

Language Barriers, Emotional Well-Being, and Cultural Retention in Immigrant Nepalese Families in the UK: A Mixed-Methods Study

Mina Sharma 

Independent Researcher, London, UK

Email: minasharma122@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper investigates the communication challenges and cultural retention within immigrant Nepalese families in the UK, focusing on the language barriers between Nepal-born parents and their UK-born children. Through a mixed-methods approach, including a survey of 30 participants and in-depth interviews with five families, the study reveals that language barriers significantly contribute to emotional gaps and family conflicts. The findings highlight the importance of bilingualism for cognitive development and cultural retention, with families expressing regret over the loss of their native language. The study applies acculturation theory and communication accommodation theory to understand these challenges and suggests strategies to improve language and cultural retention in immigrant families.

Keywords

Language Barriers, Immigrant Families, Bilingualism, Cultural Heritage, Emotional Well-Being, Intra-Family Communication

1. Introduction

Migration and the subsequent settlement in a foreign land present myriad challenges for immigrant families, especially concerning the retention of cultural and linguistic heritage. In the case of Nepalese immigrant families living in Southeast London, the challenges presented by language barriers are notably pronounced. Having observed these communication difficulties firsthand during family gatherings and cultural programs, I recognized the need to explore this issue further. This realization guided me to select Southeast London as the focus of my research. Through surveys and in-depth interviews with various Nepalese families, I pointed to understand the emotional and psychological impact of language barriers and

how these barriers affect cultural retention and parent-child relationships. Historically, the presence of Nepalese families in the UK has been largely shaped by the settlement of Gurkha soldiers and their families. The Gurkhas, recognized for their courage and loyalty, have been an essential part of the British Army for over two centuries. Following changes in immigration policies, many Gurkha soldiers, alongside high-skilled workers, students, and their families, have made the UK their home. Despite this long-standing presence, the Nepalese community faces significant obstacles in preserving their native language and cultural practices, particularly within the family unit.

One of the key factors contributing to this challenge is the work pattern of Nepalese families in the UK. Many households operate on a work rotation system, where one parent works while other stays at home to care for the children. This arrangement, while necessary for financial stability, often results in limited family time, particularly time dedicated to teaching and reinforcing the native language at home. Children, in their formative years, may begin to learn and use the Nepalese language, but as they start school and become more integrated into the English-speaking environment, a gradual shift occurs. English, being the primary language of instruction and communication in schools, becomes the dominant language for these children, leading to the destruction of their native language skills.

The influence of the school environment is further compounded by the broader community and public spaces, where English is predominantly spoken. As a result, children from Nepalese families often find themselves navigating between two languages—Nepali at home and English in the public sphere. However, without consistent reinforcement of the native language, the balance tilts heavily in favour of English, leading to a decline in the use of Nepali. This linguistic shift is not just a matter of language preference; it has profound implications for the cultural identity and emotional connections within the family.

Previous research has highlighted that language is a crucial vehicle for cultural retention and emotional bonding within immigrant families. The loss of a native language can create a sense of disconnection, not only from one's cultural heritage but also within the family unit. In the Nepalese community, where language is deeply intertwined with cultural practices, rituals, and religious traditions, this disconnection can be particularly stark. For instance, the ability to perform religious rituals in the native language is seen as essential for maintaining cultural continuity. However, as children lose proficiency in Nepali, the transmission of these cultural practices becomes increasingly difficult, leading to a potential cultural gap between generations.

When celebrating cultural customs and rituals, children often ask questions like why we celebrate them and what the benefits of these customs are. These traditions have been passed down from generation to generation, and while there may not be a scientific explanation for every festival, they hold deep cultural significance. Growing up in a multicultural society, children naturally compare their customs with those of others. This curiosity isn't unique to the Nepalese community; new generations across all communities are asking similar questions because schools

typically don't teach about their parents' festivals. Immigrant families face the unique challenge of helping their children learn both the customs of the host country and their ancestral traditions. However, language barriers between generations can make it difficult to pass down these customs and cultural practices effectively. Certainly, when parents are unable to teach their native language, it becomes difficult to pass down culture, customs, and traditions to the new generation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Dynamics in Immigrant Families

Language dynamics within immigrant families are often characterized by a complex negotiation between the retention of the native language and the adoption of the host country's language. Scholars such as Fillmore (2000) have argued that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a critical medium for transmitting cultural values, traditions, and collective memory. In immigrant families, this transmission is often disrupted as children, who are more exposed to the host country's language through education and social interactions, gradually lose proficiency in their native language (Portes & Schauffler, 1994). This phenomenon, known as language shift, has significant implications for family cohesion and cultural continuity (Fishman, 1991).

In the context of Nepalese families in the UK, the language shift is hindered by the lack of formal support for the native language. Nepalese families often rely on informal means, such as family gatherings and religious events, to maintain their native language (Pease-Alvarez, 2002). However, these efforts are often insufficient to counterbalance the dominance of English in the children's lives. As a result, many Nepalese children in the UK develop a stronger proficiency in English, leading to a linguistic and cultural gap between them and their parents. Research shows that language proficiency plays a significant role in family communication within immigrant families. When parents and children do not share a common language fluency, it can lead to emotional gaps and misunderstanding.

The concept of "Shared Language Erosion: Rethinking Immigrant Family Communication and Impacts on Youth Development," for example, describes the loss of a common language between immigrant parents and their children as the children adopt the host country's language, leading to family conflict, weakened emotional bonds, and feeling of isolation in both parents and children (Cox et al., 2021). This erosion often results in emotional challenges, as parents struggle to express themselves and pass on their cultural values, while children feel disconnected from their heritage. Bilingualism is often perceived as a bridge to maintaining cultural heritage while adapting to a new environment. Studies on "Parental perceptions of bilingualism and home language vocabulary: Young bilingual children from low-income immigrant Mexican American and Chinese American families", for example, highlight that maintaining a home language can foster cultural identity and emotional closeness within families. Bilingualism not only strengthens family ties but also enhances cognitive and social development, which can lead to better outcomes in terms of cultural retention and emotional well-being

(Mak et al., 2023). However, many immigrant families face challenges as children become more proficient in the dominant language, and parents struggle to maintain their native language at home. This tension can exacerbate generational gaps, with children feeling pressured to assimilate while parents emphasize the importance of cultural preservation. To address these challenges, families often employ a range of strategies such as engaging in cultural programs, storytelling, and encouraging the use of the native language at home. Some also participate in native language classes or cultural activities to foster a connection to their heritage.

2.2. Acculturation and Bilingualism

Acculturation theory, as proposed by Berry (1997), provides a useful framework for understanding the linguistic and cultural adjustments that immigrant families must navigate. Acculturation involves a process of balancing the retention of the original culture and language with the adoption of the host country's culture and language. Berry (1997) identifies four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Among these, integration, which involves maintaining one's original culture while also participating in the host society, is often seen as the most adaptive strategy for immigrant families.

Bilingualism is a key component of the integration strategy, as it allows immigrant children to maintain their cultural heritage while also succeeding in the host society. Research has shown that bilingualism offers cognitive advantages, such as enhanced executive functioning and problem-solving skills, as well as social benefits, including better cross-cultural understanding and communication (Bialystok, 2001). However, achieving bilingualism in immigrant families is often challenging, particularly when there is a lack of institutional support for the native language (Schwartz et al., 2010).

In the case of Nepalese families in the UK, the challenges of achieving bilingualism are compounded by the parent's busy work schedules, which leave them with limited time to engage in language teaching. Furthermore, the children's preference for English, reinforced by their schooling and social interactions, often leads to a gradual loss of their native language skills. This loss is particularly evident in the use of idioms and cultural references, which are often lost in translation and contribute to misunderstandings between parents and children.

2.3. Language as a Cultural Emotional Connector

Language is not only a means of communication but also a vehicle for expressing emotions, building relationships, and establishing cultural identity. In immigrant families, the native language serves as a link to cultural heritage, connecting children to their roots and providing a sense of belonging. However, when children lose proficiency in their native language, this connection is weakened, leading to a sense of alienation from their cultural heritage (Fishman, 1991).

Moreover, the use of language in cultural and religious practices is crucial for the transmission of values and traditions. For example, in Nepalese families, the native language is often used during religious rituals and festivals, where specific idioms

and cultural references play a significant role in conveying meaning. When children are unable to understand these idioms, the cultural and emotional significance of these practices is diminished, leading to a disconnection from their cultural roots.

In addition to its cultural significance, language is also a key component of emotional communication within families. The ability to express emotions in one's native language is often more nuanced and authentic, as it allows for the use of idioms, slang, and cultural references that are deeply embedded in the language. When children lose proficiency in their native language, this emotional communication is disrupted, leading to misunderstanding and emotional distance between parents and children (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000).

2.4. Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Giles et al. (1991), offers a framework for understanding how individuals adjust their communication styles in response to linguistic and cultural differences. According to CAT, individuals modify their speech patterns to either converge or diverge from their interlocutors' language use, depending on the desired social outcome. In the context of immigrant families, adaptation might involve parents learning the host country's language to better communicate with their children, while resistance might involve children preferring on using their native language to maintain their cultural identity.

However, the effectiveness of these accommodations depends on the extent to which both parties are willing and able to adjust their communication styles. In many immigrant families, the accommodations made by parents and children are often partial and inconsistent, leading to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings (Giles & Ogay, 2007). For example, parents may attempt to learn English from their children, but their proficiency may remain limited, leading to frustration and conflict when they are unable to fully understand their children's speech. Similarly, children may use a mix of English and their native language when communicating with their parents, but the lack of fluency in the native language may result in the loss of cultural complexities and idiomatic expressions.

CAT also highlights the role of social identity in shaping communication patterns. For children of immigrant families, the use of the host country's language may be associated with social integration and acceptance, while the use of the native language may be linked to cultural pride and identity. These conflicting motivations can create tension within families, as children may feel pressured to conform to the dominant language and culture, while parents may feel a sense of loss and alienation as their children drift away from their cultural roots (Giles et al., 1977).

Research Questions:

- 1) What are the communication challenges faced by immigrant Nepalese families in England?
- 2) How do language barriers affect family dynamics and emotional connections?
- 3) What strategies can families use to overcome language barriers, and how can language and cultural retention be improved in immigrant families?

Hypothesis:

- 1) Language barriers significantly contribute to emotional gaps and family conflicts in immigrant Nepalese families.
- 2) Bilingualism is perceived as beneficial for cognitive development and cultural retention, but achieving it is challenging without formal support.
- 3) Families that engage in cultural practices and native language use experience stronger emotional connections and reduced conflicts.

3. Methodology**3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to explore the communication challenges and cultural retention strategies in immigrant Nepalese families in the UK. The research includes a survey distributed to 50 individuals, with 30 responses received, and in-depth interviews conducted with five families. This combination of methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the language dynamics within these families, capturing both the breadth of experiences through the survey and depth of individual family dynamics through interviews.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study include Nepal-born parents and their UK-born children from immigrant Nepalese families residing in the UK. The survey involved 30 participants, selected through convenience sampling, while the in-depth interviews included five families, selected based on their willingness to participate and the diversity of their language use. The families varied in terms of the children's language proficiency, with some children speaking both Nepali and English, while others spoke only English.

3.3. Data Collection**Survey**

In the survey, a total of 30 participants were involved, consisting of 10 males and 20 females. The participants' ages ranged from 30 to 55 years old, with their length of residency in the UK varying from 8 to 20 years.

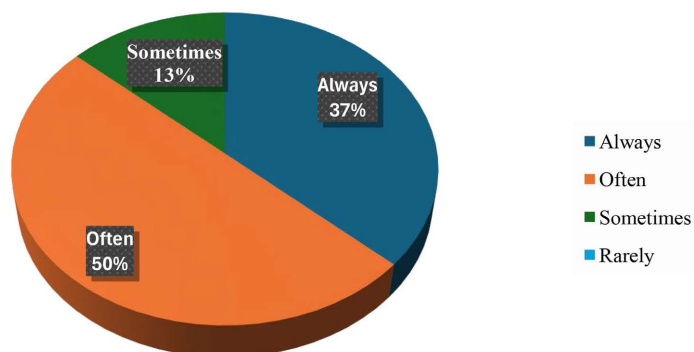
The survey comprised of 23 closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were designed to assess language use, cultural practices, perceptions of language barriers, and strategies used to overcome these barriers. Questions were structured to capture the frequency and context of language use, the importance of cultural practices, and the perceived impact of language barriers on family dynamics.

The open-ended questions asked respondents to describe the strategies they use to overcome language barriers within their family and to suggest ways to improve language and cultural retention in immigrant families. These questions provided qualitative insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives, complementing the quantitative data from the closed-ended questions.

Quantitative techniques were employed in Excel to present and analyse the data. The quantitative data were examined across different themes, with all analysed data presented thematically based on the study's purpose. Some of the research methods are also explained in this research. All participants completed the questions.

Question 1: Language Use for Daily Conversations

1. Native language use at home

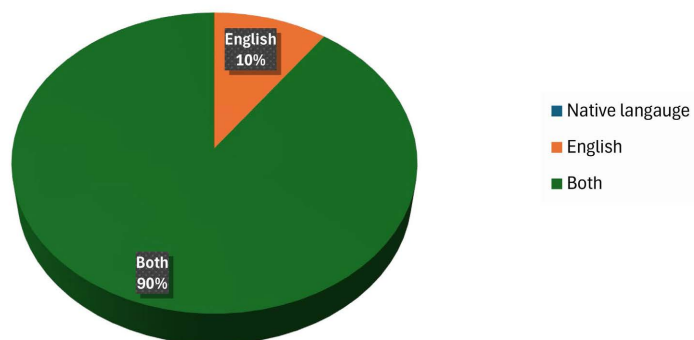


The bar chart illustrates the frequency with which participants use their native language in daily conversations at home. According to the survey:

- **50% of participants** reported that they “Often” use their native language at home, indicating that half of the respondents maintain regular use of their native language in their daily interactions.
- **37% of participants** expressed that they “Always” use their native language, demonstrating a strong commitment to preserving their linguistic heritage within the household.
- **13% of participants** indicated that they “Sometimes” use their native language at home, suggesting that their usage is less consistent, possibly due to the influence of English or other factors.
- No participants selected the “Rarely” option, which shows that all respondents use their native language to some extent at home.

Question 2: Language Use for Daily Activities

2. Language use for daily activities

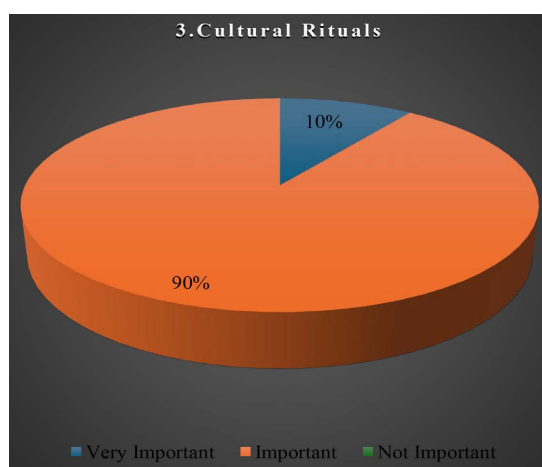


The survey results reveal the language preferences of participants when performing daily activities such as shopping, communicating, and using public

services. The findings indicate:

- **90% of participants** reported that they use both English and their native language for daily activities. This suggests a high level of bilingualism among the respondents, where they switch between languages depending on the context or need. This could reflect a flexible adaption to the linguistic demands of living in the UK, where both languages are used interchangeably to navigate different situations.
- **10% of participants** indicated that they use only English for daily activities. This minority likely represents individuals who are either more integrated into the English-speaking environment or who find it more convenient to use English exclusively in public and social contexts.
- **0% of participants** reported using only their native language for daily activities. This result underscores the dominance of English in public and everyday life in the UK, making it essential for effective communication and interaction in such environments.

Question 3: Perform Religious Rituals

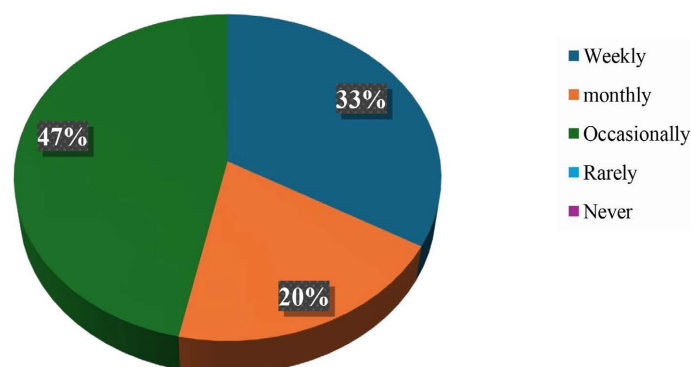


The survey results provide insights into how important it is for participants to perform religious rituals in their native language. The findings indicate:

- **90% of participants** acknowledged that it is “important” to perform religious rituals in their native language. This overwhelming majority highlights the significant role that the native language plays in religious and cultural practices. For these participants, using their native language during rituals likely enhances the spiritual experience and maintains a strong connection to their cultural heritage.
- **10% of participants** reported that it is “Very important” to perform religious rituals in their native language. This group feels even stronger to their native language in the context of religious practices, viewing it as essential for preserving the authenticity and meaning of these rituals.
- **0% of participants** indicated that performing religiously in their native language is “Not Important.” This absence suggests a universal recognition among the respondents of the importance of using their native language in maintaining cultural and religious traditions.

Question 4: Attend Religious Program

4. Attend religious services



The survey results reveal how frequently participants attend religious services conducted in their native language. The findings indicate varying levels of participation:

- **33% of participants** reported attending religious services in their native language on a “Weekly” basis. This group demonstrates a strong commitment to regularly engaging with their religious community and practices in their native language, likely reflecting a deep connection to their cultural and spiritual roots.

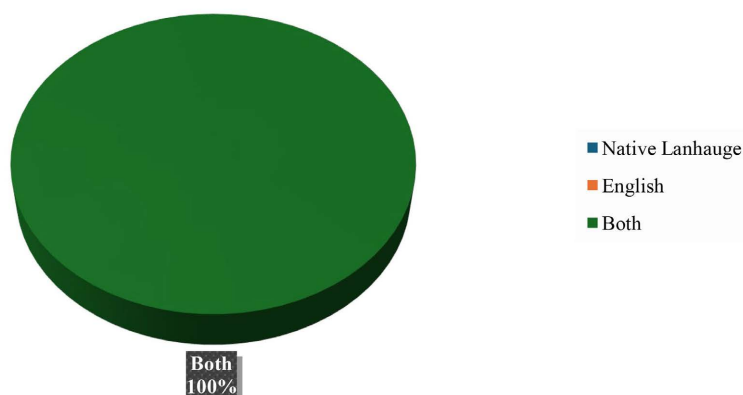
- **20% of participants** attend religious services “Monthly”. These individuals still maintain a connection to their native language in religious setting, though with less frequent attendance, possibly due to other commitments or fewer available services.

- **47% of participants** attend “Occasionally”. This suggests that nearly half of the respondents participate in religious services in their native language but on an irregular basis. This group may attend special religious events or ceremonies rather than regular services, indicating a more flexible or situational engagement with their native language in a religious context.

- **0% of participants** reported “Rarely” or “Never” attending religious services in their native language. This absence indicates that all respondents participate in such services to some extent, reaffirming the importance of their native language in maintaining their religion and culture.

Question 5: Language Use during Families Gathering

5. Language use during families gathering



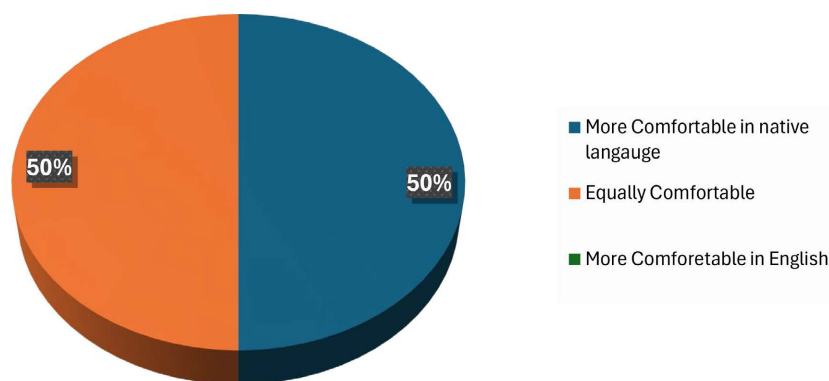
The survey results indicate that during family gathering, **100% of participants** reported speaking both their native language and English. This unanimous response suggests that bilingualism is a common practice during family interactions.

Using both languages during family gatherings likely serves multiple purposes. It allows older family members to maintain their cultural and linguistic heritage through the native language, while also enabling younger generations to communicate comfortably in English. This blending of languages may also facilitate more inclusive conversations, ensuring that all family members, regardless of their language proficiency, can participate fully in the gatherings.

The use of both languages during family gatherings reflects the dual identity that many immigrants' families experience. It demonstrates a commitment to preserving their cultural roots while also adapting to the linguistic norms of their host country. This bilingual approach likely strengthens family bonds by bridging generational and cultural gaps, allowing for meaningful and connected interactions.

Question 6: Feel Easy Emotional Expression

6. Emotion expressing language



The survey reveals that when it comes to emotional expression, participants are evenly split between their preferences for language use:

- **50% of participants** reported feeling more comfortable expressing their emotions in their native language. This suggests that for half of the respondents, their native language is deeply tied to their emotional experiences and cultural identity. It is likely that the nuances, idioms, and expressions in their native language resonate more deeply with them, allowing for a more authentic and meaningful emotional expression.

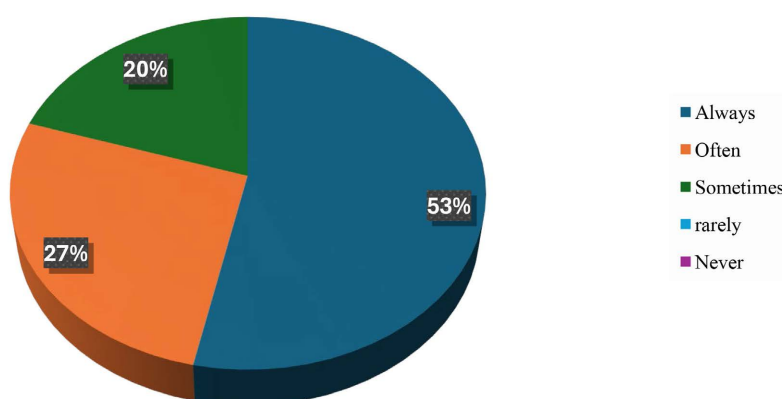
- **50% of participants** indicated that they feel equally comfortable expressing their emotions in both English and their native language. This group demonstrates a high level of bilingual fluency and adaptability. Their ability to express emotions comfortably in both languages suggests that they navigate their bicultural

identity with ease, finding both languages equally effective for conveying their feelings.

These results highlight the diverse linguistic preferences among the participants for emotional expression. This balance reflects the complex and dynamic nature of bilingualism within immigrant families, where language is not just a tool for communication but also a medium for emotional and cultural expression.

Question 7: Parents Communication Language

7. Parents communication language



- **53% of participants** reported that they “Always” speak to their children in their native language. This majority shows a strong commitment to passing down their linguistic heritage to the next generation, likely driven by the desire to maintain cultural identity and ensure that their children remain connected to their roots.

- **27% of participants** confirmed that they “Often” speak to their children in their native language. This group also places importance on using their native language, with some degree of flexibility, perhaps mixing languages depending on the context or situation.

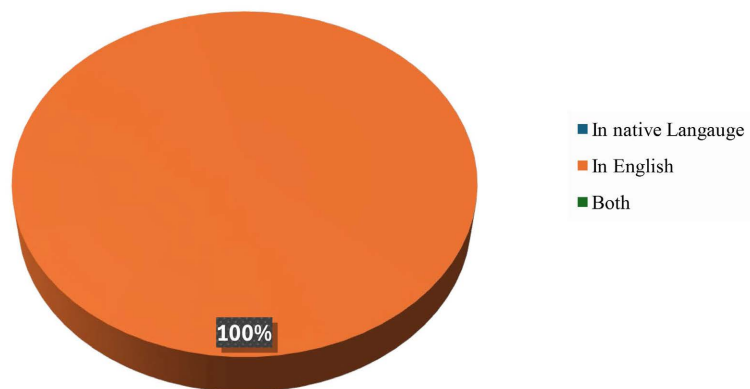
- **20% of participants** indicated that they “Sometimes” speak to their children in their native language. This suggests a more occasional use of the native language, which may reflect the influence of English in their daily lives or the children’s stronger preference for English.

- **0% of participants** reported “Rarely” or “Never” speaking to their children in their native language. This absence underscores the value that all participants place on their native language, with every respondent trying to use it at least some of the time when communicating with their children.

These results highlight a spectrum of language use within families, from those who prioritize native language use to those who mix languages depending on the situation. Overall, the data indicates a strong desire among participants to keep their native language alive within their families, even as they navigate the challenges of bilingualism.

Question 8: Children Communication Language

8. Children communication language



- **100% of children** reply in English when their parents speak to them in their native language. This indicates a strong preference for English among the younger generation, which is likely influenced by their schooling and social environment in the UK.

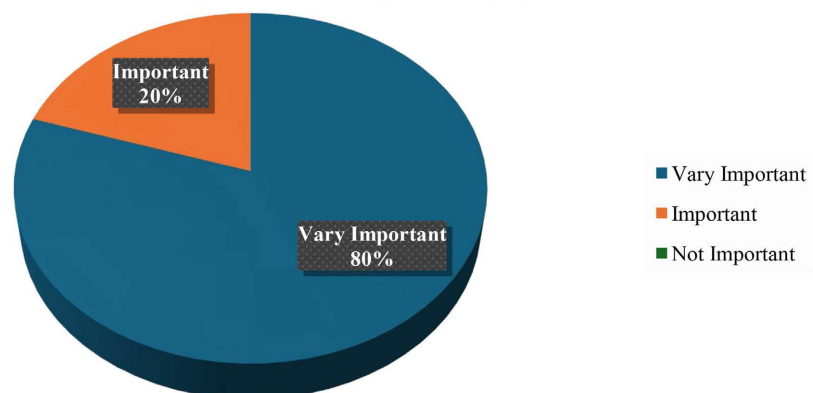
The preference for English among these children suggests that as they started attending school, where English is the primary medium of instruction and interaction, they gradually adopted it as their dominant language. This shift is common in immigrant families, where children often assimilate into the linguistic and cultural norms of their new country, sometimes at the expense of their native language.

As the children become more comfortable with English, they may find it easier and more natural to use it in all aspects of their lives, including at home. This gradual transition away from the native language reflects the challenges immigrant families face in maintaining bilingualism, particularly when the dominant language outside the home is different from the one spoken at home.

This finding underscores the importance of mindful language preservation strategies within immigrant families, such as consistent use of the native language at home, participation in cultural activities, and encouragement from parents to maintain bilingualism. Without such efforts, there is a risk that the native language may be lost over time as children fully integrate into the English-speaking environment.

Question 9: Importance of Learning Native Language

9. Importance of learning native language



The survey results provide insights into how important participants believe it is for their children to learn and use the native language. The findings are as follows:

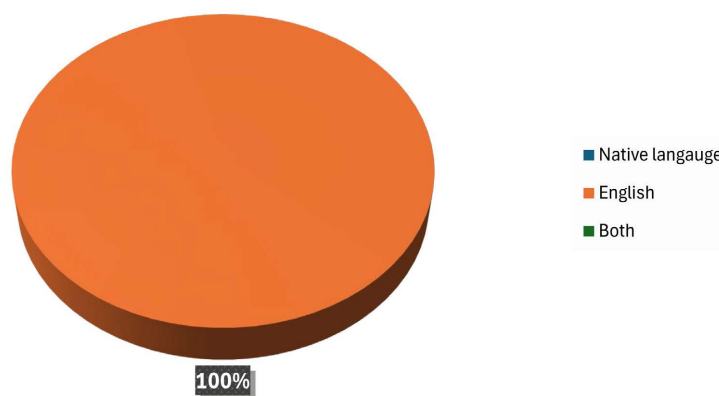
- **80% of participants** consider it “Very Important” for their children to learn and use their native language. This strong majority reflects a deep commitment among parents to preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage. For these participants, teaching their native language to their children is seen as essential for maintaining a connection to their roots, cultural identity, and family traditions.

- **20% of participants** believe it is “Important” for their children to learn and use the native language. While not as strongly emphasized as the previous group, these participants still recognize the value of bilingualism and cultural preservation. They may view the native language as a significant part of their children’s upbringing, though perhaps not as crucial as those in the first group.

- **0% of participants** consider it “Not Important” for their children to learn and use the native language. This indicates a unanimous recognition among all respondents of the importance of the native language in their children’s lives, whether seen as vital or simply important.

Question 10: Sibling Interaction Language

10. Sibling Interaction language



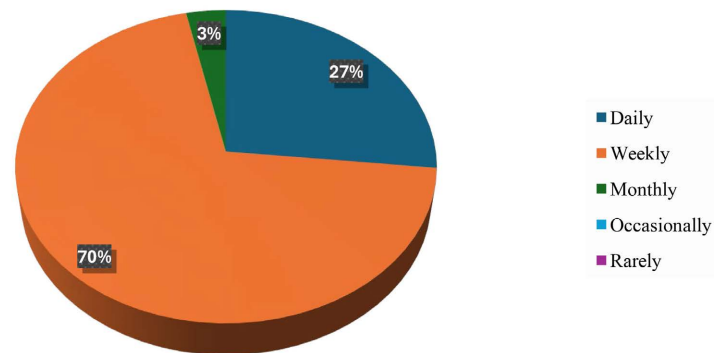
The survey results indicate a clear and predominant language preference among the participants’ children when communicating with each other at home:

- **100% of participants** reported that their children exclusively use English to communicate with each other at home. This finding suggests that English has become the dominant language for intra-family communication among siblings, completely replacing the native language in this context.

This result highlights the challenges immigrant families face in maintaining their native language across generations, particularly when children are more engaged in an English-speaking environment. It highlights the importance of deliberate efforts by parents to encourage the use of the native language at home, not just in interaction with parents but also among sibling, to preserve bilingualism and cultural heritage.

Question 11: Interaction with Same Language Speakers

11. Interaction with same language speakers

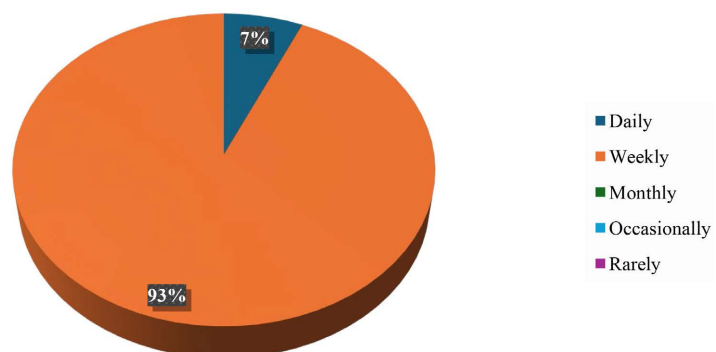


The survey results provide insights into the frequency with which participants interact with other speakers of their native language outside the family. The findings are as follows:

- **27% of participants** reported interacting with same-language speakers on a “Daily” basis. This group likely has strong ties to their cultural community, perhaps through work, social networks, or community activities, allowing them to maintain regular contact with others who speak their native language.
- **70% of participants** interact with same-language speakers “Weekly”. This majority suggests that while they may not engage daily, these participants still maintain a consistent connection with their linguistic community.
- **3% of participants** reported interacting with same-language speakers “Monthly”. This participant maintains a more infrequent connection with their linguistic community, which may be due to fewer opportunities for interaction or other commitments that limit their ability to engage more regularly.
- **0% of participants** indicated “Occasionally” or “Rarely” interacting with same-language speakers. This absence suggests that all respondents have some level of regular interaction with others who speak their native language, underscoring the importance of these connections for cultural and linguistic maintenance.

Question 12: Media Consumption

12. Media Consumption

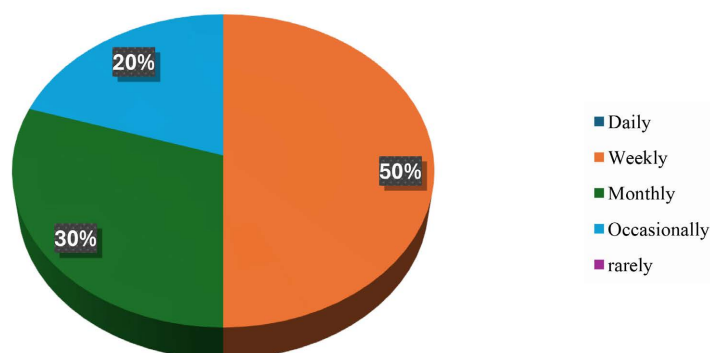


The survey results reveal how frequently participants engage with media content in their native language, such as reading newspapers, listening to songs or hymns, or watching TV shows and movies. The findings are as follows:

- **7% of participants** reported engaging with media in their native language on a “Daily” basis. This small group likely places a high value on staying connected with their cultural roots through regular exposure to native language content.
- **93% of participants** indicated that they engage with native language media on a “Weekly” basis. This overwhelming majority shows that while most participants may not consume native language content daily, they still make it a regular part of their routine. Weekly engagement allows them to stay in touch with their cultural heritage, enjoy entertainment in their native language, and maintain a sense of connection to their linguistic community.
- **0% of participants** reported engaging with native language media on a “Monthly,” “Occasionally,” or “Rarely” basis. This absence suggests that all respondents have made it a priority to interact with their native language through media at least on a weekly basis, highlighting the ongoing importance of these cultural connections in their lives.

Question 13: Cultural Activities

13. Cultural Activities



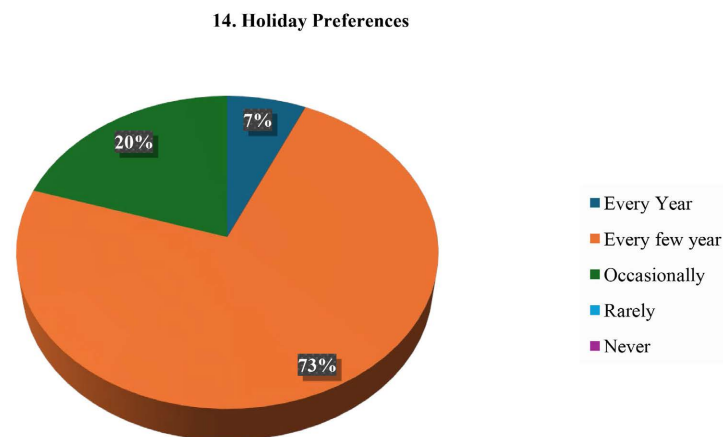
The survey results provide insights into how often participants engage in cultural activities such as traditional dance, music, and yoga. The findings are as follows:

- **50% of participants** reported participating in cultural activities on a “Weekly” basis. This significant portion of respondents indicate a strong commitment to regularly engaging with their cultural traditions. Weekly participation in activities like traditional dance, music, visiting temples, or yoga suggests that these practices are an essential part of their lives, helping them maintain a strong connection to their heritage and promote a sense of cultural continuity within their community.
- **30% of participants** participate in these cultural activities “Monthly”. While not as frequent as weekly engagements, these participants still prioritize cultural activities,
- **20% of participants** reported participating in cultural activities “Occasionally”.

This group engages with their cultural traditions on a more irregular basis, possibly due to limited opportunities, time constraints, or other factors. However, occasional participation still indicates a desire to stay connected to their cultural roots, even if less frequently.

- **0% of participants** reported participating in cultural activities on a “Daily” basis or “Rarely”. The absence of daily participation suggests that, while cultural activities are important, they are not intended into the daily routines of the respondents. Similarly, the absence of rare participants highlights that all respondents engage in these activities at least occasionally, reflecting their ongoing cultural significance.

Question 14: Holiday Preferences



The survey results reflect the participants’ preferences and actual practices regarding spending holidays in their country of origin, likely Nepal. The findings are as follows:

- **7% of participants** prefer to spend holidays in their country “Every Year”. This small group demonstrates a strong commitment to maintaining close ties with their homeland and cultural roots. Despite the challenges such as financial constraints, work obligations, expensive travel, and school schedules for their children, these participants prioritize annual visits likely to celebrate festivals and spend time with family and relatives.

- **73% of participants** prefer to visit their country “Every few years”. This majority indicates a desire to return home regularly, but not every year, due to the practical challenges mentioned. For these participants, factors such as the high cost of travel, limited vacation time, work responsibilities, and the children’s school schedules make annual visits difficult. However, they still value reconnecting with their homeland and celebrating important festivals with their extended family, even if less frequently.

- **20 % of participants** prefer to spend holidays in their country “Occasionally”. This group may face even greater constraints or have fewer opportunities to travel. While they still wish to visit their country and maintain cultural connections, the frequency of these visits is more irregular, likely due to the same financial and

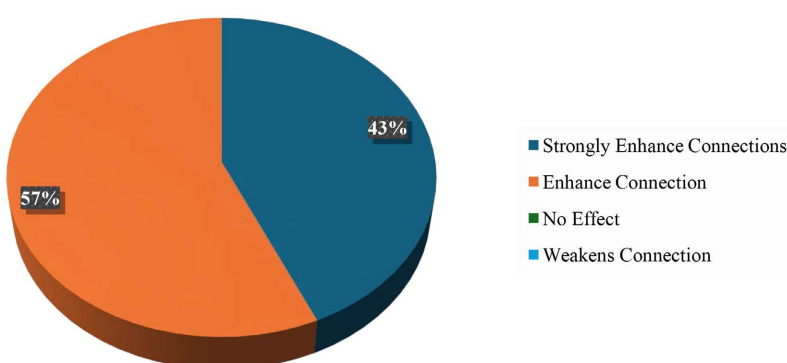
logistical barriers that prevent more frequent travel.

- **0% of participants** reported “Rarely” or “Never” spending holiday in their country. This absence highlights that all respondents have a desire, to some extent, to visit their homeland and celebrate with family and relatives in Nepal, even if circumstances prevent frequent travel.

They may miss out on celebrating important and spending time with family and relatives in Nepal, which can be a source of longing and cultural disconnection. Despite these challenges, the desire to return home remains strong, reflecting the deep importance of cultural and familial ties.

Question 15: Emotional Well-Being

15 Emotional Well-Being



The survey results highlight the participants’ perceptions of how the use of their native language influences their emotional connections with family members. The findings are as follows:

- **43% of participants** reported that the use of their native language “Strongly Enhances Connections” within the family. This group feels that speaking the native language is a powerful tool for fostering deep emotional bonds. They may feel that when they and their children communicate in the native language, it creates a sense of attachment, understanding, and continuity across generations.

- **57% of participants** believe that the native language “Enhances Connection” with family members. While not as strongly felt as the first group, these participants still recognize the positive impact of using their native language in family interactions. The native language serves as a bridge that helps convey emotions and cultural values more effectively than a second language.

- **0% of participants** reported that the native language has “No Effect” or “Weakens Connection”. This absence suggests that all respondents perceive some level of positive impact from using their native language in family communications.

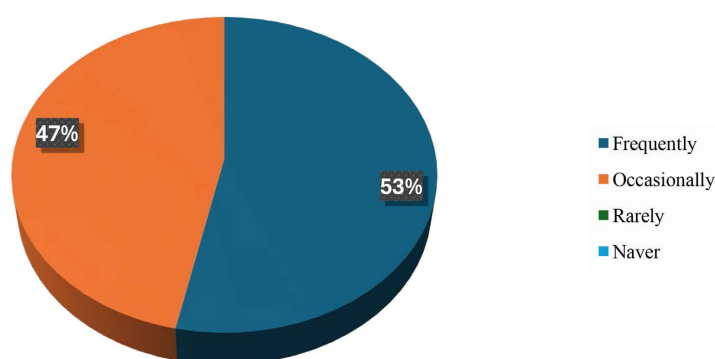
However, the responses also reveal underlying tensions and challenges. Many participants mentioned feeling disconnected or emotionally distant when their children reply in English instead of their native language. Parents often express

frustration or sadness when they are unable to communicate openly in their native language, as they feel it limits their ability to fully express emotions, convey cultural values, and maintain a strong emotional bond with their children.

Parents increasingly recognize that the native language is not just a means of communication but a vital link to their cultural heritage and an essential component of emotional connection. When children prefer to speak English, especially after starting school, parents may feel that the emotional connection is weakening because the shared language with cultural idioms, expressions, and emotional depth is being lost.

Question 16: Misunderstanding and Conflict

16. Misunderstanding and conflict



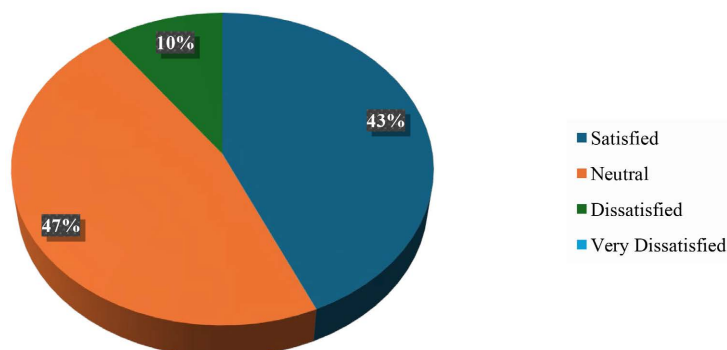
The survey results shed light on the extent to which participants believe that language barriers have led to misunderstandings with their families. The findings are as follows:

- **53% of participants** reported that language barriers “Frequently” cause misunderstandings with their families. This is especially true in immigrant families where parents may speak the native language more fluently while children are more comfortable in English.
- **47% of participants** reported that language barriers “Occasionally” lead to misunderstanding. Occasional conflicts might arise during important discussions, cultural events, or when trying to convey complex emotions or instruction. These respondents recognize that, although not constant, language barriers do occasionally disrupt family harmony and communication.
- **0% of participants** reported that language barriers “Rarely” or “Never” cause misunderstanding. This absence suggests that all respondents have, at some point, experienced language-related challenges in their family interactions.

The frequent or occasional misunderstandings reported by all participants suggest that language is a central issue in family dynamics. Parents and children may struggle to fully understand each other, especially when one party uses a language in which they are less fluent. This can lead to frustration, misinterpretation of intentions, and a weakening of emotional connections.

Question 17: Bilingual Family

17. Bilingual family

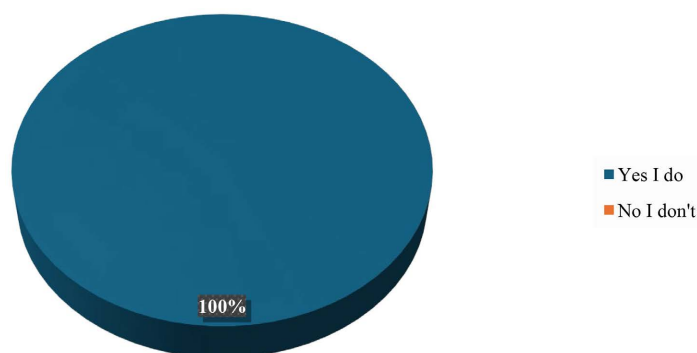


The survey results reveal participants' satisfaction levels with the current state of bilingualism in their families. The findings are as follows:

- **43% of participants** reported being "Satisfied" with the current level of bilingualism in their family.
- **47 % of participants** indicated a "Neutral" stance regarding their satisfaction with bilingualism. These participants may recognize the benefits of bilingualism but also see areas of improvement. They may feel that while their family members have some proficiency in both languages, there could be a stronger emphasis on either maintaining the native language or improving English skills. This neutral perspective suggests that participants are neither fully content nor completely dissatisfied, acknowledging the complexities and challenges of fostering bilingualism within their family.
- **10% of participants** reported being "Dissatisfied" with the current level of bilingualism in their family. These participants may be concerned that their family members, particularly the younger generation, are not as proficient in their native language as they would like. They might worry that the native language is being lost, which could weaken cultural ties and emotional connections within the family.
- **0% of participants** reported being "Very Dissatisfied" with the level of bilingualism in their family.

Question 18: Fell Regret

18.Fell regret



The survey results show a universal sentiment among participants regarding their decision not to teach their children their native language:

- **100 of participants** answered “Yes, I do” when asked if they regret not teaching their children their native language. This overwhelming response reflects a deep sense of regret among all respondents. It indicates that every participant wishes they had made a stronger effort to pass on their native language to their children.

The fact that no participants selected “No, I don’t” suggests that this regret is widely felt, possibly due to the realization that language is a crucial tool for maintaining cultural identity and emotional bonds within the family. Parents may also feel that their decision has impacted their children’s ability to fully connect with their cultural roots, leading to a sense of loss that becomes more pronounced as their children grow older and the cultural gap widens.

Participants in the study shared various strategies they plan to use to overcome language barriers within their families. Many emphasized the importance of engaging in activities together, such as listening to music and watching movies in their native language, which helps create a shared cultural experience and reinforce language use. Storytelling and regular interactions with family members were also highlighted as effective methods for encouraging the use of Nepali at home. Some participants mentioned actively encouraging their children to speak Nepali, while others admitted they struggled with finding effective strategies and expressed having no clear idea of how to address the issue.

When asked about ways to improve language and cultural retention in immigrant families, participants offered several suggestions. They emphasized the need for native language classes to provide structured learning opportunities for children and adults alike. Additionally, participating in cultural and ritual programs was seen as vital for maintaining a connection to their heritage. Some participants also called for policy-level discussion to address the broader challenges of language and cultural retention within immigrant communities. Joining dance and singing classes that focus on native language was also mentioned as a creative way to keep the language and culture alive. These responses reflect a collective recognition of the importance of proactive efforts in preserving their native language and cultural practices within the family and community.

3.4. In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews were conducted with five families, focusing on the experiences of parents and children in managing language differences within the family. The interviews explored the role of language in cultural and religious practices, the impact of language barriers on emotional connection, and the strategies used by families to maintain their native language. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in the conversation while ensuring that key topics were covered.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a

mix of Nepali and English, depending on the participants' language preferences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, with key themes and patterns identified through thematic analysis.

This shift toward English becomes particularly pronounced when children start attending school, where English dominates both instruction and social interactions. Many parents reported making efforts to teach their children Nepali during early childhood, but these efforts often decreased as the children grew older and became more dipped in the English-speaking environment. Both parents and children acknowledged that language barriers have contributed to emotional gaps within the family. Parents expressed frustration when their cultural knowledge was dismissed by their children, often leading to conflicts. Children, on the other hand, felt frustrated by their parents' limited English proficiency, which sometimes resulted in misunderstandings and ineffective communication.

A common source of conflict arises when parents want to participate in cultural programs, but their children resist. This hesitation can lead to hurt feelings, as parents feel their cultural heritage is being rejected, while children feel restricted by their parents' limited English. Misunderstanding is further when children struggle with Nepali idioms, leading to miscommunication and feelings of embarrassment, especially when they are corrected or mocked by others.

Children also voiced concerns about the lack of everyday interaction in their native language, citing how their parents' work schedules often left them without both parents at home. While parents expressed a desire to spend more time with their children, they also recognized the necessity of working to survive, creating a difficult situation where both sides are right, but the circumstances are challenging. Some children mentioned feeling embarrassed when their attempts to speak Nepali were laughed at, highlighting the many factors that contribute to the decline of their native language. For instance, parents may attempt to learn English from their children, but their proficiency often remains limited, leading to frustration. Similarly, children who use a mix of English and Nepali may lose the cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions that are crucial to fully understanding and maintaining their heritage.

Interview Insights

Language Use and Cultural Practices:

The in-depth interviews provided rich insights into the complexities of language use and cultural practices within immigrant Nepalese families. The key themes that emerged from the interviews include:

1) Mixed Language Use:

- In families where children spoke both Nepali and English, the use of Nepali was often limited to specific contexts, such as conversations with grandparents or during cultural events. In contrast, English dominated everyday conversations, particularly when discussing schoolwork, social activities, and media consumption.
- Parents noted that even when children used Nepali, their proficiency was

often limited, with frequent code-switching between Nepali and English. This mix of languages sometimes led to misunderstandings, particularly when idioms or cultural references were involved.

2) Emotional Gaps and Family Conflicts:

- Both parents and children acknowledged that language barriers created emotional gaps within family. Parents reported feeling hurt when their children dismissed their cultural knowledge or when they struggled to explain the significance of cultural practices in Nepali. This often led to conflicts, particularly during cultural and religious events where the use of Nepali was seen as important.

- Children, on the other hand, expressed frustration with their parents' limited English proficiency. They noted that this sometimes led to misunderstanding or incomplete communication, particularly when discussing complex or sensitive topics. Some children also reported feeling embarrassed when their parents struggled to communicate in English in public setting.

3) Screen Time and Media Consumption:

- A significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the role of media consumption in shaping language use within the family. Children expressed a strong preference for English-language media, including music, television programs, and news. This preference often led to segregated screen time within the family, with children watching English-language content while parents preferred traditional Nepali programs.

- Parents expressed concern that this separation in media consumption was contributing to further destruction of the native language and a weakening of the family bond. Some parents noted that they tried to encourage their children to watch Nepali-language programs or listen to traditional hymns, but these efforts were often met with resistance from the children.

4) Cultural and Religious Practice:

- The interviews revealed that cultural and religious practices were a key site of tension within families, particularly when language barriers made it difficult for parents to convey the significance of these practices to their children. For example, parents reported struggling to explain the meaning of specific rituals and prayers in Nepali, leading to a sense of disconnection for the children.

- Some parents also noted that their children were more likely to question or challenge cultural practices when they were unable to fully understand the language and context in which these practices were rooted. This often led to conflicts, with children expressing doubt about the relevance of these practices in their lives.

3.5. Impact of Language Decline

The interviews highlighted the profound sense of loss and regret felt by parents who were unable to maintain their native language within family. This loss was often framed in terms of a weakening of cultural ties and a sense of disconnection from their heritage. Parents expressed concern that their children were losing not only the ability to speak Nepali but also the deeper cultural knowledge and values

that were transmitted through the language.

For the children, the loss of the native language was experienced differently. While some children expressed regret over their limited proficiency in Nepali, particularly when interacting with extended family members, others viewed their language skills as sufficient for their needs. These children tended to prioritize English, seeing it as more relevant to their life in the UK. However, they also acknowledged that this prioritization sometimes led to misunderstandings and conflicts with their parents.

4. Finding

Survey Results:

The survey results reveal a complex picture of language use and cultural retention within immigrant Nepalese families in the UK. The key findings from the survey are as follows:

4.1. Language Use in Daily Life

- A significant majority (70%) of children in families where both Nepali and English are spoken prefer to use English, with only 30% of their communication occurring in Nepali. This shift toward English is particularly pronounced when children start attending school, where English becomes the dominant language of instruction and social interaction.
- Parents reported that they made efforts to teach their children Nepali during early childhood, but these efforts often disappeared as the children grew older and became more occupied in the English-speaking environment.

4.2. Language Use in Cultural and Religious Practices

- Parents expressed difficulties in finding the appropriate words in English for religious rituals and explaining their significance to their children. This was particularly challenging during major cultural events, such as Dashain, Tihar (Deepawali) and Teej, where specific prayers and rituals require a deep understanding of the Nepali language and culture context.
- While families that celebrated festivals together with other Nepalese families were able to maintain some use of Nepali, this often involved a mix of English and Nepali, with English being used for casual conversations and Nepali reserved for more formal or ritualistic contexts.

4.3. Impact of Language Barriers

- A majority of parents (80%) regretted not being able to teach their children the native language more effectively. They expressed concern about the loss of the native language leading to a weakening of cultural ties and a sense of disconnection from their heritage.
- Both parents and children acknowledged that language barriers contributed

to emotional gaps within family. Parents reported feeling frustrated when their children dismissed their cultural knowledge, often resulting in conflicts. Children, on the other hand, expressed frustration with their parents limited English proficiency, which sometimes led to misunderstanding and lack of effective communication.

4.4. Strategies to Overcome Language Barriers

- The survey respondents identified several strategies for overcoming language barriers within the family. These included encouraging the use of the native language at home, storytelling in Nepali, participating in cultural programs, and interacting with extended family members who spoke Nepali. Parents also emphasized the importance of praising children when they spoke in Nepali, as a way of reinforcing the value of their native language.
- Despite these efforts, many families reported that the dominance of English in their children's lives made it difficult to maintain consistent use of Nepali. Some parents expressed a desire for formal native language classes, community programs, and cultural events that could provide additional support for language retention.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that language barriers significantly impact family dynamics and emotional connections within immigrant Nepalese families in the UK. The shift from Nepali to English among the younger generation is not only a linguistic change but a cultural and emotional shift that has profound implications for family unity and culture.

Language Barriers and Emotional Gaps:

The emotional gaps that arise from language barriers are perhaps the most significant finding of this study. These gaps are manifested in several ways: parents feel hurt when their cultural knowledge is dismissed, children feel frustrated by their parents' limited English proficiency, and both parties experience misunderstanding and conflicts as a result of their linguistic differences. These findings align with previous research on the role of language in emotional communication within families (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000).

The loss of idiomatic expressions and cultural references further exacerbates these emotional gaps. As noted by Fishman (1991), language is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, and the loss of language proficiency can lead to a weakening of cultural ties and a sense of disconnection from one's heritage. In the context of Nepalese families in the UK, this disconnection is particularly evident during cultural and religious practices, where the inability to fully understand the language and context in which these practices are surrounded leads to a sense of alienation for the younger generation.

Bilingualism and Cultural Retention:

The study also highlights the importance of bilingualism for cultural retention

and cognitive development. Bilingualism is seen as a valuable tool for maintaining cultural identity while also integrating into the host society. However, achieving bilingualism in immigrant families is challenging, particularly when there is a lack of formal support for the native language.

In the case of Nepalese families in the UK, the dominance of English in the children's lives, linked with the parent's busy work schedules, makes it difficult to maintain consistent use of Nepali. The study suggests that more formal support, such as native language classes and community programs, is needed to help families achieve bilingualism and retain their cultural heritage.

Communication Accommodation and Family Dynamics:

The application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in this study provides valuable insights into the ways in which families navigate language barriers. The partial and inconsistent accommodations made by parents and children often lead to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. For example, parents may attempt to learn English from their children, but their proficiency may remain limited, leading to frustration and conflict.

Similarly, children may use a mix of English and Nepali when communicating with their parents, but the lack of fluency in the native language may result in the loss of cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions.

CAT also highlights the role of social identity in shaping communication patterns. For children of immigrant families, the use of English may be associated with social integration and acceptance, while the use of Nepali may be linked to cultural pride and identity. These conflicting motivations can create tension within families, as children may feel pressured to conform to the dominant language and culture, while parents may feel a sense of loss and alienation as their children drift away from their cultural roots.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The finding of this study underscores the complex and involved nature of language barriers in immigrant Nepalese families in the UK. These barriers are not only linguistic but also cultural and emotional, leading to a range of challenges that impact family dynamics, cultural retention, and emotional connections.

Key Conclusions:

- **Language barriers contribute significantly to emotional gaps and family conflicts in immigrant Nepalese families.** These gaps are led by the loss of idiomatic expressions and cultural references, leading to a weakening of cultural ties and sense of disconnection from one's heritage.
- **Bilingualism is perceived as beneficial for cognitive development and cultural retention,** but achieving it is challenging without formal support. The dominance of English in the children's lives, combined with the parent's busy work schedules, makes it difficult to maintain consistent use of Nepali.
- **Communication Accommodation Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the way in which families navigate language barriers.** However, the partial inconsistent accommodations made by parents and children often lead

to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings.

Suggestions for Future Research and Practice:

- **Support for Native Language Retention:** There is a need for more formal support for native language retention in immigrant families, such as native language classes, community programs, and cultural events. These initiatives could help families achieve bilingualism and maintain their cultural heritage.

- **Family-Based Language Learning:** Encouraging family-based language learning, where both parents and children learn each other's languages, could help bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps within families. This approach could be supported by community programs that provide resources and support for family-based language learning.

- **Cultural and Emotional Communication:** Future research could explore the role of cultural and emotional communication in immigrant families, with a focus on how language barriers impact the transmission of cultural values and the expression of emotions. This research could inform the development of interventions aimed at strengthening cultural and emotional connections within families.

- **Longitudinal Studies:** That track language use and cultural retention over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of language barriers on immigrant families. These studies could also explore the effectiveness of different strategies for overcoming language barriers and maintaining cultural heritage.

In conclusion, language is a powerful tool for cultural and emotional connection within families, and the loss of a native language can have profound implications for family dynamics and cultural retention. By understanding the challenges faced by immigrant families and developing strategies to support bilingualism and cultural retention, we can help bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps that families and strengthen the ties that bind them.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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