

*“A unique program where parents can come with their questions, concerns, and then discuss it together to find solutions”* Analyzing the Method of It’s My Child (IMC)  
According to Parents and Ambassadors’ Experiences



**Universiteit Utrecht**



Thesis supervisor: Charlotte Vissenberg

Second assessor: Mariëtte de Haan

Student number: 6423663

Student name: Nur Izzati Ghassani Averus

University of Utrecht

## **Abstract**

It's My Child (IMC) is an organization that collaborates with Ithaca ISK. Its goal is to empower refugee and immigrant parents to reclaim their parental roles to optimally support their children. The current study was conducted as a process evaluation to help further develop the IMC program. Eleven parents and ambassadors participated in in-depth interviews as part of the current study. Analysis of parents' and ambassadors' experiences revealed several successful and unsuccessful elements that will contribute to refining the program. The method of IMC, which is based on the Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) and targets specific needs of parents, emerged as one of the most successful elements of the program. Parents felt that this program offered the opportunity for personal interaction with an ambassador and also the chance to work with a group of other parents. However, this program was not found to widen parents' networks, especially in fields other than education and parenting. Based on these results, it is suggested that more international ambassadors be added to the IMC program to reach parents from different cultures and that a permanent employee be added to the program staff.

Key words: process evaluation, empowerment, refugee parent

## **Abstract**

It's My Child (IMC) is een stichting die samenwerkt met Ithaca ISK om vluchtelingen en immigranten ouders in staat te stellen hun ouderrol te reconstrueren om zo hun kind verder te ondersteunen in een nieuwe samenleving. Aan de hand van een diepte-interview namen 11 ouders en ambassadeurs deel aan dit huidige onderzoek. Door ervaringen van ouders en ambassadeurs werden verschillende succesvolle en niet-succesvolle elementen gevonden die aan het programma hebben bijgedragen. De methode van IMC gebaseerd op de stages of changes (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) en specifieke doelstellingen van ouders werd één van de succesvolle elementen van het programma. Bovendien vonden ouders dat dit programma de mogelijkheid biedt om een persoonlijke benadering te hebben met de ambassadeur en om samen te werken met andere groepen van ouders. Dit programma verbreedt het netwerk van de ouders echter niet volledig, alleen op het gebied van onderwijs en opvoeding. Op basis van het resultaat wordt gesuggereerd dat IMC met een internationaal team van ambassadeurs meer ouders met

verschillende achtergronden zou kunnen bereiken. Ook het hebben van een vast team van werknemers binnen IMC speelt hierbij een belangrijke rol. De resultaten van deze studie zullen gebruikt worden bij het verder ontwikkelen van het IMC-programma.

### **Introduction**

Living in a new country is never easy for immigrant and refugee parents. Parents are faced with many significant challenges including the following: language and cultural differences, unemployment (Stewart, Dennis, Kariwo, Kusher, Letourneau, Makumbe, Makwarimba & Shizha, 2015), distance from family, friends, and a familiar environment (Bandyopadhyay, Small, Watson & Brown, 2010), and new parenthood practices (Center for Community Child Health, 2004). Moreover, some parents are not connected with the community around them and experience a lack of knowledge about how to deal with their new situation (Lewig, Arney & Salveron, 2010). These challenges may lead parents to feel stress, isolation, and loneliness (Stewart et al., 2015).

Children often become the main translators of language and culture for parents, helping parents adjust to their new situations (e.g., communicating with the teachers at school). Thus, there is a role reversal between parent and child, due to the capability of children to acculturate and learn the language and culture faster than their parents (Gordon, 1996). As a result, parents often feel frustrated because they have to depend on their children (Gordon, 1996). When the parental role is overtaken by children, parents can feel hopeless (Zimmerman, 1990).

In order to help refugees and immigrant parents regain their role as parents, it is important to empower parents by developing their knowledge, skills, and capacity, and by then encouraging parents to support others who are in a similar situation. Ultimately, parents become more confident to take action and gain more control over their lives (Boehm & Staples, 2004). Involvement in the community has proven to be a tool which can increase mastery and control over the environment (Zimmerman, 1990). Through participation, parents can develop social support, find a sense of community, gain experience in organizing people, identify available resources (Zimmerman, 1990), learn or get help from each other (Malton, 1987), gain trust in self and others (Shepard & Rose, 1995), and support their adjustment process in a new environment (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002).

It's My Child (IMC) is an organization that works with Ithaca ISK, a transitional school for immigrant and refugee students, in a way that takes into account the parents' concerns, questions, and needs. The primary purpose of this program is to empower parents and enable them to reclaim their parental roles and support their children (It's My Child, 2019). IMC believes in a group approach; encouraging parents to be involved in a group allows them to support each other and learn from each others' experiences. Moreover, it strenghtens personal interaction with the program's ambassadors, who are program team members responsible for motivating, stimulating, and guiding parents in reaching their own goals (S. Shat, personal communication, January 22, 2018). IMC developed a method based on the Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). The method includes the following steps: making initial contact with parents, stimulating parents to talk about their needs and questions, encouraging parents to design their own programs of intervention and to take an action toward meeting their needs, evaluating how parents feel after taking certain actions, and encouraging parents to share their experiences with other parents. Over time, this method allows parents to find solutions that suit their circumstances and guides them during the implementation of their actions (It's My Child, 2019).

Although this program has been established since the 2017–2018 academic year, there has not yet been an evaluation conducted to assess whether the method is working as intended to achieve IMC goals. This process evaluation is expected to identify successful components within the program (Reynolds, Franklin, Levinton, Maloy, Harrington, Yaroch, Person & Jester, 2000; Shek & Sun, 2012). Therefore, the current study will focus on evaluating the IMC program using parents' and ambassadors' experiences and on providing suggestions to improve the program. The study's research questions include the following:

- 1) *How do parents and ambassadors experience empowerment within the IMC program?*
- 2) *What are the IMC program elements that do and do not contribute to these experiences?*
- 3) *What are suggestions for improving the IMC program?*

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Empowerment**

According to Zimmerman (1995), a state of Psychological Empowerment (PE) is one that includes holding beliefs that goals can be achieved, possessing awareness of existing resources or factors that can support achievement of those goals, and making efforts to achieve the goals. Rappaport (1981) also stated that individuals become empowered if they can gain control over their lives and possess skills to influence their lives. Therefore, it is important for individuals to feel that they can take actions to control their own lives (Sue & Morishima, 1982).

Empowerment increases parents' awareness of opportunities to improve their own lives and their children's lives (Shepard & Rose, 1995). The purpose of the IMC program is to enable participants to reach three components of personal empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995): interpersonal, interactional, and behavioral. The interpersonal component includes perceived control, self-efficacy, motivation to control, and perceived competency. To address this component, the program encourages parents to believe that they can influence their lives. The interactional component refers to parents gaining an understanding of how their environment works. Program activities endeavour to help parents gain awareness about the choices they can make to achieve the goals they set, including the values, culture, and resources that exist around them. In the behavioral component, parents take concrete actions toward achieving their goals through participation in community activities or organizations (Zimmerman, 1995).

### **Stages of Change**

In empowering parents, the IMC program applies Prochaska and Velicer's Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model (1997). At the first stage, precontemplation, parents are typically not aware of the need to or do not intend to take action because they are unmotivated. To make parents more aware, IMC tries to make contact with parents and build a relationship with them, so that ambassadors gain parents' trust and build good relationships with them. The second stage is contemplation, where parents become more aware of their needs and the importance of taking action. This stage is reached after the ambassador stimulates parents to talk about their needs and concerns. The third stage is preparation, where parents become clearer about what concerns or questions they have, and create an action plan to meet their needs, with

the guide of an ambassador. The fourth stage is the action itself, where parents take concrete actions to implement their action plan. The last stage is maintenance, where parents become more confident about themselves and continue to take actions. In this stage, parents usually evaluate their feelings following their actions (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

## **Parental involvement**

Parental involvement has been proven to be an essential element of the effective education of children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Academic performance is higher among children with parents who are more involved in their children's education, as compared to those whose parents are involved in a lesser degree (Topor, Keane, Shelton & Calkins, 2010). Epstein (1995) developed an ecological framework to assist educators in fostering parental involvement. It consists of six types of involvement. The first, parenting, refers to helping families establish home environments that can support children's academic achievement. The second, communicating, addresses the design of effective communication between parents and school. Volunteering involves recruiting parents to help with school activities. Learning at home can be encouraged by giving information to help parents support their children with homework. The fifth type, decision-making, refers to involving parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders. Finally, collaborating with the community involves integrating resources from the community to strengthen schools, families, and children's learning.

When working with culturally diverse families (Ansell, 2011) it is vital to examine parents' beliefs about their role in their children's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). According to Hill & Taylor (2004), the types of parental involvement could vary depending on their cultural beliefs and practices.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative research design which intended to explore parents' perspectives on their situations, noting patterns and regularities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). According to Eldredge, Markham, Ruitter, Kok, Fernandez & Parcel (2016), this type of research design "gives voices to participants, and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions."

The evaluation approach used in this study was selected to describe the IMC program implementation (Linnan & Steckler, 2002) and the evaluated effectiveness (Eldredge et al., 2016) of the method that this program used. The data was used for the summative purpose of making judgments about the degree to which the program was implemented as planned (Helitzer et al., 2000). According to Baranowski and Stables (2002), “This information, in turn, can be used to interpret and explain program outcomes; analyze how the program works and provide input for future planning.” The current study utilized a dose received type of process evaluation. It sought to determine the extent to which parents interacted and actively engaged in the program and gathered their perspectives about the program by encouraging them to recall their experiences (Linnan & Steckler, 2002).

As the initial step in conducting the process evaluation, the researcher developed a logic model (Eldredge et al., 2016) of the intervention, as the IMC program is developed using trial and error with some parents. This logic model provided a description of the IMC program including its purpose, strategies, mechanism, resources, and expected outcomes (Saunders, Evans & Joshi, 2005). Next, the researcher created a topic list (see Appendix B) as preparation for conducting interviews. Interview data was collected during March–May 2019. After every interview, the researcher transcribed the interview and analyzed the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) to answer the research questions.

## **Respondents**

Respondents included eleven persons representing five different groups: three active parents, two active parents who volunteer as ambassadors, two nonparent ambassadors, two parents who no longer participate in the program, and two parents who are not interested in the program. These groups provided a variety of parent perspectives regarding the program that could be used to identify characteristics that might contaminate the program implementation (Eldredge et al., 2016). Most of the respondents were female, with an average of three children, and one respondent was male. Most respondents came from Syria, but some respondents came from Iraq, the UK, South Africa, the Netherlands, and China. Most of the parents surveyed have lived in the Netherlands for an average of 1.5 years. The nonparent ambassadors were natives of the Netherlands.

Respondents were recruited in several ways. Program ambassadors facilitated the recruitment of parents who were currently or previously involved in the IMC program. Parents who had not been interested in joining the program were contacted through the IMC database. The researcher personally approached the parent and nonparent ambassadors.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The researcher used semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore parents' experiences with the IMC program (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Parents were interviewed individually using a topic list that included semi-structured questions. The semi-structured interview was selected because it allows the researcher to ask further questions in response to the answers given by the respondent (Berg, 2001). This approach aims to identify the information, values, preferences, attitudes, or beliefs (Tuckman, 1972) that each parent holds. The questions were formed according to the topic list (see Appendix B) and were designed to explore parents' and ambassadors' experiences the program. The researcher asked questions about parents' backgrounds at the beginning of the interviews, in order to identify each parent's previous situation before joining the program. The interviews lasted for an average of one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded using a mobile phone. Each subject provided informed consent (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) before each interview. During the interviews, translators were used as needed to translate from Arabic and Dutch to English. The researcher assigned a number to each interview for the purposes of analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The research objective was to explore parents' and ambassadors' experiences with the IMC program, to identify successful and unsuccessful program elements, and to give recommendations for further program development. A deductive approach was used to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The interpretation was guided by the existing literature, reflecting on the logic model of the interventions (see Appendix A) and themes that emerged spontaneously from the data.

After each interview was conducted, the analysis process started with coding and dividing the portions of the interview data that reflected each respondent's status within the Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), the components of



personal empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995), and the six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995) in order to explore the empowerment process within the IMC program.

## **Results**

Six themes emerged from analysis of the interview and observational data that reflect parents' and ambassadors' experiences in the IMC program. The themes include the following:

1. Challenges that arose when parents arrived in the Netherlands,
2. Motivations for participating or not participating in the IMC program,
3. Stages of Change according to the model,
4. Successful and unsuccessful elements of the program,
5. Experiences after involvement in successful elements, and
6. Program suggestions.

The first three themes were addressed in order to answer the questions related to the empowerment process of the IMC program. The researcher attempted to understand the respondents' full experiences beginning with their arrival in the Netherlands, their motivation to participate in the IMC program, and their experiences in following the program. The fourth and fifth themes addressed the elements that do and don't contribute to the program, and supported the data regarding successful elements of IMC program. The final theme gathered respondents' suggestions for further development of the IMC program.

### **Challenges that Arose when Parents Arrived in the Netherlands**

Analysis of the interview data indicated that parents faced several challenges when they arrived in the Netherlands. According to all parents, the language barrier was the biggest challenge that they experienced. Not speaking the Dutch language limited their communication with others (e.g., communicating with teachers at school), made them unable to support their children fully academically (e.g., helping them with homework), and inhibited their adaptation process (e.g., choosing to stay at home or only go to places where they did not need to make conversation with other people). Some parents who did not speak English felt that speaking English could facilitate their communication with others.

The language barrier not only influenced parents' involvement at school and engagement with the community; it also influenced their parental role, as most of the parents reported becoming more dependent on their children. For example, parents described taking their children with them to the doctor or to government offices to translate for them.

*"I feel powerless whenever I ask my kids to translate for me, I know that I should do it myself and that it adds burden on them." (Parent, 41 years old)*

In addition, parents shared that the language barrier acted as an obstacle to finding a permanent job. In their previous nations, most of the parents felt that they contributed to their communities by having a permanent job. These jobs may have included working in an organization or company for parents with more education, or working as a laborer or running their own small business such as a restaurant or a shop. Once they arrived in the Netherlands, those who wanted to start a small business found they had to have a certification or a certain degree. Because of these barriers, most of the parents felt that they had to start over from the beginning in order to find a job.

According to many parents, the educational system in the Netherlands is a challenge as it is totally different than their own. The majority of parents stated that they had little to no understanding of the system and how their children would progress from one level to another. This lack of understanding of the education system made parents feel powerless in their children's academic lives. They did not understand what their children learned at school, the grades, the leveling system, or how they could help their children to get better grades and get into the type of school of their choice. One of the parents felt confused when she was invited by the teacher to talk about her child's problem and was asked to help find the solution from her perspective. This confusion was due to the differences in customs; in her country the teacher is usually the one who shares the solutions with parents, and they distinguish between the parent's role, which is at home, and the teacher's role, which is at school.

Cultural differences are another of the challenges that most of the parents mentioned during the interviews. These include differences in habits, ways of thinking, and people's reactions in different situations. One of the parents mentioned that at first, she was shocked to learn that young people in the Netherlands are allowed to live alone or with their partners before getting married, while in her country this is not allowed and they must live with their families until they

get married. The cultural differences that parents faced made them feel it was hard for them to be accepted and involved in the Dutch community. Some of the parents felt that they had been labeled or subjected to prejudice by Dutch people. One parent expressed that some of his Dutch friends always tried to convince him of their own points of view; feeling that they were right and he was mistaken. This contrasted with his belief that nothing is right and nothing is wrong, but that everyone has his own point of view which should be respected.

The last challenge that emerged from the interview data addressed separation from family members. Some of the parents had to flee from their native countries and leave their family members behind. One of the parents shared that she had left her mother and son to join her other children in the Netherlands, and that this was one of the most difficult decisions she'd ever had to make. She revealed that this sometimes made it challenging to focus on her current situation in the Netherlands. She related feeling distracted by this issue and felt that she had to live in two places at the same time.

### **Motivation for Participating/Not Participating in the IMC Program**

According to interview data from parents and ambassadors, most parents were interested in becoming involved in the IMC program because they believed in the ideas of the program. Most parents stated that they felt something special and unique about the IMC program which differed from other programs they had been familiar with. They recognized that the IMC program was aligned with their personal needs, and that it attempted to target all of their needs one by one.

*“I found that the idea of IMC is a unique program because we as parents can come with our questions, our concern, and then discuss it together and find solutions.” (Parent, 49 years old)*

Several parents indicated that they were motivated to join the program after seeing how the ambassador worked. One parent mentioned seeing that the ambassador worked passionately days and nights to spread this program and help parents. Parents saw the ambassadors' determination to reach all parents, even though they were working as volunteers.

Parent ambassadors believed they were stronger when they were together and were able to share different experiences which might help and strengthen other parents. In addition, they appreciated that they did not have to fit into a pre-designed program, but were given the freedom

to create their own ways. One parent ambassador stated that through this program, they could develop their skills at their own pace, which helped them to widen their network.

The nonparent ambassadors shared that they wanted to be involved in this program in order to better understand the immigrant parents' situation and to find out how they could help and learn from these parents. They mentioned that, especially in the case of refugee parents, they had heard their stories in the media, but that this program gave them the opportunity to hear and understand the stories from the parents' own perspectives and experience. Their other motivation was related to the struggles that the immigrant parents had. They believed that all of the parents had already built their lives with education, jobs, positions, and connections in their home countries. These parents had to give up all of that, falling from much higher levels in comparison to their children. The nonparent ambassadors stated they believe that many people do not realize how much these parents were struggling. These ambassadors voiced a desire to support parents step-by-step in living their lives in the Netherlands.

Some parents shared that they were not interested in joining the IMC program. These parents were expats who had more stable conditions in their home countries and typically moved to the Netherlands because of their jobs. However, these parents related that they were open to supporting other parents as needed. One parent, who joined the IMC program but then decided to leave it, stated that she already had her own support system because some of her family members live in the Netherlands.

### **Stages of Change**

Given the many challenges these parents face, it was necessary to design an intervention that suits their individual needs. The first step in this process was to approach parents in different ways in order to gain their trust. Parents were contacted when they came to register their children for school, at school activities, at report discussion day, and through phone calls. Parents introduced other parents to the IMC program and some organizations introduced parents to the program, as well. After an initial meeting, each ambassador arranged a needs assessment meeting with parents to learn more about their needs and to place them in a suitable group.

*“I met the ambassadors several times and I felt match with her. I can felt a positive energy from her. It makes me want to achieve many things and believe that I can do it.” (Parent, 40 years old)*

The ambassadors reported that some parents did not know where to start to meet their needs. Some of them lacked the confidence to do many things. Therefore, it was the role of ambassadors to guide and encourage parents to take a first step and begin to take actions by themselves. After making a plan, parents started to take actions toward their goals. According to parents, having an ambassador was motivating and helped parents when they took action as part of this process. One parent mentioned that she was able to talk freely to the ambassadors about challenges that she faced in improving her Dutch. She wanted to find an intensive speaking course and she was able to register for one after discussing the available opportunities. She also mentioned that the ambassador encouraged her to register by herself but the ambassador guided her and make sure that she completed every step. As they began to take action, the majority of parents mentioned that they worked within a group to fulfil their needs, as mentioned by one of the mothers.

*“When I talk with my group about the problem that I had with my neighbour, I realize that he might not be racist as I thought, but it might be my behavior that he didn’t accept as it was annoying.” (Parent, 41 years old)*

This quotation shows the importance of bringing parents into the group. In this setting, parents could share their stories, describe what they have been through, and explore how they dealt with the obstacles they faced. Moreover, parents were able to express how they felt (e.g., crying, laughing, or making a joke about their own behavior). Parents in the group felt they could discuss different points or experiences and share ideas and information without any judgments. This allowed parents to empower each other.

All parents were asked to reflect about themselves after taking action. This reflection related to questions of whether their actions were working toward or had already met their needs, how they felt about the actions they’d taken, what they saw as next steps. The ambassadors believed that this reflection process would help parents to evaluate themselves and would give them a sense of accomplishment, making them feel more confident and valuable.

After these initial actions, most of the parents reported feeling that they were more confident in creating a plan and taking future action by themselves. They attributed this to encouragement from the ambassadors and from other parents within the IMC community. Some parents felt they still needed support, but had gained a clear view of what they should do. As their confidence grew, most parents felt motivated to share their experience in the IMC program with others. One parent stated that she learned a lot during one of the IMC workshops and she wanted to share her experience and learning with her friends and neighbors. Indeed, some of the parents felt so motivated that they decided to become ambassadors themselves. They believed this program made a difference in their lives and they wanted to support other parents as well.

### **Successful and Unsuccessful Program Elements**

Both parents and ambassadors believed that the method of the IMC program was its strong point. The method started with contacting parents in different ways, which, according to parents, was an excellent way to start. It targeted all of the parents' needs, especially those who recently arrived in the Netherlands. Furthermore, it allowed parents to bring their ideas, initiatives, and their own ways of implementation, as stated by one of the parents.

*“We were the ones who do the event and inviting other people. We try to figure out what our real needs and to make the different workshop, presentation, and we also invite more parents to come.” (Parent, 52 years old)*

The ambassadors were another program feature that many parents mentioned as a strength. The program ambassadors made them feel supported and motivated. One of the parents mentioned that the ambassadors always encourage her to work on her personal needs and she felt positive energy because if she achieved something, the ambassador gave her a sincere compliment, which motivated her to do many things. Parents also expressed satisfaction with the ambassadors' role in managing group discussions and giving every group member the opportunity to express themselves.

All parents cited the group discussions as another successful program element, noting that these created a safe environment for them to talk freely without judgments. They were able to express themselves and to share with others. One parent mentioned that she still has personal

contact with the ambassadors, but that she also likes to have discussions within a group. She mentioned that this allowed her to get new ideas from others.

Another program element viewed as successful was that this program, its approach, and its mechanism of operation, was founded and initiated by a person from the same target group, an immigrant mother herself, who held a master's degree in educational management and had wide experience in the education sector. Due to her own experience, she was more aware of the cultural sensitivity required for this work and was therefore prepared for it.

The majority of parents stated that they were exposed to a variety of activities as part of the IMC program. These included professional activities led by experts, group discussion activities, and individual activities.

Some of the parents noted observing effective cooperation between IMC and Ithaka, and viewed that as a successful element of this program. According to parents, the school always took their suggestions or ideas seriously. One of the ambassadors mentioned that she could speak freely with the principal about her ideas and that she felt she had his full support. When IMC arranged an activity, the school allowed the team to come to school to inform students about the activity, so they could pass the information on to their parents.

Regarding the unsuccessful elements of this program, one of the mothers stated that she was satisfied with the group method; it widened her network, especially in the education and parenting field. However, it did not widen her network on her career path. She felt that she was unable to contact people who could help her find work, because her background is in the legal sector, rather than in the education and social sector that the IMC program focuses on.

### **Experiences after Involvement in the IMC Program**

Based on the interview data, the parents identified many differences after joining the IMC program. In general, parents felt empowered; they regained their self-efficacy by gaining a broader network and obtaining more information related to their areas of need.

*“I felt free to talk with school’s teacher, principal or whomever to talk at school. For example, when school wrote advice for my child about where to go after this. At first, I did not know what does this mean, where does my child can work after this level, which high level of study does my*

*child can go. So throughout the different activities of IMC, I had more awareness with the differences in the educational system, about how it goes at the class, about how I can communicate with teachers or experts and additionally throughout the different psychological session I learned about my child and how to communicate to them.” (Parent, 41 years old)*

According to the parents, these networks became their support system and exposed them to new ideas and different perspectives. Furthermore, some parents stated that they were able to create their community from the relationships they built with other parents. One volunteer parent ambassador mentioned that she successfully established a parent group and implemented many activities at school and in her neighborhood. As a result, she is now viewed as a leader within her municipality. She recognized this achievement as a stepping stone for her.

Related to differences in the way parents supported their children, all parents reported that their relationships with their children were improving, as compared to when they started the IMC program. One of the parents mentioned that she created an open relationship with her daughter, where she allowed her daughter to express herself and talk freely about anything. Another parent confirmed this and stated that she also could communicate better with her daughter and became more understanding, especially when they discussed the cultural differences they experienced. She had built greater skill in explaining these issues to her daughter. Another parent mentioned that he could support his daughter academically by being able to mentor her on what she needs to do to be accepted into the school of her choice after graduating from Ithaca. He mentioned that he helped her with homework and school projects and that he cooperated with a mentor from school, discussing and creating plans for his daughter.

In addition to feeling more confident in supporting their children, parents reported feeling more in control and more optimistic in the area of employment opportunities. They were aware that there were some steps they would need to take to become competitive in finding work. However, they believed that there was a future for them in this country, and that the opportunity still existed for them to get a permanent job. They believed that the opportunities provided by the IMC program to increase their soft skills (e.g., communication, planning, organizing) and hard skills (e.g., computer skill) would increase their chances to find jobs.



*“I have to admit that IMC helped a lot having this job. During the interview I talked about nothing but my role as an ambassador by IMC, the interviewers were amused with this experience and I was accepted for this job.” (Parent, 41 years old)*

Parents also mentioned increasing their competence in the Dutch language. One of the parents stated that the IMC program staff trusted that she is capable of achieving her goals and gave her a safe zone to practice and learn. For example, she was required to implement the presentations she gives on behalf of IMC in the Dutch language. She said this helped her greatly, by requiring her to increase her dictionary skills and practice the language.

One parent mentioned learning to accept others as another valuable program experience. She mentioned that she had never met a lesbian mother, and that she was totally against homosexuality, but that a lesbian mother joined one of the meetings and the whole group was discussing how to overcome the problem of children misusing the internet. She said it was a very warm and fruitful discussion and from it she learned that people are all the same and that they can live together simply.

The ambassadors observed that after the IMC program, some parents who usually stayed at home and avoided making contact with other people became more likely to go out and engage in activities beyond their homes, indicating that these parents were no longer isolated. They mentioned that some parents appeared more confident to do simple things such as starting a conversation and talking with people around them.

### **Suggestions for Program Improvement**

Parents and ambassadors identified several suggestions and recommendations for improving the IMC program. The most frequently-mentioned suggestion was related to increasing the diversity of ambassadors for the purpose of targeting more parents from different nationalities. One parent mentioned that having ambassadors who speak another languages in addition to Dutch, Arabic, or English could allow the program to reach more parents who only speak their native language. For example, if one of the ambassadors could speak Tigrinya or Farsi, it would be easier to reach more Eritrean and Pakistani parents.

Some parents saw a need to include more paid staff within the internal organization of IMC, as the current organization includes only one paid staff member with the remainder working as volunteers. One of the parents stated the following:

*“A volunteer is a person who is looking for the opportunity and will not give a 100% effort to the work itself even if he believes in it, and whenever this person got a paid job, they are going to leave immediately because everyone seeks for a paid job. It is like IMC training people, and they will leave as soon as they get the new opportunity.” (Parent, 40 years old)*

### **Discussion**

The current research documented and analyzed parents’ and ambassadors’ experiences regarding the empowerment process in order to evaluate the IMC program. The study identified successful and unsuccessful elements that contributed to the program. It became evident that the method of IMC, the role of ambassadors within the program, and the opportunity to work in groups were aspects that successfully support this program. However, interview data indicated that this program doesn’t expand parents’ networks outside the education and social sector.

The participants in this study expressed that the method of IMC was the most successful element of the program. In general, the method allowed parents the freedom to decide what they want to achieve based on personal needs and how they want to implement their own goals. Therefore, it expanded the parents’ opportunities to gain mastery over issues concerning themselves (Rappaport, 1987). Also, this program aligned with the adult learning process and emphasized more self-directed learning, which gave learners space to take control over the design, implementation, and evaluation of their learning process (Brookfield, 1993).

Possessing this flexibility in organizing their own actions allowed parents to manage their own time, identify their own needs, and work with others who had common goals (Sue & Zane, 1980). Allowing parents to make decisions about their lives can develop their ability in the areas of decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership skills (Zimmerman, 1995). Further, it enhances parents’ experience of elements of psychological empowerment, such as mastery and control over their environment (Zimmerman, 1990).

The IMC program also places importance on building parents’ trust. According to Elliott and Yusuf (2014), building trust among refugees is a challenge because of what they have

experienced in the past. It is confirmed by the evidence that some parents more easily trust others, while some need more time to build their trust to people. The IMC program strives to build not only participants' ability to trust other people, but also their ability to trust themselves. Parents need to develop these qualities in order to become more aware of resources that may be valuable in developing themselves, becoming more confident, and evolving their roles within their own families (Shepard & Rose, 1995).

Zimmerman (2002) noted that self-evaluation can enhance one's self-efficacy, and parents in this program are encouraged to engage in self-reflection regarding their accomplishments for that purpose. With reflection, parents evaluate their own performance while taking particular actions toward their goals. They reflect on how they feel after conducting an action and compare this to how they felt before. In this phase, parents are also encouraged to appreciate to their own efforts and accomplishments. These experiences are supported by previous research from Zimmerman (2002) related to self-evaluation, which addresses self-observation about one's performance in attaining a task. Therefore, this activity is intended to create a feeling of satisfaction and positive affect among parents regarding their performance.

Ambassadors play a significant role in the success of the IMC program. The ambassador role offers a personal approach to motivate, stimulate, and encourage parents in targeting their needs. This aspect of learning is very important to the adult learning process, as stated by Vella (1994) "participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned." The ambassadors' input gave space for parents to engage in their own learning process and receive individual attention. The ambassadors also motivated parents by encouraging them to achieve their goals. According to Zimmerman (2000), environmental supports, such as praise from other people, will increase people's feelings of self-efficacy.

Parents identified the opportunity to work in groups as another successful element of the program. According to Rappaport (1987), natural community settings can increase people's ability to mutually help each other. The majority of parent respondents mentioned sometimes feeling isolated because they could not interact with others. The group work method within this program enables parents to meet other people, often people who have similar experiences (e.g., refugees) or came from similar cultures (e.g., Arabic countries). Therefore, the work group approach enabled parents to increase social capital, especially in bonding, giving space for

parents to freely communicate what they felt, to exchange perspectives, and to learn from each others' experiences. According to Putnam (2000), bonding can be described as a condition where people socialize with others of the same race, religion, age, or other characteristics. Previous research demonstrated bonding can be a source of support and hope for parents, providing them with internal strength derived from a common history, language, goals, and cultural features (Hussain & Bhushan, 2010). In the IMC program, bonding occurred during the activities that parents engaged in together. Group activities also helped parents gain new skills through direct experience with others; they learned by observing how other parents handled certain issues. This is consistent with Bandura's (1982) research into modeling behavior, which demonstrated that people learn new behaviors by observing others.

The IMC program's group work also enabled parents to meet people from various cultural backgrounds, which helped them integrate into the new society. For example, parents had the opportunity to connect with Dutch people who could help them practice Dutch, or with experts in the parenting field. According to Putnam (2000), bridging is related to making connections with people who different than oneself. Some IMC parents had no previous experience in living with people of different cultures, habits, and values. Thus, by meeting people in their group activities, they became more aware of and gained more understanding of diversity. Consequently, these parents expanded their understandings of community, values, and environment in their surroundings (Zimmerman, 1995). Expanding parents' networks also led them to recognize the valuable support available around them. For example, if they wanted to know more about how to handle phone addiction, they knew an expert they could contact to ask about the issue. Through social networks, a parent can gain access to resources and greater opportunities to collaborate (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). Having an understanding of community issues and becoming aware of the choices that one has is crucial to the interactional component of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995).

In examining the logic model of the IMC program (see Appendix A), it becomes clearer that the IMC method was designed to target parents' individual needs by giving them the control to initiate and carry out their own action plans. By offering the flexibility for parents to plan and organize their own actions, the IMC program demonstrated an awareness of the cultural diversity among parents and emphasized their personal preferences. This was intended to create among

participating parents the feeling of being understood, valued, respected, and included. The group work activities within the program increased parents' social capital, provided them with a support system, increased their sense of belonging in the community, and helped them gain the knowledge, skills, and experience to integrate into the new society.

The current study design presented several limitations which need to be taken into account in analyzing the data. One was that phone interviews, rather than face-to-face interviews, were conducted with the parents who were not interested in participating in the program. Thus, there is the possibility that the data is less complete for that specific group of parents. Another limitation arose from the fact that the majority of respondents were from Syria, because parents from Arabic countries comprise the main target group of this program and its main group of active participants. Therefore, this research primarily addressed the perspectives of a specific cultural group in evaluating the program. This could be viewed as a strength of the study, since the results offer a variety of perspectives from interview subjects within a particular cultural group who did and did not participate in the program. To enhance the quality of this thesis, the researcher obtained reviews of its content from two individuals with educational backgrounds. One reviewer suggested conducting research that studies the implementation of the IMC program with parents from different cultural backgrounds, including parents from Eritrea, Afghanistan, and other countries, in order to determine the program's effectiveness across cultures. Further research can also focus on studying outcomes among children whose parents are involved in the IMC program.

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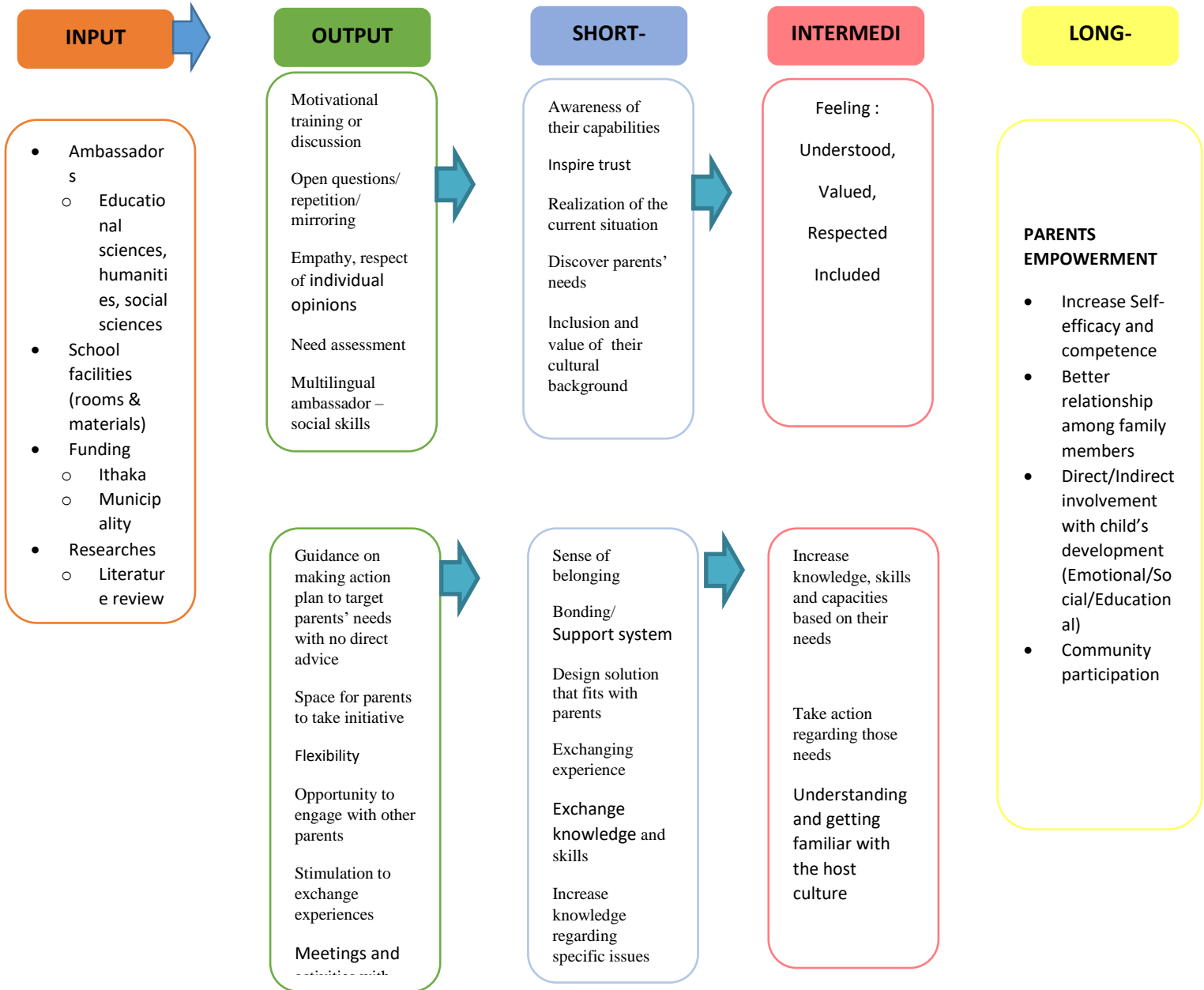
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# Appendixes

## Appendix A



## Appendix B

### LIST OF QUESTIONS

#### Parents who are involve

Topic	Questions
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How long have you been here?</li><li>• How many children do you have?</li><li>• In what level of education? (where do they go to school?)</li><li>• Could you please tell me about your experience in adjusting with new society?</li><li>• <b>(PE)</b> How this experience influence yourself?</li><li>• How this experience influence relationship with your family?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> How do you support your child regularly? examples</li><li>• How does that feel?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> Talking in scoop of education, in what ways did you involve in your child education in your home country? (in what ways you used to help your child with the school)</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> What about current conditions?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> Did you face any challenges in supporting your child academically?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> Does the school gives you opportunity to involve with your child education/development?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> In what ways?</li><li>• <b>(PI)</b> How do you feel about it?</li></ul>
Transtheoretical model; stages of change (intervention)	<u>Stage 1: Precontemplation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can you tell me how you got into the program?</li><li>• (the way ambassador approach you)</li></ul>

- What motivated you to set up the meeting?
- How was your experience in the first meeting with the ambassador?
- What did you discuss?
- How did you feel after the first meeting?
- What happened after that?

#### Stage 2: Contemplation

- Did the program help you identify your current needs?
- In what ways are this program help you to identify your current needs?
- **(PE)** Do you feel that you are able to take a step after that?
- **(PE)**Why?

#### Stage 3: Preparation

- How did you start to take the step?
- With whom?
- **(PE)** Did you feel that you have enough resource to support your action?
- **(PE)** What kind of resources?
- Could you please describe me the steps that you follow in making solution
- How did you feel doing it? (helpful/not)
- **(PE)** What are the benefits?/ how did that impact you? (for yourself, in network towards other parents, relationship with school)

	<p><u>Stage 4: Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it feel to take an initiative? (easy or not)</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> How do you feel after taking action? (satisfaction)</li> <li>• Was it useful or not?</li> <li>• In what ways? Examples</li> <li>• Did it fulfill your needs?</li> <li>• Did you find any challenges?</li> <li>• What challenges?</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> Did you get any support in implementing your action?</li> <li>• From whom?</li> <li>• Tell me your feelings about it</li> </ul> <p><u>Stage 5: Maintenance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> After all the process, do you feel comfortable to make a plan by yourself?</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> Do you feel comfortable to take an action by yourself?</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> What makes you comfortable/not?</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> Do you feel that you have enough network in order to adapt in new society?</li> <li>• Give example of your network</li> <li>• How does this network help you?</li> <li>• <b>(PE)</b> What do you think about sharing experience to others?</li> </ul>
<p>General questions</p>	<p><u>General Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about IMC program as a whole?</li> <li>• How do you think this program helped you?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you like the most about this program?</li> <li>• What did you like the least about this program?</li> <li>• What are your suggestion to make it even more better?</li> </ul>
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### **Parents who quit the program**

(For those who joined but did not continue I'm planning to ask the same questions with 'the parents who is still participating in the program' until they mentioned about not participate or follow the program anymore and the ask the additional questions below

Additional Questions:

- Can you please share the reason why you decided to not participate with this program anymore?
- What suggestion do you have to overcome this issues that you have? Why?

### **Parents who are not participate**

- Can you tell me how was it like to being contacted by the program?
- What do you think about the person who approached you (the way ambassador approach you)
- Did you set up meeting with the ambassador?  
If YES
- What motivated you to set up the meeting?
- What did you discuss?
- How was your experience in the first meeting with the ambassador?
- How did you feel after the first meeting?
- What happened after that?
- What makes you did not interest to join this program?
- From that, what do you suggest to make it even better?

If NOT

- What makes you not interested to set up the meeting?
- From that, what do you suggest to make it even better?