families in collaborating with schools. Newcomer parents who do not speak the language of the host country may struggle to communicate with teachers, understand school policies, and support their children's education (Antony-Newman 2019; Bernhard 2010; Marks et al. 2014; Gaytán et al. 2007). Moreover, communication barriers can create misunderstandings and mistrust between newcomer parents and teachers, leading to a lack of collaboration and engagement in the school community (Hagelskamp et al. 2010; Bang 2011; Darmody and McCoy 2011). In addition to language and communication barriers, newcomer families may also face limited involvement in decision-making processes related to their children's education. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that, despite these challenges, newcomer parents demonstrate a strong commitment to their children's educational success (Devine et al. 2023; Norozi and Moen 2022).

Studies have shown that newcomer parents often feel excluded from school decision-making processes and are not aware of their rights and responsibilities as parents (Georgis et al. 2014; Smith et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2018). This lack of involvement in decision-making can create a sense of powerlessness and disengagement from the school community, affecting their children's academic success and wellbeing (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2015). Furthermore, newcomer families may also experience a lack of cultural understanding from school personnel. Despite these challenges, studies have shown that newcomer families appreciate and value the support they receive from schools and educators. Schools that provide newcomer families with orientation programs, language support, and opportunities for engagement and involvement can enhance their sense of belonging and collaboration with schools (Li et al. 2016; Myers 2018). Furthermore, schools that adopt a culturally responsive approach to working with newcomer families can promote positive relationships and enhance their engagement and participation in the school community (Bartlett and Bajaj 2023; Georgis et al. 2014; Goldsmith and Kurpius 2018). Newcomer families' perceptions and experiences of collaborating with schools are shaped by multiple factors. Understanding these factors can help educators and policymakers develop effective strategies to support newcomer families' integration and engagement with schools, promoting their children's academic success and social wellbeing.

3. Conceptual Framework: Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement

This study utilizes "Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement (Epstein 2010, 2018a, 2018b)" as its conceptual framework to explore how newly arrived immigrant parents perceive and experience collaboration with schools in Norway. Epstein's model provides a structured approach to understanding the various forms of parental involvement in education and the reciprocal relationships between families, schools, and communities. By focusing on specific areas of engagement, this model offers a practical foundation for examining the support and challenges immigrant parents encounter as they engage with their children's education in a new cultural context.

By categorizing parental involvement, this model offers a focused lens for analyzing the "perceived support and challenges" that immigrant parents face across different areas of engagement. Epstein's framework identifies six key types of involvement that shape effective school–family partnerships: "Parenting", "Communicating", "Volunteering", "Learning at Home", "Decision Making", and "Collaborating with the Community". Each of these categories highlights different dimensions of engagement and collaboration, offering insights into the ways schools can support and facilitate parental involvement. These categories are particularly relevant in an immigrant context, where cultural and linguistic factors can influence parents' participation and access to school activities. In this section, each type of involvement is detailed as it pertains to this study. The "Parenting" dimension addresses how schools assist families in creating a supportive home environment conducive to their child's learning and development. For immigrant parents newly

arrived in Norway, understanding and adapting to Norwegian parenting expectations and educational norms can be challenging. This study examines the support immigrant parents receive in understanding the school system and how schools communicate expectations around parenting practices that support student learning. Effective "Communication" between school and home is essential for building strong partnerships and keeping parents informed about their child's progress and school activities. This study explores immigrant parents' experiences with school communication methods, including language barriers, the availability of interpreters, and the accessibility of information provided by schools. This component also considers how schools can adapt communication strategies to meet the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant families.

The "Volunteering" dimension refers to parents' participation in school events and activities, allowing them to become involved in the school community. For immigrant parents, engagement in school events may be impacted by cultural differences, work schedules, or unfamiliarity with volunteering opportunities in the Norwegian educational context. "Learning at Home" emphasizes parents' roles in supporting their child's education outside of school, including homework help, skill-building, and encouragement. This component facilitates to understand the challenges and support immigrant parents encounter in fostering learning at home, particularly when they may not be familiar with the Norwegian curriculum, educational expectations, or language. "Decision Making" involves parents' participation in school governance and policy-making, such as serving on school councils or advisory committees. This dimension explores the level of influence immigrant parents have within the school system, as well as the barriers they may face to active participation in decision-making roles. This element also helps us to understand how schools encourage or inhibit immigrant parents' voices in shaping school policies, highlighting the need for inclusive practices. The last element in the model is "Collaboration with the Community". This component emphasizes the role of schools in connecting families with community resources and support networks. For newly arrived immigrant parents, external resources such as language support services, cultural organizations, and social networks can play a crucial role in facilitating their adjustment to the school environment. This also provides a framework for how schools work with local organizations to connect immigrant families with resources that support both their children's education and their integration into Norwegian society.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 newly arrived both immigrant and refugee parents who had children enrolled in Norwegian urban primary schools. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling and were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. All participants had children attending schools in Norway and had been in Norway for less than 5 years. The interviews were conducted in the either in participants' native languages, which included Arabic, Dari, and Farsi, or in English. The interviews were conducted in a private setting, and each interview lasted between 55 and 80 min. The semi-structured interviews addressed several topics, including parents' expectations of school support, their perceptions of teacher–parent communication, and their experiences navigating their child's education in a new cultural context. The parents included both mothers and fathers with varying educational and professional backgrounds. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process followed the six steps of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, all recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Secondly, the transcripts were read and re-read to gain a thorough understanding of the data. Thirdly, initial codes were generated from the data. Fourthly, the codes were organized into potential themes. Fifthly, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure their coherence and representativeness of the data. Finally, the themes were named and defined. The analysis process was conducted independently by two researchers to enhance the reliability and

validity of the findings. The researchers compared their codes, themes, and interpretations to ensure consistency and accuracy. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through discussion and consensus. Ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also assured of their confidentiality and anonymity, and all data collected were stored securely. The study was approved by Norwegian Data Protection Services for Research (SIKT). The limitations of this study included the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The use of semi-structured interviews may also result in the possibility of interviewer bias. However, efforts were made to minimize this bias by conducting the interviews in the participants' native languages and by using two researchers to analyze the data.

5. Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to explore newcomer parents' experiences and perceptions regarding their collaboration with Norwegian schools. While parents from different countries had unique experiences, several common themes emerged that illustrate the challenges and complexities they face. This section analyzes these themes within the context of Epstein's model of parental involvement and the relevant literature, with a focus on integration, communication, and the perception of temporariness in their engagement with the educational system. Key themes include the following: "Journeying through Integration within the Norwegian Educational Landscape", "Collaboration: Dialogic or Monologic?", "Language and Communication Barriers", and "Navigating New Horizons".

5.1. Journeying Through Integration Within the Norwegian Educational Landscape

The findings of this study also indicate that newcomer parents appreciated the support they receive from schools. Many parents expressed gratitude for the efforts made by school personnel, particularly teachers, to help them understand the school system and the day-to-day routines. For instance, one parent from Chile said, "I am grateful for the support I have received from the school. They have helped me understand how things work in a Norwegian school". Another parent from Syria said, "The school has been helpful in providing information about the education system. They have helped me to understand the expectations for my child". Furthermore, some parents appreciated the support provided by the school in terms of language assistance, including mother tongue teachers and interpreters. For instance, a parent from Afghanistan said,

> I am grateful for the language support provided by the school. The school has provided me with a translator for parent teacher conferences. It has been very helpful for me to communicate with the teachers and understand what is going on in the classroom.

The appreciation expressed by the parents for the support they received from schools suggests that the efforts made by schools to create a welcoming environment for newcomer parents and provide them with language assistance and information about the school system and day-to-day routines are valued. These efforts can go a long way in promoting positive collaboration between schools and newcomer parents. Epstein's model emphasizes the importance of schools actively supporting parents' understanding of the educational environment as a way to foster parental involvement (Epstein 2010). The appreciation expressed by parents suggests that schools' efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere align with these principles, helping to build trust and positive collaboration between schools and newcomer parents. However, as Bendixsen and Danielsen (2023) note in their study of migrant parents in Norway, this initial support, though valuable, does not necessarily address deeper, structural barriers to parental engagement, especially when cultural expectations and differences in parenting norms come into play.

Another noteworthy consideration regarding parental involvement emerges from the data pertaining to the perception of temporariness within introductory and welcoming

classes. In the Norwegian educational system, students are typically enrolled in introductory classes for a single academic year before transitioning to a school located in close proximity to their place of residence (as referenced). This arrangement imparts a pervasive sense of impermanence, which, in turn, carries two significant implications for parents. On one hand, parents recognize the vital role played by introductory classes as the initial step toward successful integration for both them and their children. On the other hand, they are acutely aware that their child will be relocated to a different school after only a year. This awareness significantly impacts the collaborative dynamics between schools and parents. A parent's sentiment can be succinctly summarized as follows:

> I do not feel that my child truly belongs here when I am aware of their imminent transfer to a new school within a short span of four months. The duration of my engagement with teachers and the school becomes questionable. Even if I harbor intentions to proactively participate and propose ideas to enhance our collaborative efforts, I often refrain, recognizing the transient nature of our presence. I am cognizant that our stay here will be fleeting. (The mother of eleven-year-old David, originally from Russia)

This finding resonates with Schneider and Arnot's (2018) research on migrant parents in Norway, which discusses the impact of perceived instability on parental involvement. The temporary nature of introductory classes leads parents to question the value of forming deep connections with the school community, as they feel their involvement may be inconsequential given their limited time in these classes. This aligns with observations on transactional communication, where the temporary nature of certain educational arrangements can create a barrier to genuine collaboration, as both parents and schools may prioritize logistical coordination over sustained relational engagement. In essence, it becomes evident that parents perceive the transitory nature of introductory classes and subsequent transitions to new schools as a significant deterrent to their comprehensive involvement in all facets of their children's education.

5.2. Collaboration: Dialogic or Monologic?

All participating parents uniformly conveyed a sense of being excluded from the decision-making process concerning their children's education. The parents expressed surprise when questioned about their role in educational decision-making for their children. They pointed out the pre-established nature of their child's educational path, encompassing prescribed curricula, study methodologies, daily routines, extracurricular activities, and assessment protocols. Parents highlighted their passive receipt of information without the opportunity for meaningful involvement in decision-making. One recurring factor cited by parents was their lack of familiarity with the educational system. A parent from Afghanistan articulated,

> Everything here is novel for my family and me. My primary focus is on grasping the workings of this new environment. Currently, I am unable to contemplate offering suggestions or participating in decision-making. The intricacies of this system are interconnected, and I must comprehend the entirety before proposing improvements for my child's education.

This quote highlights two critical points: first, parents often need time to acclimate to an unfamiliar system before feeling equipped to engage meaningfully; second, the existing school practices may unintentionally reinforce a passive role for parents, making them recipients rather than co-creators in their children's education. Further, this observation illuminates the prioritization of understanding the novel context and system among recently arrived parents, overshadowing their inclination for involvement in decision-making. This also reflects Epstein's first type of involvement, "Parenting", where parents need to feel secure in their roles in a new cultural and educational landscape. This parent's experience of needing to first comprehend the system indicates the importance of supportive resources that can ease cultural transitions, which in turn impacts their ability to participate actively

in other areas of involvement. In addition, it underscores the perception of a dearth of opportunities for parental participation in shaping their child's educational journey, given that all aspects appear meticulously prearranged, leaving parents as passive recipients of information. Participants reported that decisions such as which classes their children were placed in and whether their children should receive additional support were made without their input. Their feedback emphasizes a clear power imbalance, where schools communicate decisions rather than engage parents as collaborative partners.

One participant, a mother from Russia, stated: "I want to be part of the decision-making process. I want to have a say in what happens with my child's education. But it feels like everything is preplanned and you have to just follow it". This raises the question of whether the collaborative dynamic is dialogic or monologic. To what extent does the interaction with newly arrived immigrant parents extend beyond the provision of comprehensive information about their child's education, and does it genuinely encompass their input and engagement in decision-making processes? The limited involvement of newcomer parents in decision-making processes at schools is a common challenge reported in the literature (Gaytán et al. 2007; Antony-Newman 2019). The participants in this study echoed these findings and expressed frustration at their exclusion from important decisions about their children's education. The lack of understanding of the education system and decision-making processes may contribute to the limited involvement of newcomer parents in decision-making processes (Devine et al. 2023).

Indeed, schools must undertake a critical reevaluation of their vision and planning when it comes to engaging newcomer parents. Antony-Newman (2019) argues that schools' approaches to immigrant parental involvement often reflect institutional assumptions about newcomer parents as passive or less competent due to their unfamiliarity with the system, which reinforces a monologic framework. From a theoretical standpoint, Epstein's model of parental involvement emphasizes that effective parent–school partnerships should be reciprocal and inclusive, fostering collaborative decision-making that values parents as essential stakeholders (Epstein 2018a). Yet the experiences reported in this study suggest a gap between this model and its implementation in practice, as schools primarily communicate decisions to parents rather than actively engaging them in shaping educational pathways. This discrepancy points to a potential mismatch between schools' stated values of inclusivity and the structural realities that limit parents' roles.

A fundamental shift in perspective is essential to ensure that these parents are not only informed but also actively involved in decision-making processes that directly affect their children's education. To this end, schools should adopt a proactive approach to incorporating newcomer parents into the educational framework. This involves developing strategies to facilitate their participation in the decision-making processes related to their children's schooling. This might encompass opportunities for parents to provide input on curriculum choices, school policies, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of their children's educational experience. By affording newcomer parents a voice in these matters, schools not only acknowledge their valuable perspectives but also empower them as stakeholders in their children's education. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership and partnership between parents and educators, ultimately contributing to a more enriching and supportive educational environment. In summary, redefining the role of newcomer parents within the school community, from passive recipients of information to active contributors in decision-making, is a pivotal step toward promoting a collaborative and inclusive educational ecosystem that serves the best interests of all students. This approach aligns with a growing trend in education toward more collaborative and participatory decision-making processes (Epstein 2018a).

5.3. Language and Communication Barriers

Many of the parents expressed frustration with the language barriers they encountered when communicating with the teachers and other school personnel. They also reported that they often did not receive adequate translation or interpretation services, which

makes it difficult for them to understand important information about their children's education. Most of the participants were not proficient in Norwegian, and some struggled to communicate in English, which is commonly used as a second language in schools. As a result, they often found it challenging to understand and respond to the information provided by the school, including their children's academic progress, school policies, and events. One participating father from Afghanistan described the language barrier as a significant challenge in his communication with the school: "I cannot speak Norwegian, sometimes the information the school sends is only in Norwegian. I have to ask my friends to help me translate it, but they are not always available. So, . . . and it makes me feel helpless". Another participant from Syria expressed frustration with the lack of interpretation services at school meetings:

> Our most recent parent–teacher meeting, involving both parents, was rescheduled on three separate occasions due to the unavailability of an interpreter. I had a pressing need to engage with the teacher directly at the originally scheduled time. However, the persistent rescheduling of the meeting led to mounting frustration and a subsequent loss of motivation on my part.

Overall, these findings suggest that language and communication barriers have a significant impact on the newcomer parents' collaboration with schools. The lack of proficiency in Norwegian or English limits their ability to express themselves freely, communicate with school staff, and actively engage in their children's education (Turney and Kao 2009). Moreover, the lack of timely and reliable interpretation services, as described by a Syrian parent, who experienced repeated rescheduling of meetings due to interpreter unavailability, highlights the structural inadequacies that exacerbate parents' frustration and disengagement. This experience suggests that language support is not merely an add-on service but a critical factor that shapes parents' perceptions of the school's inclusivity and responsiveness. Such issues can lead to a breakdown of trust between parents and the school, as delayed or inaccessible communication creates feelings of marginalization and deters proactive involvement.

Another relevant theme that emerged from the data was the lack of cultural understanding between newcomer parents and Norwegian schools. The parents reported that they felt that their cultural backgrounds were not understood by school personnel. One of the parents originating from Iran also conveyed a sense of undervaluation concerning her opinions and perspectives in certain aspects of her engagement with school personnel. For instance, she articulated the following:

> In Iran, educational institutions exhibited a more stringent disposition, with an overarching deference to the authority of teachers. Here, I perceive a greater degree of autonomy granted to students within the school environment, which subsequently extends to their behavior at home. I sense that the teachers may not fully comprehend the significance accorded to parental positions and the culture of respect within my heritage.

This finding also aligns with D'Angelo and Ryan's (2011) observation that parents from more structured educational systems often encounter a mismatch between the strict school and home environments in their home countries and the more flexible, student-centered approach in Norwegian schools. This difference can lead to confusion and adjustment challenges for both parents and children as they navigate unfamiliar expectations and practices in the Norwegian education system. Although the participants appreciated the support they received, they often felt confused due to cultural differences. The lack of cultural understanding also created challenges in communication between the parents and school staff, and this resonates with the earlier research by Darmody and McCoy (2011) and Schneider and Arnot (2018). Some participants reported that they struggled to understand the language used by the school staff, and they felt that the school staff had difficulty understanding them as well. A participant from Ukraine stated that "Sometimes, I feel like the school staff doesn't understand what I'm trying to say even though I speak

English with them". Furthermore, some participants felt that their cultural background and beliefs were not taken into consideration when making decisions regarding their child's education. This aligns with the argument made by Darmody and McCoy (2011), who assert that all individuals possess social and cultural capital, shaped by their unique socio-cultural backgrounds. Upon arrival in a host country, ethnic minority families may have limited economic resources at their disposal; however, they bring with them distinctive forms of cultural and social capital. While these forms may not always align with those valued in the host society, this does not imply that the cultural and social capital held by minority parents lacks value or relevance.

Despite these challenges, participants also acknowledged the efforts made by schools to accommodate their cultural differences. A participating parent from Afghanistan stated that "I appreciate the school's efforts to learn about my culture like cloth, flag, food and language. However, they are not interested in religion. For example, a separate swimming class for my daughter". Participants' narratives also point to instances where cultural practices were selectively acknowledged by the school. For example, the Afghan parent appreciated efforts to celebrate aspects of his culture, such as traditional clothing and food, yet noted a lack of accommodation for religious practices, such as separate swimming classes for girls. This selective recognition can be seen as tokenism, where superficial elements of a culture are embraced without engaging with deeper cultural values. This approach may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes, rather than promoting a genuine understanding of the cultural frameworks that guide newcomer parents' expectations and beliefs about education.

The Syrian parent's following description of the differences in children's play styles—contrasting the more informal, physically assertive style typical in his home country with the structured approach in Norway—illustrates how these cultural differences extend beyond classroom practices and into children's socialization experiences (Antony-Newman 2019). The parent stated the following:

> . . . So when they (the children) come here, we can't force them to play, e.g., football with a Norwegian style. My son was used to playing soccer in the streets. . . he was in organized soccer in his home country once a week, but it wasn't enough. . . so he played soccer in the streets of our neighborhood. . . they were used to pushing each other. . . and be tough with each other while playing but they tolerated more. . .

This is consistent with Darmody and McCoy's (2011) findings, which emphasize that immigrant parents often hold differing views on the roles of schools and parents compared to those of their children's teachers and educational institutions in host countries, particularly when they lack fluency in the host country's language. This lack of understanding between newcomer parents and Norwegian schools is a critical issue that can impact the collaboration and engagement between parents and schools contributing to social exclusion and marginalization. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding in fostering effective communication and collaboration between parents and schools (Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan 2021; Bendixsen and Danielsen 2023). The lack of cultural understanding can create a communication gap between parents and schools, which can negatively impact parental involvement in their child's education. This can also result in the parents feeling that their cultural practices and beliefs are not valued in the school environment. This can ultimately lead to a lack of trust and cooperation between parents and schools. Therefore, it is crucial for schools to be aware of and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of newcomer parents. Schools can provide cultural sensitivity training to school staff and encourage them to learn about the cultural practices and beliefs of newcomer parents. Furthermore, involving parents in decision-making and recognizing the importance of family involvement in different cultures can facilitate parental engagement and collaboration with schools (Epstein 2010, 2018a). Schools can make an effort to involve parents in

decision-making processes and provide them with opportunities to participate in school events and activities that align with their cultural beliefs and practices.

5.4. Navigating New Horizons

The recent conflict between Ukraine and Russia has given rise to a significant influx of migrants, predominantly from Ukraine. Within this context, an illustrative anecdote emerges from the perspective of a Russian mother, shedding light on the emotional and psychological challenges faced by her 12-year-old child due to their national identity. The incident in question revolved around an international celebration day, namely United Nations Day, during which students in the introductory class were tasked with carrying the flag of their respective countries and delivering brief oral presentations in their national languages. These presentations typically encompassed elements such as the national language, national day, notable figures, and other pertinent aspects of their homeland. The Russian mother recounted a distressing experience in which her child grappled with the burden of belonging to Russia. She recounted how the presence of four Ukrainian classmates, who were proficient in Russian language but harbored negative sentiments toward Russia, exacerbated her child's emotional turmoil. For her child, participating in the rehearsal within the classroom setting proved unmanageable, while the actual celebration day proved to be an even more daunting ordeal. On that fateful day, her child feigned illness before the entire school community, including fellow students and parents, in an attempt to escape the distressing event. When queried about whether she had sought assistance in addressing this situation, the mother revealed her hesitance and uncertainty in knowing how to seek help or whom to approach for support. Her hesitation stemmed from doubts about whether it was appropriate or even permissible to openly discuss and request assistance for her child's predicament. She held certain expectations that the school and the teachers should naturally address such issues without requiring her to initiate the conversation or seek help. This poignant narrative underscores the complex and nuanced challenges faced by individuals, particularly children, amid conflicts that engender nationalistic sentiments and animosities.

The narrative from the international celebration day highlights the need for a supportive and inclusive educational environment that is equipped to address the emotional wellbeing and psychological welfare of students who find themselves in such delicate situations. Additionally, it underscores the importance of clear channels for communication and assistance between parents and the schools, ensuring that the welfare of all students is prioritized and safeguarded. The schools and the teachers must remain proactive in updating their knowledge and pedagogical approaches to effectively address the contemporary circumstances of their diverse student populations (Schneider and Arnot 2018). While celebrating diversity is undoubtedly a commendable endeavor, schools, and especially teachers who engage with newcomer immigrant students from Russia and Ukraine, should be acutely aware of the sensitivity surrounding the experiences of these children. It is imperative to understand how to provide adequate support to these students, ensuring that children hailing from Russia do not harbor feelings of guilt or apprehension about their cultural and national identities. The significance of this issue extends beyond the concerns of a single child, as there exist a substantial number of young immigrants undergoing similar challenges. Consequently, this matter warrants careful consideration by the schools and the teachers, particularly those entrusted with the wellbeing and education of newly arrived immigrant children. In this case, the mother's reluctance to seek help also illustrates a breakdown in communication; she is uncertain of whom to approach and feels unsure about the school's openness to discuss sensitive issues related to national identity. This gap reflects what Devine et al. (2023) describe as a common challenge for immigrant parents, who often hold high expectations of school intervention but lack the confidence or knowledge to approach educators. Cultural differences in perceptions of authority and responsibility may also play a role; the mother's expectation that the school should handle these issues independently may stem from a background where schools traditionally hold

more authority in managing student welfare. Previous research (D'Angelo and Ryan 2011) indicates that immigrant parents from structured educational backgrounds often feel less empowered to contribute to decision-making in more democratic school settings, such as Norway's, which value open dialog and parental involvement. This anecdote also brings to light a broader issue related to "Collaborating with the Community" (Epstein 2013, 2018b). The school's approach to celebrating national identities through flag-bearing and presentations may unintentionally place students from politically conflicting backgrounds in challenging situations. Research on schools' collaboration with immigrant parents (Darmody and McCoy 2011; Schneider and Arnot 2018; Bartlett and Bajaj 2023) highlights that inclusive practices must consider the diverse backgrounds of students and avoid activities that could amplify differences or tensions. A more sensitive approach would be to offer alternative ways for students to participate in international celebrations that do not require them to represent potentially contentious national identities publicly. By doing so, the schools can better comprehend and address the unique needs and sensitivities of immigrant students from Russia and Ukraine, thereby facilitating their integration into the educational system and promoting positive self-identities and relationships among all students.

A recurring relevant subtheme that prominently emerged from the corpus of interview data pertains to the role of parents within the school context, whether as a resource or as a hindrance. All participating parents unequivocally conveyed that they are not actively engaged in any school-related activities, nor do they make any discernible contributions to the school community. It is noteworthy that these parents hail from diverse backgrounds, possessing a wide array of qualifications, strengths, and skills that could potentially enhance the overall educational experience, not only for students in the introductory classes but also for the entire school community. To illustrate this point, one father, originating from Afghanistan, noted his proficiency as a football player, having competed at the provincial level in his home country. Furthermore, parents from Russia and Syria disclosed their qualifications as educators, holding master's degrees in education from their respective countries. A mother from Ukraine revealed her professional expertise as a swimmer, while mothers from Afghanistan and Chile affirmed their culinary, baking, and artistic talents. Regrettably, these valuable skills and talents have remained largely unacknowledged by the schools in question. Consequently, these latent potentials remain untapped, and parents find themselves primarily preoccupied with the acquisition of essential information pertaining to the school system and the daily routines of their children within the educational institution.

Merely furnishing newcomer parents with information about the host system and culture falls short of realizing the full potential that these parents can offer in the pursuit of creating a secure and improved educational environment. This situation demonstrated by participating parents regarding their involvement in school underscores a missed opportunity for schools to leverage the diverse talents and competencies possessed by parents, which could enrich the educational milieu and foster a sense of community involvement. The prevailing lack of discourse regarding these skills and potentials effectively limits parents to the role of passive observers rather than active contributors to their children's educational journey. To rectify this oversight, it is imperative for schools to initiate meaningful dialog with parents, recognizing and harnessing their abilities and expertise to enhance the holistic educational experience for all stakeholders involved.

It is crucial to recognize that newcomer parents possess the capacity to contribute significantly to the enhancement of a school's overall quality, yet opportunities for them to do so remain largely untapped. In order to discern the extent of newcomer parents' latent capabilities and how they can actively benefit not only their own children's education but also that of other students and the entire school community, it is imperative for educators and educational institutions to establish positive and effective collaboration with parents. The responsibility for cultivating these meaningful connections and engaging newcomer parents effectively within the school system rests squarely with schools. This endeavor

demands a concerted allocation of time and effort on the part of the schools, a commitment that often surpasses the time and effort expended on providing information pertaining to predefined programs and services for newcomer students. To fully harness the potential of newcomer parents and transform them from hindrances into valuable resources, schools must recalibrate their approach to encompass genuine collaboration with these parents. In essence, this paradigm shift necessitates a departure from a unidirectional model of information dissemination to a more interactive and participatory engagement with newcomer parents. By doing so, schools stand to benefit not only from the diverse skills and insights that newcomer parents bring but also from the sense of community and shared responsibility that such collaboration can foster. In summary, the evolution of schools from providers of information to facilitators of meaningful collaboration with newcomer parents holds the key to unlocking the untapped reservoir of potential and transforming parents into vital allies in the pursuit of educational excellence.

6. Conclusions

Newcomer parents in Norway encounter significant obstacles when attempting to collaborate with educational institutions (Norozi and Moen 2022). These challenges are multifaceted, stemming from language and communication barriers, cultural disparities, limited engagement in decision-making processes, and the establishment of only nominal relationships with these parents. The effective collaboration between schools and newcomer parents necessitates a steadfast commitment to addressing these hurdles and cultivating an environment that is both inclusive and welcoming. Achieving this objective mandates proactive efforts on the part of schools, teachers, and educators, entailing an investment of time and resources to genuinely empower parents. The process of empowerment extends beyond the mere provision of information and necessitates the creation of opportunities for active participation in decision-making and comprehensive school activities. Schools and teachers must recognize the imperative of staying attuned to the evolving global landscape, acknowledging that newcomer children represent a heterogeneous group with diverse needs. The adoption of a "one-size-fits-all" approach is ill-suited to cater to the unique requirements of newcomer students and their parents. In effect, effective collaboration imposes a demand for enhanced competencies on the part of schools and teachers. Given the demanding nature of the teaching profession, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to singlehandedly acquire and update their skills in response to evolving circumstances. Consequently, schools and teachers should receive ongoing support through professional development initiatives. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that this does not absolve teachers of their responsibility as lifelong learners, as they must continue to engage in the process of learning and transformation to meet the dynamic needs of their students and parents.

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