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# Bridging cultures: the role of school's cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity in immigrant parents' school involvement

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Parents' involvement in children's education has been identified as a significant predictor of students' school achievement and psychological outcomes. In the case of immigrant parents, research has suggested that low educational levels, poor incomes, and pertaining to minority cultural groups negatively affect their participation in both school and home academic activities. Nevertheless, little is known about the influence of schools' approaches to cultural diversity and parents' intercultural competencies on their commitment to children's schooling processes. This study aims to examine the relationships between cultural diversity climate at school, cultural sensitivity, and school involvement among 751 Venezuelan and Peruvian immigrant parents settled in Chile and (2) to determine the possible influence of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between cultural diversity climate and parents' school involvement. Results show that sociodemographic variables had limited effects on their school involvement, while cultural diversity climate, and cultural sensitivity had a greater influence. Implications for understanding immigrant parents' relationships with schools and designing intervention programs are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

immigrant parents, parental school involvement, cultural diversity climate, cultural sensitivity, intercultural education

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Parental school involvement

Parental involvement in children's education has been extensively studied over the past decades, particularly regarding its impact on students' positive development and academic success (Epstein, 2018). In fact, meta-analytic studies have indicated that parents' participation in children's school education predicts important outcomes such as school absenteeism and dropout (Gubbels et al., 2019), students' social and emotional adjustment (Barger et al., 2019), as well as their academic achievement (Kim, 2022; Wilder, 2023). In this way, parental school involvement can have a key role in promoting their wellbeing and the development of positive life trajectories in the future.

There is a consensus on the importance of encouraging parents to actively support their children's learning at home and participating in institutional and extracurricular school activities (Sandoval et al., 2017; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). As such, parents' engagement in children's education has been understood as a type of social capital which allows them to benefit their children through their relationships with other parents and teachers (Murray et al., 2020; Turney and Kao, 2009). Involvement in education not only facilitates the transmission of the value of education but also provides parents with opportunities to access information and monitor their children's school lives (Domina, 2005).

To better understand parental school involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) developed a model focusing on the psychological processes that determine it. This model stresses the relevance of parents' motivational beliefs related to involvement, encompassing their role construction and self-efficacy in supporting their child's academic success. A second key element is related to parents' perceptions of involvement invitations from the school, which consist of specific requests to participate and the perception of a positive school climate. Besides, parents' personal life contexts are additionally considered factors that shape their views on the feasible forms and timing of involvement, such as their skills, knowledge, available time, and energy for engagement.

In a more comprehensive manner, therefore, parental involvement could be understood as an emergent outcome of a complex system of relationships between multiple levels of the environment that influence each other. According to a socioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998), school involvement occurs through the interaction between two systems: one at the microsystem, within the home, and the other at the mesosystem level, which is the school. The microsystem encompasses immediate relationships, daily activities, significant life events, and surrounding environments, which often serve as foundational reference points. As such, children undergo primary socialization at this level, with the microsystem playing a crucial role in shaping parenting practices and cultural transmission (Seginer, 2006).

On the other hand, the success (i.e., academic) resulting from home-school collaboration between parents and children has also been identified as an important factor for parents' involvement development. Again, from a socioecological perspective, this second level (mesosystem) connects children to broader societal influences, such as parental involvement in school activities, which leads to parents becoming more engaged in their child's education (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). Besides a third level, the exosystem, encompasses contexts that do not directly involve students but still impact their experiences in the immediate environment and include factors such as parents' work conditions and health and welfare services, all supporting children's development. Importantly, this perspective emphasizes a central aspect of the present study: the complex relation of factors that can affect parental involvement, which is most evident in immigration dynamics.

### 1.1.1 Immigrant parents' school involvement

Most of the available research on immigrant parents' school involvement has been conducted in the United States, Europe, and Asia. In these contexts, it has been found low levels of participation in general, which, in turn, have been associated with parents' low socioeconomic status, language barriers, and low academic

expectations, as well as a presumed lack of interest in education (Calzada et al., 2015; Friedman et al., 2006; Li et al., 2020; González-Falcón et al., 2022). Moreover, it has been argued that lack of parental involvement could explain high rates of dropout and academic failure among immigrant students (González, 2022).

Likewise, the intersection of being an immigrant, low-income, and belonging to a cultural minority group altogether could lead to a more heightened mismatch of needs. This is because it increases the likelihood of schools successfully recognizing these parents' academic knowledge and cultural backgrounds, hindering their participation (Antony-Newman, 2018; Ballenger, 2009; Calzada et al., 2015; Davis-Kean et al., 2021; Friedman et al., 2006; Ishimaru and Takahashi, 2017; Yu, 2020). Therefore, it may undermine parents' perceived capabilities to contribute to their children's academic progress by failing to recognize them as sufficiently qualified (Ballenger, 2009; Fang et al., 2017; Sheng, 2012). Moreover, it could negatively affect parents' social identities and self-efficacy, hindering their willingness to actively participate in children's schooling (Ballenger, 2009; Ishimaru and Takahashi, 2017; Yu, 2020). As a whole, this could affect parents' construction of their role in their children's education, which is developed through their relationship with the school and can be either facilitated or hindered depending on whether they are recognized as legitimate actors in transmitting knowledge (Ballenger, 2009; Rane and McBride, 2000).

Exacerbating this, cultural clashes between parents and school, as well as the perception of pressures to assimilate into the host culture, and repeated experiences of discrimination have been identified as important barriers to involvement for parents that belong to minority cultural groups (Onsès et al., 2023; Peček et al., 2008; Sime et al., 2017). In those cases, the educational centers could be perceived as a source of psychological and cultural threats, leading parents to limit their interactions with the school members in order to protect their cultural and personal identities (Antony-Newman, 2018; Marchand et al., 2019).

## 1.2 Explaining immigrant parents' school involvement: cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity

### 1.2.1 School cultural diversity climate

There have been identified several factors that parents consider crucial for their children's school experiences. Among them are physical and psychological safety, the promotion of positive peer relationships, and support for the family (Ball et al., 2019; Baker et al., 2016; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Montecinos et al., 2010). The perception of a positive school climate, more specifically, appears particularly significant for parents from socially excluded groups (Baker et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2015), for whom school could represent a space of care and protection for their children (Davis-Kean et al., 2021). By establishing strong relationships and regular communication with educational institutions, parents can significantly influence their children's academic outcomes and foster a more supportive and responsive school environment (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Koutsouveli and Geraki, 2022). This is because parental involvement is closely linked to the perceived positive recognition of their cultural identities within school communities among immigrant families

(Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Khalfaoui et al., 2020).

As one might expect, promoting a cultural diversity climate is a crucial aspect of the experiences of students, teachers, and families within multicultural schools (Bardach et al., 2024; Schachner et al., 2016; Schachner et al., 2019). Cultural diversity climate is defined as the strategies employed by schools to facilitate the coexistence of diverse cultural groups. These strategies are reflected in practices, norms, and behavioral guidelines that shape intergroup relationships among students from different ethnic backgrounds and between students and teachers (Baysu et al., 2024; Byrd, 2017; Schachner et al., 2019).

Approaches to cultural diversity in schools typically fall into two categories, which often underpin public policies in multicultural societies. The first approach focuses on preventing and reducing discrimination while promoting equity and inclusion for minority group members. The second approach emphasizes adherence to pluralism and the appreciation of cultural diversity as a resource for fostering harmonious coexistence and social cohesion (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich, 2013; Fine-Davis and Faas, 2014; Schachner et al., 2016; Vandekerckhove and Aarssen, 2020). As such, cultural diversity reflects the extent to which schools implement these two approaches (Fine-Davis and Faas, 2014; Schachner et al., 2016; Schwarzenhal et al., 2020; Vandekerckhove and Aarssen, 2020). Numerous studies indicate that equitable treatment by teachers, along with opportunities for cooperation and shared goals among school community members, significantly contributes to reducing prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict (Beelman and Heinemann, 2014; Cameron and Turner, 2017; Titzmann et al., 2015; Ülger et al., 2018).

On the other hand, promoting pluralism entails integrating respect and positive recognition of students' cultural identities into teaching practices. In educational contexts, teachers tend to develop culturally sensitive pedagogies (Schachner et al., 2016) and create spaces for cultural exchange among families (Reynolds et al., 2015). The perception of equitable treatment, justice, and cultural recognition within the school environment has been linked to reduced discrimination, lower victimization rates, increased school participation, and enhanced wellbeing among minority group students (Özdemir and Stattin, 2013; Sirlopú and Renger, 2020). While scarce, available literature indicates that immigrant parents' perceptions of how well their children's and their own cultural identities are recognized and valued by schools is associated with parental involvement (Calzada et al., 2015; Baker et al., 2016; Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2015; Sohn and Wang, 2006). Consequently, a supportive cultural diversity climate aligned with the type of cultural exchange that immigrant families seek could potentially enhance their engagement in school activities. In contrast, schools that predominantly adopt individualistic, assimilationist, or segregationist approaches may discourage immigrant parents from participating in their children's education (Calzada et al., 2015; Baker et al., 2016; Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2015; Sohn and Wang, 2006).

### 1.2.2 Cultural sensitivity

Another important aspect to parental involvement is immigrant parents' competencies to communicate in the school context. Usually studied under the name of cultural sensitivity, it is defined as the

affective dimension of intercultural communication (Bennet, 1986; Chen and Starosta, 1998; Chen and Starosta, 2000). This competency involves the application of socio-cognitive skills to enhance awareness through intercultural interactions and the processing and comprehension of culturally relevant information. The development of cultural sensitivity extends beyond recognizing and understanding cultural differences and similarities; it also requires fostering positive attitudes toward individuals from diverse backgrounds, including accepting and respecting their cultural identities, thereby overcoming ethnocentric perspectives (Bhawuk et al., 2008).

These positive attitudes serve as motivators for engaging with outgroup members and enhance individuals' willingness to adapt their behaviors in intercultural contexts (Chen and Starosta, 2000; Chao et al., 2017; Rania et al., 2012; Rodenburg and Boisen, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Furthermore, individuals who exhibit sensitivity in intercultural communication tend to engage more fully in such interactions and to experience enjoyment when meeting with members of other cultures (Chao et al., 2017; Chen and Starosta, 2000; Mera-Lemp et al., 2024; Zhang and Zhou, 2019). Additionally, it has been observed that these capabilities facilitate positive expectations about future interactions with members of other cultures, thereby increasing satisfaction with intergroup contact (Herrero-Hahn et al., 2019; Lee and Ma, 2019).

While cultural sensitivity can be an important resource for facilitating parental involvement in schools, it has received little attention in this context (Sohn and Wang, 2006). However, existing evidence indicates that, among immigrant students, these competencies are explained by the perception of positive contact norms and cooperation, which improves students' intergroup attitudes, intercultural awareness, and the development of effective behavioral strategies in diversity scenarios (Schachner et al., 2015; Schwarzenhal et al., 2020). As these competencies increase, students' satisfaction with their schooling and their integration within educational contexts improve (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020; Rania et al., 2012). In the same vein, research has reported that higher levels of intercultural sensitivity are associated with greater involvement of university students in both formal and informal academic activities within multicultural contexts (Tamam and Krauss, 2017). Several studies have also suggested that teachers' cultural sensitivity promotes the development of pedagogical practices that include respect for and positive recognition of students' cultural identities (Katitaş et al., 2024; Mera-Lemp et al., 2024; Ulbricht et al., 2022).

## 1.3 The Chilean case

In Chile, the rapid increase in the immigrant population is leading to significant changes within the education system. As of 2022, foreigners constituted 8.3% of the total population, primarily originating from countries such as Venezuela (32.8%), Peru (15.4%), Colombia (11.7%), and Haiti (11.4%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022). Consequently, immigrant students constitute 8% of overall national school enrollments, primarily concentrated in public schools (57.2%) and private subsidized institutions (38.1%) (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2024).

Official data indicate that the living conditions of immigrant families are often precarious. Despite their increased presence in the workforce, immigrants typically earn lower incomes, have lower rates

of community participation, and have limited access to support networks compared to native citizens (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2024). Immigrant families are highly exposed to discrimination based on their cultural origins and encounter more significant barriers to accessing social services and healthcare than Chileans (Aninat and Vergara, 2020; Cabieses and Oyarte, 2020; Grau et al., 2021). In the same vein, more than 26% of immigrant children and adolescents aged 1–18 live in conditions of multidimensional poverty, a rate that double that of the Chilean population (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, 2021).

Immigrant students are also concentrated in schools which are often characterized by high levels of vulnerability, low educational quality, and school climate problems (Eyzaguirre et al., 2019). Additionally, results from PISA test have shown that these students tend to present lower levels of academic achievement than Chileans (Agencia de Calidad en Educación, 2022), which coincides with the international tendency (Karakus et al., 2023). Besides, they exhibit lower attendance rates compared to their native counterparts across all levels of education (García and Friz, 2019).

Although the Chilean education system is implementing changes to address these sociocultural transformations by promoting inclusion and intercultural teaching, research has revealed difficulties in managing social and cultural diversity within schools (González et al., 2023; Ortega et al., 2020). For instance, different studies have shown the existence of intergroup conflicts, stressing the negative effects of discrimination and prejudice on their school experiences (Guthrie et al., 2019; Mera-Lemp and Martínez-Zelaya, 2021; Pavez-Soto et al., 2019; Segovia-Lagos et al., 2023).

Taken together, these antecedents indicate that immigrant families settled in Chile are facing several difficulties in their relationships with schools, which seem to be leading children to an important academic disadvantage. Given the impact of experiences at school and academic achievement on children's positive development as well as in their social and cultural integration in the future, it is important to consider the role of their parents as key actors during their schooling processes (Boonk et al., 2018).

### 1.3.1 Immigrant parents in the Chilean educational system

While the overall research on immigrant parents' experiences in Chilean schools is limited, past research examining the perspectives of Chilean teachers highlights the negative implications of insufficient training in culturally responsive teaching practices, as well as the perception of cultural threat and biases toward immigrant students and their families (Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2021; Riedemann et al., 2020). Additionally, some studies have indicated that native teachers often exhibit ambivalence when assessing immigrant parents' abilities to take an active role in their children's education, suggesting that these parents do not sufficiently engage in school activities (Segovia and Rendón, 2020).

On the other hand, research on acculturation preferences indicates that Latino immigrant adults and adolescents strongly desire to maintain their original cultural identities while incorporating elements of Chilean culture. This dual commitment is linked to higher levels of wellbeing and social connectedness with host society members (Mera-Lemp et al., 2021; Mera-Lemp and Martínez-Zelaya, 2021). Nonetheless, despite these parents wanting their children to maintain their cultural identities and learn about Chilean culture, they often promote cultural assimilation

at school to avoid conflict (Oyarzún et al., 2022). Additionally, immigrant parents prefer enrolling their children in schools with a significant immigrant population to minimize their exposure to discrimination from native students (Eberhard and Lauer, 2019). This suggests that parents' participation could be hindered by difficulties in their interactions with teachers and Chilean parents (Joiko and Vásquez, 2016).

## 1.4 Objectives and hypotheses

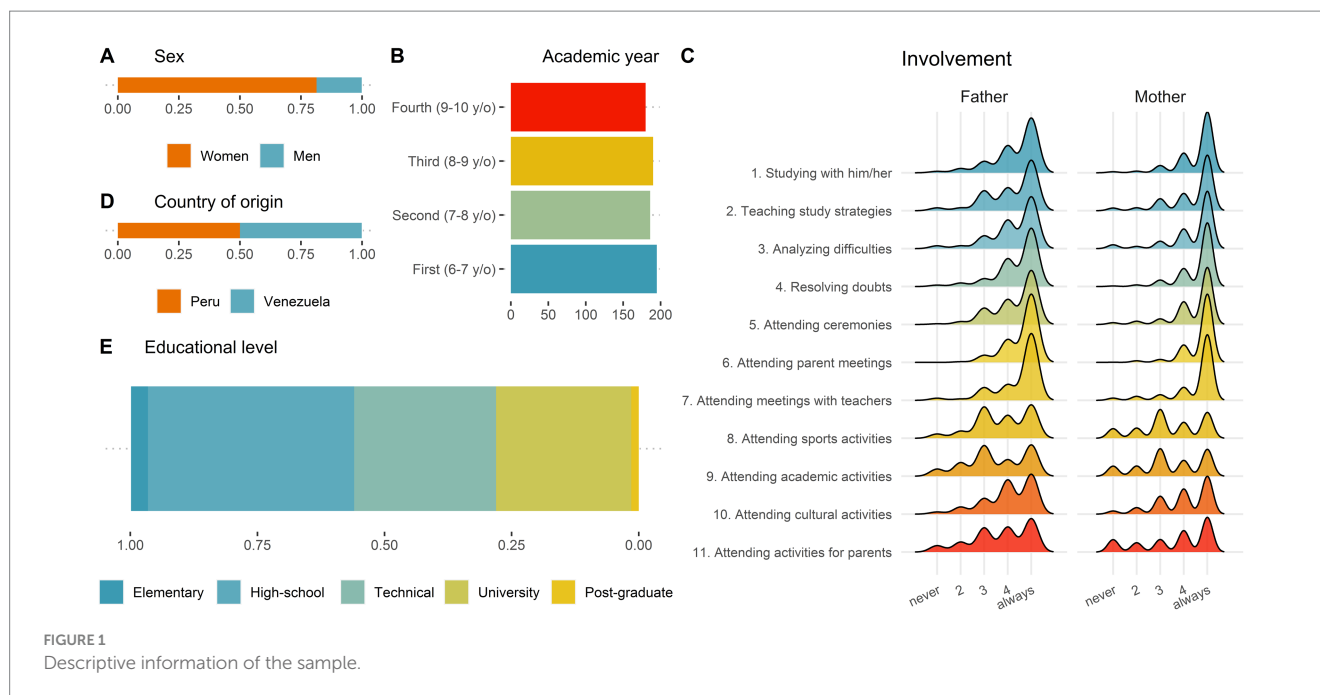
On summary, prior research suggests that the intercultural sensitivity of immigrant parents may be explained by the extent to which they perceive a climate of cultural diversity that facilitates positive intergroup relations at school settings (Sohn and Wang, 2006). Furthermore, feeling capable of communicating and sharing culturally based knowledge within the school environment can enhance their engagement in school activities, thereby supporting the positive development of their children (Swap, 1993). Based on these antecedents, this study aims (1) to study the relationships between cultural diversity climate, cultural sensitivity and school involvement perceived by Latin-American immigrant parents settled in Chile, and (2) to the determinate the possible influence of cultural sensitivity on the relationship between cultural diversity climate and parents' school involvement. As a hypothesis, we expect that: 1. Parental school involvement will be explained by cultural diversity climate; 1.1. Parental school involvement will be explained by cultural sensitivity; 2. Cultural sensitivity will mediate the effects of cultural diversity climate on parental school involvement.

## 2 Materials and methods

### 2.1 Participants and procedure

The present study uses a correlational design and a non-probabilistic convenience sample of immigrant parents and tutors of school children. The sample was collected by professional interviewers of immigrant origin who went to the areas surrounding the educational establishments ( $k = 171$  schools) in 31 districts of the city of Santiago to invite immigrant school guardians. In turn, study participants could in addition recommend people they knew to participate, and the main inclusion criteria were (a) being an immigrant of Peruvian or Venezuelan origin and (b) being a parent of a student in grades 1–4 in an educational establishment in Santiago.

The final sample consisted in 751 participants (visual descriptions in Figure 1), 18.5% were males and the other 81.4% females, with no differences in the proportion their proportion by country of origin ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.456; p = 0.500$ ). They were equally from Peru and Venezuela and their pupils were in first (6–7 years) to fourth grade (9–10 years) of the Chilean educational system. Participants' consent was requested, aiming to safeguard voluntarily participation. The procedures followed in the study were certificated by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidad Alberto Hurtado, considering all the standards of the Helsinki Declaration.



## 2.2 Variables and instruments

Each participant answered demographic information regarding their gender, age, nationality, educational level, length of stay in Chile, type of school attended by their student and length of time as a parent or guardian. Besides, they were asked to inform their child's gender and academic year. In addition, they answered the following measures:

### 2.2.1 Cultural diversity climate

We adapted 18 items from the Affirming Climate for Workplace Diversity (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich, 2013). This scale was originally created to assess immigrants' perceptions of the cultural diversity climate within organizations, and its validation (i.e., construct and criterion) was carried out with a large sample of public servants (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich, 2013). In this study, it was used to measure parents' perceptions of equitable treatment, equal access to opportunities and identification with the institution, and identity recognition (e.g., "In the school where I am a guardian, immigrants receive fewer opportunities than Chileans (scholarships, social assistance, support for guardians and students, etc.," "In the school where I am a guardian, both Chileans and immigrants are treated fairly") on a Likert scale from 1 (Very disagree) to 4 (Very agree). In the present study, total reliability was of  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

### 2.2.2 Cultural sensitivity

The cultural sensitivity scale (Chen and Starosta, 2000), validated in Chile by Martínez-Zelaya et al. (2020), was applied. It consists of 24 Likert-type items with four answer options (1 = Very disagree, 4 = Very agree) (e.g., "When I speak with people from different cultures, I try to gather as much information as possible," "I enjoy being with people from different cultures"). Previous studies have successfully analyzed its construct and criterion validity (Martínez-Zelaya et al., 2020; Lahoz i Ubach and

Cordeu Cuccia, 2021). In this study, the scale's reliability was  $\alpha = 0.91$ .

### 2.2.3 Parental school involvement

Eleven items from the School Involvement Questionnaire of the Metropolitan Survey on Family and Education, Centre for Family Studies and Research (CEIF) of Universidad Finis Terrae, were applied. These items measured the frequency in which parents participate at school, including both academic (e.g., "Meetings with teachers") and extracurricular activities (e.g., "Sports activities organized by the school"), as well as the extent in which they support their children at home (e.g., "To study with this child for tests"). This scale has been used previously in Chilean studies, which have effectively examined its construct and criterion validity (i.e., Gubbins and Otero, 2018; Gubbins and Otero, 2020). In this research, it presented Alpha: Home = 0.90; School = 0.87; Total = 0.88.

Finally, the official number of immigrants in the commune obtained through the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022) was included as collective level data in relation to the communes where participants were surveyed.

## 2.3 Analyses

First, we performed a series of confirmatory factor analyses to evaluate the psychometric properties of the scales, with their respective reliability tests (i.e., Cronbach's Alpha). For testing the main hypotheses, we conducted multi-level modeling and plotted the main results and finally, we evaluated a mediational model to test our hypotheses. All analyses were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2014) with RStudio (RStudioTeam, 2015). For reliability analysis and the mediational model, we used the packages lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) and semTools (Jorgensen et al., 2022). For correlations, apaTables (Stanley and

Spence, 2018) was used. For multilevel models, lme4 (Bates et al., 2015), and sjPlot (Lüdtke, 2020) for tables and multilevel moderation effects. Finally, we used the package wesanderson for colors (Ram and Wickham, 2023). All the data and the syntax with all the analyses supporting our main analyses are made available in our Supplementary material section.

### 3 Results

The correlation matrix (Table 1)<sup>1</sup> revealed a negative association between sex and educational level, suggesting that men have marginally lower education levels than women and school involvement at home, meaning that females tend to be slightly more involved in school-related tasks at home than males. Further significant associations were found between Nationality and Stay in the Country, indicating that Peruvians with pupils at school (compared to Venezuelans) tended to stay more in Chile. Finally, educational level had a strong negative relationship with Nationality, indicating that, for this particular sample, Peruvians had levels of education compared to Venezuelans, which was further corroborated with a Chi-square test ( $\chi^2(4) = 134.86$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Before conducting the main analyses, we evaluated the true nature of the measured constructs (i.e., Culture Diversity Climate and Involvement at School, and the former with Cultural Sensitivity, as seen in Figures 2A,B, respectively). As Figure 2A shows, some lines suggest a positive relationship, while others remain flat or neutral, or even negative. Similarly, in plot B the pattern of lines also shows a diverse set of relationships, with many lines showing minimal slope, although some suggest a slight positive trend between the constructs. As a whole, these visual analyses suggest that the true nature of the variables is nested in schools and therefore, we will test the main hypotheses through multilevel regressions.

As can be seen in the analyses (Table 2), the models explained a substantial percentage of the variance in school involvement, the largest being related to school activities. In detail, among the variables that explained total school involvement is the fact of being female (vs. male), having a higher educational level, having more years as parents and that the pupil is from a younger grade. Finally, the variables that explain the most variance are higher levels of cultural diversity climate, on the one hand, and cultural sensitivity, on the other.

In a detailed analysis, examining activities at home and activities at school, it is observed that both the climate of cultural diversity and cultural sensitivity are the variables that most explain the dependent variables. In addition, it is seen that gender (i.e., being female vs. being male) explains only home activities, and that time as a proxy explains only school activities. On the other hand, educational level significantly explains both variables, while dependence (i.e., public or private and subsidized school) only explains greater involvement in

school activities. In none of the cases is there any effect of nationality, age or length of stay in the country. Additionally, we evaluated whether the effects of the cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity were affected by their interaction with participants' nationality, educational level, or the type of school (Figure 3). As can be seen, in all cases, there were positive effects of both cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity regardless of the levels of these variables.

Finally, we tested a simple mediation model to explain the scores of the two facets of Involvement in School as it is seen in Figure 3. The overall fit of the path analysis revealed an excellent adjustment ( $CFI = 1.000$ ,  $TLI = 1.000$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.000$ , 95% CI [0.00, 0.00]) and revealed that there are indirect effects of Cultural Diversity Climate on the two facets of Involvement. In both cases, higher scores in Cultural Diversity Climate, through greater Cultural Sensitivity, explained greater Involvement in home activities ( $\beta = 0.06$ ;  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.10]) and in school activities ( $\beta = 0.04$ ;  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.09]).

### 4 Discussion

This study shows that immigrant parents' school involvement is shaped by the interaction of different levels of their experiences, such as home, school, and sociocultural factors, as has been stated by several authors (i.e., Antony-Newman, 2018; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). Particularly, our results support the idea that cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity are fundamental aspects of immigrant parents' involvement at Chilean schools. It also shows that institutions that create favorable conditions for intergroup contact through practices of positive recognition of cultural identities, equitable treatment and equal access to opportunities (for both Chilean and immigrant parents), foster immigrant guardians' commitment. Importantly, this includes not only parental participation in school activities but also encourages their engagement in helping children with their learning processes at home (Figure 4).

The results presented here indicate that, when schools positively manage cultural diversity, parents' socio-cognitive skills and attitudes to communicating in intercultural settings are enhanced. In turn, cultural sensitivity promotes greater involvement in their children's education. Higher skills for interacting with native teachers and parents may facilitate intergroup contact and social performance in the case of our participants. Interestingly, our findings show that they also influence the extent to which these parents are involved in their children's school education at home, suggesting that cultural sensitivity could lead to a better attitude toward the culturally based school content that children must learn and study at home. Remarkably, the effects of sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender, age, educational level, length of stay in the country) only had a minor influence on parents' involvement despite being focused on in past research. Together with the fact that the present study's sample was composed of participants of the nationalities representing the two main immigrant communities in Chile, these findings highlight the relevance of cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity. Indeed, these variables can be considered assets that could improve immigrant parents' involvement with diverse backgrounds and at different contexts such as public or subsidized schools with varying levels of immigrant population sizes.

<sup>1</sup> We consider it important to mention that, due to the nature of the data in this research, the correlation table should be taken as a guideline and not as a reflection of what actually occurs between the variables.

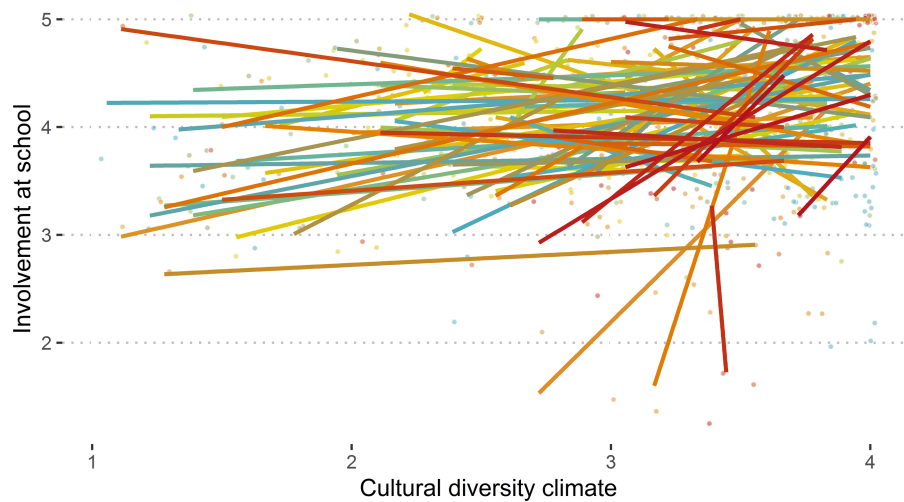
TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Sex <sup>1</sup>	-	-												
2. Age	35.82	7.27	-0.10**											
			[-0.17, -0.02]											
3. Nationality <sup>2</sup>	-	-	0.02	0.02										
			[-0.05, 0.10]	[-0.05, 0.09]										
4. Ed. Level	2.82	0.91	-0.10**	-0.01	-0.36**									
			[-0.17, -0.03]	[-0.08, 0.06]	[-0.42, -0.30]									
5. Stay	7.45	5.61	-0.06	0.21**	0.64**	-0.25**								
			[-0.13, 0.01]	[0.14, 0.28]	[0.59, 0.68]	[-0.32, -0.18]								
6. Dependency <sup>3</sup>	-	-	-0.05	0.09*	0.00	0.11**	0.05							
			[-0.12, 0.02]	[0.02, 0.16]	[-0.07, 0.07]	[0.04, 0.18]	[-0.02, 0.12]							
7. T. Guardian	2.89	1.97	-0.03	0.24**	0.31**	-0.11**	0.48**	0.06						
			[-0.10, 0.04]	[0.18, 0.31]	[0.24, 0.37]	[-0.18, -0.03]	[0.42, 0.53]	[-0.02, 0.13]						
8. Aca. Year	2.47	1.12	-0.03	0.18**	0.07*	0.02	0.11**	-0.01	0.25**					
			[-0.10, 0.04]	[0.11, 0.25]	[0.00, 0.14]	[-0.05, 0.09]	[0.04, 0.18]	[-0.08, 0.06]	[0.18, 0.31]					
9. CSC	3.20	0.69	-0.08*	-0.03	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	0.01	0.13**	0.02				
			[-0.15, -0.01]	[-0.10, 0.05]	[-0.08, 0.06]	[-0.09, 0.06]	[-0.04, 0.10]	[-0.06, 0.08]	[0.06, 0.20]	[-0.06, 0.09]				
10. CS	3.87	0.49	-0.05	0.04	-0.22**	0.10**	-0.11**	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.38**			
			[-0.13, 0.02]	[-0.04, 0.11]	[-0.29, -0.15]	[0.02, 0.17]	[-0.18, -0.04]	[-0.03, 0.11]	[-0.05, 0.09]	[-0.05, 0.09]	[0.32, 0.44]			
11. Involv. H.	4.42	0.81	0.08*	-0.01	-0.07*	0.08*	-0.04	-0.02	0.03	-0.13**	0.18**	0.19**		
			[0.01, 0.15]	[-0.08, 0.06]	[-0.15, -0.00]	[0.00, 0.15]	[-0.11, 0.03]	[-0.09, 0.05]	[-0.04, 0.10]	[-0.20, -0.06]	[0.11, 0.25]	[0.12, 0.26]		
12. Involv. S.	4.02	0.83	-0.02	0.08*	0.04	0.11**	0.08*	0.17**	0.18**	0.00	0.23**	0.19**	0.42**	
			[-0.09, 0.05]	[0.01, 0.15]	[-0.03, 0.11]	[0.04, 0.18]	[0.00, 0.15]	[0.10, 0.24]	[0.11, 0.25]	[-0.07, 0.07]	[0.16, 0.29]	[0.12, 0.25]	[0.36, 0.48]	
13. Involv. T.	4.16	0.70	0.02	0.06	-0.00	0.11**	0.04	0.12**	0.15**	-0.05	0.24**	0.22**	0.73**	0.93**
			[-0.05, 0.09]	[-0.02, 0.13]	[-0.07, 0.07]	[0.04, 0.18]	[-0.03, 0.11]	[0.05, 0.19]	[0.07, 0.21]	[-0.13, 0.02]	[0.18, 0.31]	[0.15, 0.29]	[0.70, 0.77]	[0.91, 0.93]

*M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. <sup>1</sup>1 = Men, 2 = Women. <sup>2</sup>Nationality is the comparison between immigrants from Venezuela (1) and Peru (2).

<sup>3</sup>Dependency indicates whether each school was public (i.e., fully maintained by the state; 1) or subsidized (i.e., financed by the state but administrated by private organizations; 2). CDC = Cultural Diversity Climate; CS = Cultural Sensitivity. Involv. H., Involv. S., and Involv. T., indicate Involvement in School with tasks at Home, School and the Total score, respectively. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

### A Cultural Diversity Climate and Involvement at School



### B Cultural Sensitivity and Involvement at School

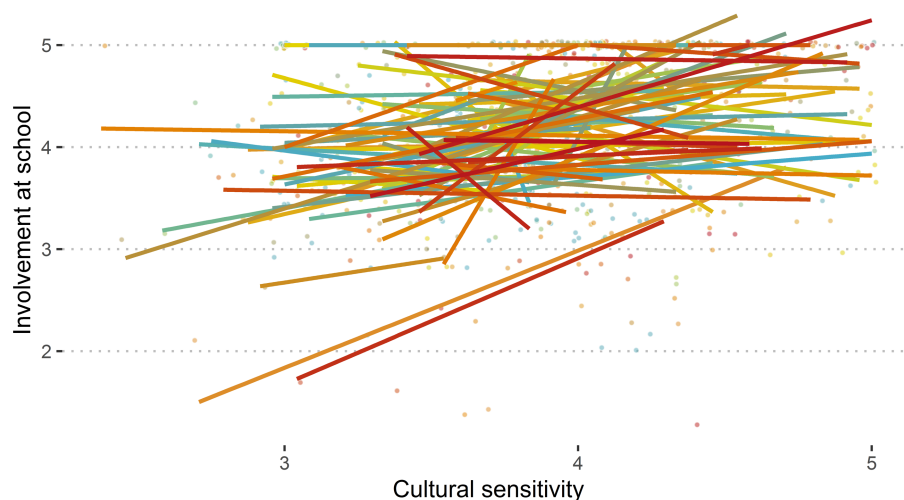


FIGURE 2

Linear relations between the variables. Each line represents a linear regression predicting involvement at school by either cultural diversity climate (A) or cultural sensitivity (B), across 171 schools of Santiago, Chile.

These outcomes are especially relevant because immigrant parents find themselves in a situation of significant disadvantage compared to the majority group. On the one hand, they must overcome several barriers to access basic social welfare conditions. Furthermore, they belong to social categories with low recognition, status and power, exposing them to different forms of discrimination. The fact that cultural diversity climate, as well as cultural sensitivity, tend to have a greater influence on parental involvement than sociodemographic variables, such as educational level, suggests that schools have the potential to become spaces that can legitimize immigrant parents by ensuring equality and justice in their relationships. Certainly, educational institutions cannot modify the structural conditions that constrain these parents' participation in children's schooling. However, by improving parental involvement, schools can promote students' social inclusion by fostering their academic achievement and positive development. When educational centers do not provide the necessary conditions for students to

expand their personal, social, and cultural resources, they reproduce social inequalities, particularly affecting those from minority groups (Ali, 2008; Mzidabi et al., 2024).

In fact, several authors (Bankston, 2004; Martínez-Taboada et al., 2017; Ogbu and Simons, 1998; Olmedo, 2003) have indicated that lack of recognition, pressure to assimilate, and unfair treatment can lead to cultural resistance strategies, resulting in absenteeism, academic failure, and school dropout. These problems are often experienced by immigrant children, who usually are at high risk of poor academic results and frequently live in vulnerable conditions (Alieva et al., 2024; Özdemir and Bayram Özdemir, 2020) and might keep families from minority groups in precarious situations, perpetuating dynamics of exclusion and social marginalization (García, 2011). Strong collaboration and egalitarian relationships between parents and school staff could help to reverse these cycles of inequality (Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Serna et al., 2008).



TABLE 2 Multilevel models predicting involvement at school across 171 schools in Santiago.

Predictors	Total score			Home			School		
	$\beta$	95% CI	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	95% CI	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	95% CI	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	0.03	−0.07, 0.13	<0.001	−0.02	−0.11, 0.08	<0.001	0.06	−0.05, 0.16	<0.001
Sex <sup>1</sup>	0.09	0.02, 0.15	0.008	0.11	0.05, 0.18	0.001	0.05	−0.01, 0.12	0.094
Age	0.02	−0.04, 0.09	0.483	0.00	−0.07, 0.07	0.995	0.03	−0.03, 0.10	0.331
Nationality <sup>2</sup>	0.01	−0.10, 0.12	0.849	−0.05	−0.17, 0.07	0.440	0.04	−0.06, 0.14	0.442
Edu. Level	0.10	0.02, 0.17	0.009	0.08	0.00, 0.15	0.047	0.09	0.02, 0.16	0.014
Stay	0.00	−0.09, 0.10	0.987	−0.01	−0.11, 0.09	0.876	0.00	−0.09, 0.09	0.946
Dependency	0.10	−0.00, 0.20	0.053	−0.04	−0.13, 0.05	0.385	0.13	0.03, 0.23	0.010
Time guardian	0.10	0.02, 0.18	0.011	0.03	−0.06, 0.11	0.539	0.13	0.05, 0.20	0.001
Academic year	−0.07	−0.14, −0.01	0.035	−0.11	−0.18, −0.03	0.004	−0.05	−0.11, 0.02	0.182
CDC	0.18	0.10, 0.25	<0.001	0.13	0.05, 0.21	0.001	0.17	0.09, 0.24	<0.001
CS	0.14	0.07, 0.22	<0.001	0.12	0.04, 0.20	0.003	0.13	0.05, 0.20	0.001
Immigrants <sup>3</sup>	−0.03	−0.12, 0.05	0.450	−0.05	−0.15, 0.04	0.262	−0.01	−0.09, 0.08	0.904
<b>Random effects</b>									
$\sigma^2$	0.36			0.52			0.47		
$\tau_{00}$ School	0.29			0.33			0.34		
$\tau_{11}$ School Nationality	0.05			0.16			0.02		
$\rho_{01}$ Centro	−0.89			−0.93			−1.00		
ICC	0.21			0.15			0.22		
<i>N</i> Centro	171			171			171		
Observations	751			751			751		
Marginal <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> /Conditional <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.112/0.296			0.074/0.210			0.114/0.313		

<sup>1</sup>1 = Men, 2 = Women. <sup>2</sup>Nationality is the comparison between immigrants from Venezuela (1) and Peru (2). <sup>3</sup>The variable represents the number of immigrants in the commune within Santiago. CDC = Cultural Diversity Climate; CS = Cultural Sensitivity. Invol. H., Invol. S., and Invol. T., indicate Involvement in School with tasks at Home.

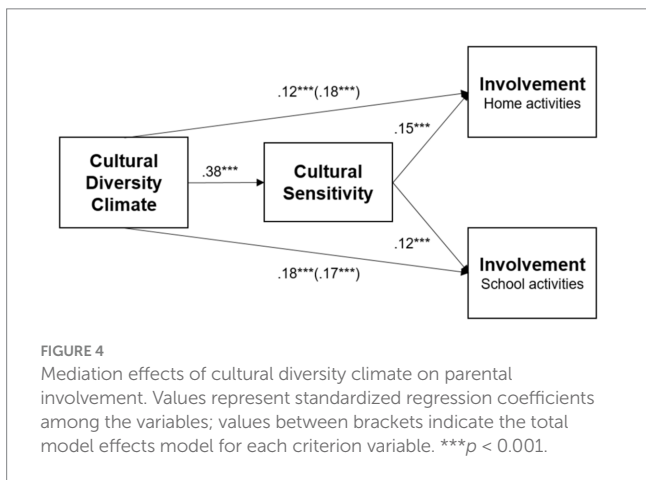
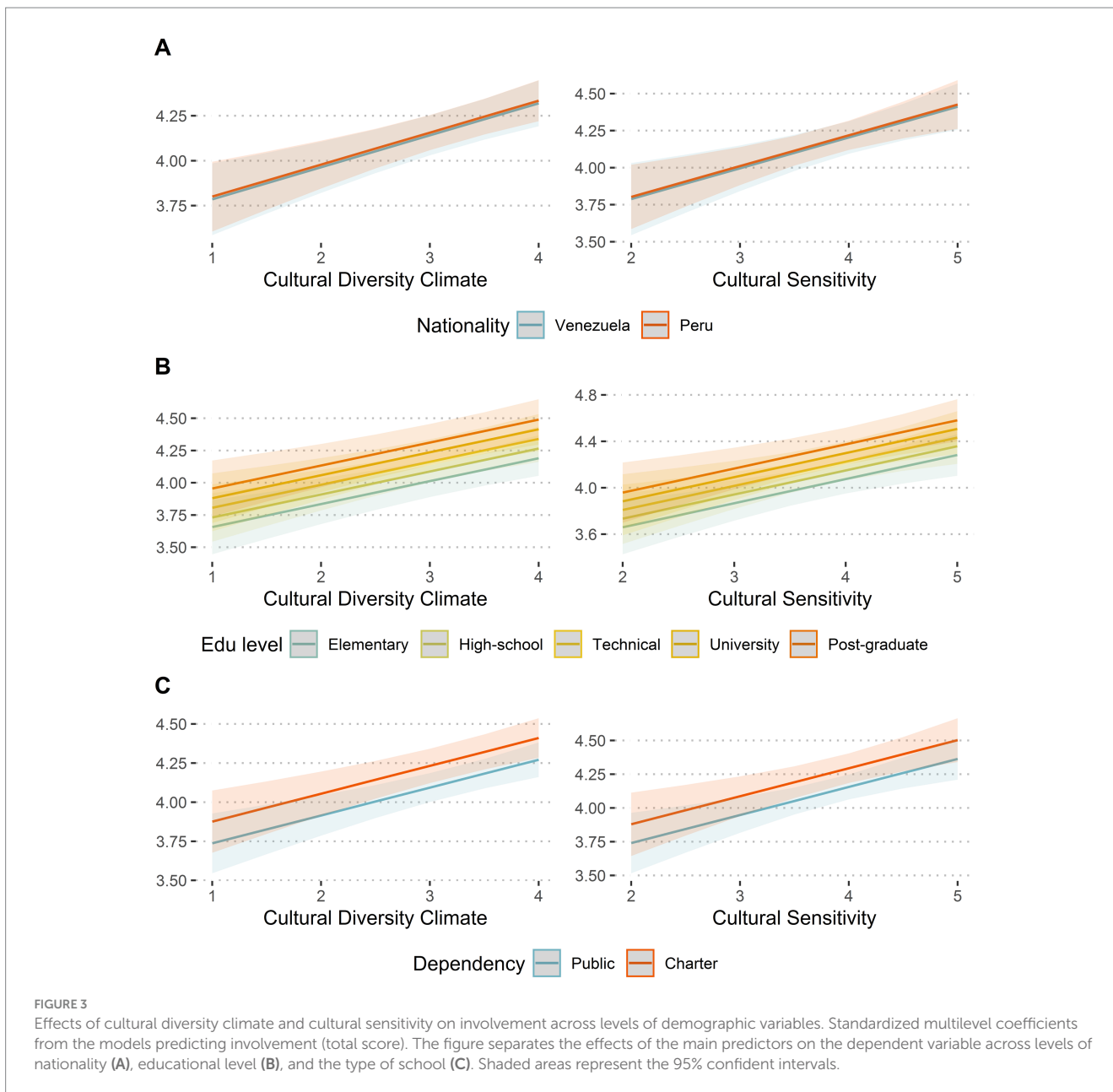
Given the substantial challenges that educational systems encounter because of the multiple needs of their students and families, it seems that improving the cultural diversity climate and enhancing parents' cultural sensitivity could have high cost-benefit potential. According to our results, future interventions could focus on establishing school policies that guarantee equal treatment and opportunities, and respect for cultural identities. This could also help teachers and administrators improve their attitudes toward multiculturalism and intergroup relationships between students. Besides, intercultural communication competencies training programs for parents at schools could strengthen their participation in children's education and reinforce their commitment to the institutions. Also, it could facilitate their integration into the host society in different dimensions of their lives.

#### 4.1 Parents' school involvement, cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity perceptions

We have found high levels of cultural diversity climate, intercultural sensitivity, and additionally, involvement in school in the present sample, and several reasons could explain this. First,

heightened levels of intercultural sensitivity align with reports from immigrant secondary education students in Chile (Lahoz i Ubach and Cordeu Cuccia, 2021). Even though they have operationalized cultural competence in a different manner, other local studies with immigrant students (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020), have shown notable capabilities in both understanding information from the local culture and interacting with native peers in school. This has been attributed to the fact that immigrants must constantly confront the task of navigating information from a new culture, as well as communicating with members of the host society, which may facilitate the development of these competencies (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020; Rania et al., 2012).

Second, high levels of school involvement, both in the home context and through direct participation in school activities, may be linked to higher levels of collectivistic cultures; specifically, due to the relevance of societal norms and conformity (see Henrich, 2020). In fact, families from more collectivistic cultures often adopt parenting styles that emphasize the importance of duty fulfillment and obedience, thereby promoting behavioral control (Bornstein, 2017; Bornstein and Cote, 2006; Gallardo, 2019). Furthermore, it has been suggested that immigrant parents from low-income countries are particularly concerned with transmitting to children the values of hard work and discipline and recognizing the role of education in facilitating social mobility (Nesteruk and Marks, 2011).



It is important to note that these results differ from previous studies, which suggested that immigrant parents in Chile perceived tensions in their relationships with the schools (Eberhard and Lauer, 2019; Oyarzún et al., 2022). This could be attributed to the fact that this study focused on parents' perceptions about their own relationships with school agents rather than the practices implemented within the classroom context. Furthermore, methodological differences could explain these discrepancies, such as using quantitative methodology and including a wide diversity of schools. Besides, research on acculturation attitudes within the Chilean population has described a strong inclination toward individualism. This suggests that Chileans often interact with immigrants as individuals with distinct characteristics and personal goals rather than emphasizing group affiliations (Martínez-Zelaya et al., 2020; Mera-Lemp et al., 2021). Such an approach may

contribute to the perception of equitable and fair treatment by teachers and administrative staff.

Finally, recent studies have also reported that even though Chilean teachers have had to face the challenges of teaching immigrant students with little knowledge about intercultural education and scarce resources, it seems that their attitudes toward multiculturalism at school tend to be positive (Mera-Lemp et al., 2024). It is possible that the experience of continuously teaching immigrant students is leading them to new insights, which could boost the development of practices such as the incorporation of content based on the students' cultures of origin and creating strategies to establish trust-based relationships with immigrant families (Mendoza Mardones, 2024).

## 4.2 The role of sociodemographic variables

Analyzing the relevance of sociodemographic variables, we found that mothers are more prone (compared to fathers) to involve themselves in supporting children in homework and studying at home. In addition, in the present sample, fathers indicated lower levels of cultural diversity at schools than mothers. As is widely recognized, parental roles in children's education are often shaped by parents' expectations and their cultural contexts (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997), and these expectations are inherently gendered. Thus, mothers tend to deal with stronger role expectations than fathers regarding active daily involvement, which could lead to a great engagement in the home context (Kim and Hill, 2015; McBride et al., 2009). In the same vein, and while there is a lack of evidence regarding the role of gender in the perception of the school diversity climate, some studies have suggested that women tend to perceive discriminatory attitudes to a lesser extent than men due to cognitive biases that allow them to pay less attention to, or even deny, unfair treatment. This could explain why fathers perceived, to a lesser degree, that the school provides equal treatment and equal access to opportunities compared to women (Kim and Noh, 2014).

Nonetheless, this hypothesis (i.e., differential perception of discriminatory attitudes) is not the only possible explanation since there are no differences between genders in parental involvement at school, and the differences between fathers/mothers in school involvement at home are small in magnitude (see also Figure 1C). While the literature has focused on school involvement among women, the absence of differences by gender in the present study could be seen as a positive outcome, as there is evidence highlighting the importance of fathers' participation for the educational trajectories and wellbeing of their children (Lazović et al., 2022; Rollè et al., 2019). On the other hand, there were no differences between Venezuelan and Peruvian parents regarding their perceptions of cultural diversity climate (see Figure 3A). Nonetheless, Venezuelan participants seem to present higher levels of cultural sensitivity and a stronger involvement at home. This could be because Venezuelan participants presented higher levels of education, and yet, parents' nationality was not related to any of the other variables.

While parents' educational level was not related to the perception of cultural diversity climate, it was positively associated

with cultural sensitivity; at least in intensity (see Figure 3B). Some studies (Sari and Yalçinkaya, 2023) have suggested that academic education contributes to a more positive attitude toward members of other cultures, as well as to an increased ability to communicate in multicultural environments. This also supports the idea that parents with higher cultural capital would be more likely to actively participate in children's education, possibly because their own academic knowledge is aligned with what is promoted by the school (Antony-Newman, 2018; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Epstein, 2018; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). This underlines the importance of promoting the involvement of those parents for whom a low educational level intersects with being immigrants, placing them in a disadvantaged position (Fang et al., 2017; Sheng, 2012).

Parents' length of stay in Chile was not related to cultural diversity climate perception, probably because the quality of the relationship with the school plays a greater role than the extent of the experience at the receiving country, as has been previously observed in samples of immigrant students (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020). Strikingly, however, it was found that the longer its' duration, the lower their cultural sensitivity. Despite this could be considered counterintuitive, acculturation processes could indeed affect this competence. For example, it is possible that, as immigrants understand and learn the host society's culture, socio-cognitive efforts during intercultural communication decrease. On the contrary, the development of stronger attachments to their own cultural background could decrease their sensitivity (Martínez-Zelaya et al., 2020). Sustained emotional negative experiences through intergroup contact can also diminish immigrants' intercultural competencies (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020).

Conversely, time in the country had a positive relationship with involvement at school activities, suggesting that greater familiarity with the local culture facilitates their participation in school. Furthermore, the longer parents are connected to the school, the greater their perception of the cultural diversity climate, as well as their involvement at home and in the school. Understanding institutions, along with the establishment of relationships with their members over time, would facilitate the perception of belonging, fairness, and recognition of one's own cultural identity at school. It is also possible that school agents tend to establish interpersonal relationships with immigrant parents over time, placing less emphasis on belonging to different intergroup categories. The academic year in which the children were enrolled was only associated with parental home involvement, indicating that the younger the children are, the greater the parental participation in their education at home is (Gubbins and Otero, 2018).

In all, sociodemographic variables cannot fully explain the levels of parental involvement in this large and heterogeneous sample; rather, as we expected, cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity are those that more effectively explain it. Additionally, their effects are kept invariant across levels of some of these sociodemographic variables. These results reinforce the relevance of generating positive conditions for intergroup contact at school and the important role of parents' intercultural competencies.

### 4.3 Limitations, strengths and future research lines

This study has limitations that should be considered. First, using an intentional sample in the framework of a cross-sectional design does not allow us to appreciate the development of the relationship between the studied variables. It could be interesting to study cultural sensitivity's trajectories explaining parental school involvement across time. Additionally, a potential future direction would involve testing this through an experimental design within the context of a training program focused on competencies to assess how it may (or may not) explain parental school involvement.

Second, although our participants come from countries with significant representation in Chile, it would be important to examine whether the variables of this study can also explain parents' involvement in a more heterogeneous sample of immigrant groups. This would allow for testing, among other factors, cultural explanations (e.g., levels of collectivism or relative differences in individualism) within these samples. Third, this research only considers parents' reports without including teachers' and students' points of view. Even though there are scarce antecedents of parental school involvement in Chile, our results seem to be consistent with recent studies that have shown that teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism at school tend to be positive (Mendoza Mardones, 2024; Mera-Lemp et al., 2024), which could be facilitating parents' experiences at school. Also, some studies conducted with immigrant students in the local context have found high levels of school satisfaction (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020) and positive school climate perceptions (Lahoz i Ubach and Cordeu Cuccia, 2021). However, future studies with immigrant parents should consider the importance of including pupils and school staff to carry out data triangulation.

Notwithstanding, this work contributes to comprehending immigrant parents' school involvement in the context of South-south migration, which has been very scarcely studied. Besides, and despite its relevance, parents' perception of the cultural diversity climate at school and its effects have received little attention, so this study represents a contribution to developing this research line. Finally, it is important to remark that our results suggest intervention perspectives with significant cost-benefit potential for schools. Considering the great impact that the increase of migratory flows is having on the educational systems, this could be an interesting alternative to explore.

## 5 Conclusion

This study shows two psychological variables can influence the school involvement of immigrant parents in Chile: the school's cultural diversity climate and cultural sensitivity. In those institutions where equal treatment, recognition of different cultural identities, and social inclusion are fostered, environments are created that encourage immigrant parents to become involved not only in school activities at school but also in learning at home. Although involvement also depends—to a lesser extent—on sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender, educational level or academic year), these results highlight the importance of an inclusive school climate that supports intergroup relations and parental participation. Considering the benefits of parental involvement in school on academic success or social-emotional wellbeing, educational public policies could prioritize

interventions that improve the climate of cultural diversity and promote intercultural competencies in both parents and educational staff.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Comité de Ética Universidad Alberto Hurtado. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

MM-L: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JP: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. FG-S: Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The handling editor SD declared a past collaboration with the author JP.

## Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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## Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1561863/full#supplementary-material>

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