

Ethnic-Racial Socialization in Mixed Heritage Families: A Grounded Theory Study

Angel. Lee¹, Amirul. Iskandar^{2*}

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, Department of Psychology, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

² Department of Psychology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

* Corresponding author email address: amirul@um.edu.my

Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Lee, A., & Iskandar, A. (2025). Ethnic-Racial Socialization in Mixed Heritage Families: A Grounded Theory Study. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(1), 158-166.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.6.1.16>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore how parents in mixed heritage families in Malaysia engage in ethnic-racial socialization and transmit cultural identity to their children within the context of a multicultural society.

Methods: Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 parents from diverse mixed heritage backgrounds residing in Malaysia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and theoretical saturation guided the endpoint of data collection. Interviews focused on participants' practices, challenges, and perspectives regarding cultural identity transmission in the home. Verbatim transcripts were analyzed using NVivo software, employing open, axial, and selective coding to generate a conceptual framework grounded in participants' narratives.

Findings: Five main categories emerged: Cultural Identity Transmission, Language and Communication, Navigating Racial Bias, Family Dynamics, and Community and Social Engagement. Parents engaged in intentional practices such as storytelling, celebration of traditions, and bilingual upbringing to reinforce cultural heritage. They also described emotional and strategic responses to racial bias, as well as negotiation between co-parenting and intergenerational influences. Language was both a bridge and a barrier, shaping identity and familial cohesion. Parents sought external support through cultural events and digital communities to validate and enrich their children's mixed identities. These findings highlight the emotional labor and adaptive strategies involved in raising bicultural children in socially stratified environments.

Conclusion: Ethnic-racial socialization in mixed heritage families is a complex, multifaceted process involving intentional practices, emotional negotiations, and contextual adaptations. Parents act as cultural mediators, balancing heritage preservation with societal integration.

Keywords: *Ethnic-racial socialization, mixed heritage families, identity transmission, grounded theory.*

1. Introduction

In increasingly multicultural societies, the rise in interethnic and multiracial unions has generated new complexities in how families negotiate and transmit ethnic-racial identities to their children. Ethnic-racial socialization—the process by which children learn about the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices of their heritage—becomes uniquely intricate in mixed heritage families, where multiple cultural frameworks intersect and sometimes compete. Parents in such households must balance not only the cultural expectations of different ethnic traditions but also navigate external societal messages that may either reinforce or marginalize certain aspects of their identities. This challenge is particularly significant in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, where ethnic diversity is formally recognized but often politically and socially stratified (Nwanesi, 2024).

Mixed heritage families are not monolithic; they represent a spectrum of cultural configurations, religious beliefs, and language practices. These variations influence how parents engage in ethnic-racial socialization, especially when their own cultural backgrounds diverge in values, norms, or parenting philosophies. One of the central concerns is whether families maintain, modify, or suppress certain elements of their identities to foster social cohesion within the home or to promote easier integration into the broader society (Souza et al., 2024). Recent research highlights that cultural negotiation in such families is not merely about preserving heritage but is also deeply tied to issues of belonging, emotional security, and future orientation for both parents and children (Soliz et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2020).

Parental approaches to ethnic-racial socialization often reflect both intentional and unconscious processes. While some parents deliberately teach children about their ancestry, others rely on routine practices—like language use, participation in festivals, or storytelling—that implicitly convey cultural knowledge (Fatima, 2025; Ison et al., 2023). In some cases, parents choose to emphasize one culture over another, especially when external pressures such as racism or assimilationist norms affect perceived social mobility or safety. The dilemma of whether to conceal or maintain cultural identity has been particularly evident in contexts of racialized discrimination, as observed among Chinese American families during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cho et al., 2024). Similarly, parents may alter their strategies in

response to their child's phenotypic appearance, language fluency, or peer experiences (Yu, 2015; Zhu et al., 2024).

Language emerges as a powerful vehicle in heritage maintenance. Research shows that family language policy plays a critical role in the intergenerational transmission of identity and belonging, especially in multilingual societies (Fatima, 2025; Sibanda, 2023). In mixed heritage families, the decision of which language to speak at home can be loaded with emotional and political meaning. Studies have documented the differential impact of mothers' and fathers' language use on children's bilingual exposure and fluency, suggesting that parental roles and preferences are not equally weighted in bilingual socialization (Sander-Montant et al., 2024). Moreover, heritage language loss has been associated with declines in ethnic identity and self-esteem among second-generation youth (Li, 2020; Yu, 2015). In families where one language is prioritized over another, children may internalize asymmetrical identities, feeling more affiliated with one side of their heritage (Mu & Francis-Tan, 2024).

The issue of intergenerational conflict often complicates ethnic-racial socialization. In many Asian and diasporic families, older generations uphold traditional cultural expectations that may conflict with modern parenting styles adopted by younger parents in mixed unions (Akbar & Woods, 2019; Mitchell & Lai, 2014). This clash can manifest in disagreements over childrearing practices, discipline, naming conventions, or religious education. Such conflicts may become particularly salient in homes where extended family members, such as grandparents, play active caregiving roles (Wang, 2018). Parents must then mediate not only between cultures but also between generations, often negotiating the terms of cultural continuity and adaptation.

Children of mixed heritage are not passive recipients of socialization but active interpreters of the cultural messages they receive. Their experiences of being perceived as "different" in school or social settings can influence how they view their own identities and which aspects of their heritage they choose to embrace or reject (Kulis et al., 2016; Walsh & Azmitia, 2022). Some children may develop a dual or hybrid identity that integrates elements from both sides of their parentage, while others may experience identity conflict or marginalization (Souza et al., 2023; Тахатова et al., 2018). A study on Korean adoptees turned parents found that their efforts to transmit culture to their own children were shaped by personal narratives of loss, erasure, and reclamation, underscoring the deeply emotional dimensions of ethnic-racial socialization (Zhou et al., 2020).

The societal context plays a pivotal role in shaping how families engage in identity transmission. In contexts where multiculturalism is promoted institutionally, parents may feel more supported in raising bicultural or multiracial children. However, where assimilationist policies dominate or where minority groups are structurally marginalized, parents may feel compelled to "streamline" their child's identity for the sake of social acceptance (Li et al., 2024; Sitinjak & Harianja, 2022). Furthermore, public institutions such as schools are often ill-equipped to support mixed heritage children, failing to include relevant cultural materials or training staff in culturally responsive pedagogy (Zhu et al., 2024). Such gaps leave parents with the dual burden of private education and public advocacy.

Cultural practices surrounding death, grief, and major life transitions further illuminate how families manage cultural continuity. In African and Caribbean heritage families, rituals and traditions around these life events are crucial sites of intergenerational identity affirmation (Souza et al., 2024). The symbolic meanings ascribed to these practices often reinforce group belonging, and their absence can trigger a sense of cultural loss. Parents in mixed heritage families must navigate these emotionally charged moments, deciding which rituals to maintain, blend, or omit altogether. This emotional labor of cultural curation adds to the ongoing work of constructing a coherent family identity across cultural divides.

Gender dynamics also influence the process of ethnic-racial socialization. Studies indicate that mothers and fathers may hold different priorities and emotional investments in heritage transmission. For instance, mothers are often seen as the custodians of culture, responsible for passing on language, values, and daily customs, while fathers may focus more on public identity or structural support (Sander-Montant et al., 2024). These differing orientations can result in unbalanced cultural exposure for children or even tensions within the parental dyad. Additionally, cultural scripts around gender roles may influence how children of different sexes are socialized, with girls often expected to maintain traditions more rigidly than boys (Kádár, 2022).

Mixed heritage families are not only sites of cultural tension but also of creativity, resilience, and innovation. Many families develop hybrid rituals, multilingual communication styles, and flexible parenting practices that transcend rigid cultural boundaries (Souza et al., 2023). These families serve as living laboratories for understanding how culture is actively produced, modified, and lived in real time. However, much of the current literature has focused on

Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold in Asian countries with distinct historical and socio-political frameworks (Nwanesi, 2024; Sibanda, 2023).

This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived experiences of mixed heritage parents in Malaysia through a grounded theory lens. Malaysia provides a particularly rich setting for this inquiry due to its institutionalized multiculturalism and simultaneous ethno-religious stratification. By focusing on how parents conceptualize and implement ethnic-racial socialization within their households, this research aims to illuminate the strategies, tensions, and innovations that characterize identity transmission in mixed cultural contexts. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced, globally informed understanding of how ethnic-racial identity is socially constructed and emotionally navigated in contemporary family life.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a qualitative research design using grounded theory methodology to explore the processes and strategies of ethnic-racial socialization within mixed heritage families in Malaysia. Grounded theory was chosen to generate a conceptual framework grounded in participants' lived experiences. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure rich, relevant data from individuals who could provide in-depth insights into the socialization practices within their families. A total of 25 participants were included in the study, comprising parents from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds who were raising children in mixed heritage households. The inclusion criteria required participants to have at least one child under the age of 18 and to self-identify as actively engaged in parenting practices involving ethnic or racial identity transmission. The sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, indicating that no new themes were emerging from the interviews and that the developing theory was well supported by the data.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' unique perspectives while ensuring consistency in the key areas of inquiry. The interview protocol was designed to elicit

detailed narratives about participants' approaches to ethnic-racial socialization, the challenges they encountered, and the meanings they attached to these practices within the context of their family dynamics. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language, either in-person or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on accessibility and participant convenience. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of the participants' voices.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the constant comparative method typical of grounded theory research. NVivo software was used to organize, code, and manage the qualitative data. Initial open coding was conducted to identify key concepts within the data, followed by axial coding to explore relationships among these concepts. Finally, selective coding was used to develop a core category that integrated the emerging themes into a coherent theoretical framework. Memos were written throughout the process to document analytical decisions and enhance reflexivity. Theoretical saturation was reached when no new

categories or properties emerged, indicating that the grounded theory was sufficiently robust and conceptually complete.

3. Findings and Results

The study involved 25 participants residing in Malaysia, all of whom were parents in mixed heritage families raising at least one child under the age of 18. Of the participants, 15 were mothers and 10 were fathers. In terms of ethnic background, 9 participants identified as Malay, 7 as Chinese, 5 as Indian, and 4 as having other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Eurasian, Indigenous, or Arab-Malay heritage). Regarding religious affiliation, 10 participants identified as Muslim, 6 as Christian, 5 as Hindu, and 4 reported practicing no formal religion or adhering to multiple spiritual traditions. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 52 years, with a mean age of 39.6 years. Most participants ($n = 17$) were married, while 5 were divorced or separated, and 3 were in long-term cohabiting relationships. Educationally, 14 participants held a university degree, 7 had completed secondary school, and 4 had postgraduate qualifications. These diverse backgrounds allowed for a rich exploration of how ethnic-racial socialization is experienced and negotiated across various cultural, religious, and family contexts.

Table 1

Categories, Subcategories, and Concepts Derived from Grounded Theory Analysis

Category	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
Cultural Identity Transmission	Storytelling about Heritage	Ancestral stories, migration narratives, family history, oral traditions
	Celebration of Cultural Traditions	Festivals, rituals, traditional attire, dance, music, art
	Food as Cultural Symbol	Cultural dishes, cooking with elders, recipe sharing, mealtime conversations
	Cultural Naming Practices	Ethnic naming, dual names, symbolic names, meaning discussions
	Display of Cultural Symbols	Flags, home decorations, family altars, cultural artifacts
Language and Communication	Religious Socialization	Prayer routines, religious education, interfaith navigation, spiritual guidance
	Bilingual Upbringing	Speaking two languages, language rules at home, school language policies
	Code-Switching Norms	Switching languages with peers, adapting speech in public, language blending
	Parental Language Preferences	Mother tongue preference, father's language dominance, agreement on primary language
	Language-Based Identity	Identity tied to language, feeling 'in-between', pride in language mastery
Navigating Racial Bias	Communication Challenges	Misunderstandings, translation burden, exclusion, language insecurity
	Parental Preparation for Bias	Teaching about racism, explaining prejudice, preparing for unfair treatment
	Child Experiences of Discrimination	Stories of bias, teacher discrimination, peer exclusion, name-calling
	Responding to Microaggressions	Correcting misconceptions, emotional support, school follow-up
	Internalized Stereotypes	Self-doubt, cultural shame, negative body image, denial of heritage
Family Dynamics	Navigating School Contexts	Teacher training gaps, curriculum bias, lack of representation
	Parental Advocacy	Contacting schools, joining advocacy groups, public speaking
	Empathy Development	Teaching compassion, sharing bias experiences, modeling empathy
	Intergenerational Tensions	Clash of values, modern vs. traditional parenting, discipline differences
	Parenting Style Negotiations	Permissive vs. strict, mixed parenting strategies, negotiation of rules
	Role of Extended Family	Grandparent influence, conflict with elders, joint decision-making
	Bi-Cultural Parenting Challenges	Aligning norms, confusion in roles, dual culture negotiation

Community and Social Engagement	Coping with Cultural Misunderstandings	Cultural jokes, hurt feelings, different worldviews
	Co-Parenting Alignment	Mutual respect, division of roles, common ground
	Participation in Cultural Events	Cultural festivals, family outings, religious ceremonies, exhibitions
	Community-Based Learning	Ethnic museums, cultural camps, storytelling events
	Seeking Diverse Friendships	Encouraging diverse peers, inclusive playdates, social skill building
	Online Cultural Communities	Online forums, multicultural blogs, virtual support groups
	Social Inclusion Practices	Inclusive schools, diversity clubs, community centers

Cultural Identity Transmission

Participants emphasized storytelling about heritage as a vital mechanism for conveying cultural identity. Stories about ancestral roots, migration journeys, and historical legacies were frequently shared in both casual conversations and intentional teaching moments. One father noted, *"Every night before bed, I tell my kids how their grandfather crossed two borders just to find work. It helps them know where they come from."* Celebrations of cultural traditions such as festivals, rituals, and traditional attire were described as joyful and identity-affirming. A mother recalled, *"My daughter wore the baju kurung for the first time during Eid, and she looked at herself in the mirror with such pride—it made me cry."* Food also served as a powerful cultural symbol. Cooking with elders and sharing recipes became intimate moments of cultural bonding, as one participant shared, *"Making rendang with my mom—just the smell of it brings back generations of memory."* Cultural naming practices surfaced as acts of identity negotiation, where parents balanced between ethnic heritage and societal acceptance. One parent mentioned, *"We chose a name that has both Indian and Chinese roots—it's who she is."* The display of cultural symbols at home, such as flags, decorative items, and family altars, helped to visually affirm heritage. As described by one father, *"Our living room is like a little museum of who we are."* Religious socialization also emerged as a strong subtheme, involving prayer routines, spiritual education, and navigating interfaith dynamics. One mixed-faith couple expressed, *"We explain to our kids that faith is about respect—one goes to mosque, one to temple, and both pray at home."*

Language and Communication

Bilingual upbringing was a common practice, with families enforcing language rules to ensure the continuity of both mother tongues. One mother said, *"Malay at home, English at school—that's the deal."* Code-switching norms allowed children to adapt fluidly between different settings. A parent explained, *"Our kids speak Tamil at home, then switch to Mandarin with friends—it's their superpower."* Language preferences among parents often required

negotiation, with some favoring their native tongue over their partner's. One mother remarked, *"My husband insists on Mandarin, I speak in English—it's messy but we make it work."* Language-based identity surfaced as a key emotional marker, with children often feeling 'in-between.' As one participant reflected, *"Sometimes my son says he feels like he doesn't belong anywhere, just because he can't speak perfect Tamil."* Communication challenges, such as translation burdens or exclusion due to language differences, were also prevalent. A father noted, *"My youngest daughter gets sad when she can't understand her grandmother. It makes her feel left out."*

Navigating Racial Bias

Many parents described actively preparing their children for racial bias through intentional conversations about prejudice and discrimination. One father explained, *"We tell them, not everyone will understand or accept who you are—but that's their ignorance, not your problem."* Children's experiences of discrimination were often recounted with pain and frustration. A mother shared, *"My son came home crying because a classmate told him he wasn't 'really Chinese.'"* Responding to microaggressions involved both emotional support and advocacy. One parent stated, *"We go to the school, we ask questions. We don't let it slide."* Internalized stereotypes emerged as a psychological struggle among children who felt cultural shame or doubted their worth. A mother said, *"My daughter asked if she should bleach her skin—she's only eight. That broke me."* School contexts often reinforced bias through underrepresentation or ignorance. One parent noted, *"There are no books with kids like mine in them. It's like they don't exist."* In response, parental advocacy became a survival strategy. Some joined school boards or parent groups to push for inclusion. One mother declared, *"I became that mom who emails the principal—because somebody has to."* Interestingly, some families used these challenges to foster empathy in their children. A father explained, *"We tell them, your pain can teach you to care for others who are different too."*

Family Dynamics

Intergenerational tensions surfaced as a frequent challenge, especially when grandparents held traditional views that clashed with modern parenting. A mother recalled, *"My mom keeps telling me to raise my kids 'proper Indian way.' I love her, but things are different now."* Parenting style negotiations occurred between parents with differing cultural values, often requiring compromise. One father shared, *"We argue about discipline—she's more relaxed, I'm stricter. But we find middle ground."* The role of extended family, particularly grandparents, was both supportive and complicated. A participant stated, *"My mother-in-law helps with childcare, but she also wants to name our baby—she thinks she has that right."* Bi-cultural parenting challenges involved reconciling different norms and expectations, which could confuse both children and parents. One mother explained, *"We're figuring it out together—what rules come from which side, and what's just us."* Cultural misunderstandings, especially around humor or expression, sometimes caused emotional distance. One father noted, *"She laughs at jokes I don't get—it's small, but it matters."* Co-parenting alignment required conscious communication and mutual respect. A parent explained, *"We always talk before making a big decision. Our cultures are different, but our goals are the same."*

Community and Social Engagement

Participation in cultural events allowed families to reinforce identity in collective settings. One participant described, *"We go to Hari Raya open houses and Deepavali dinners—it shows the kids they belong everywhere."* Community-based learning through museums and camps provided structured cultural education. A mother said, *"The storytelling sessions at the cultural center helped my kids understand their roots in a fun way."* Seeking diverse friendships was encouraged as a form of inclusive socialization. One father shared, *"We tell them: make friends with everyone, don't stick to one group."* Online cultural communities were particularly important for families in less diverse neighborhoods. One parent stated, *"There's a Facebook group for mixed families—sometimes, those people understand us better than our relatives do."* Finally, social inclusion practices such as enrolling children in inclusive schools or joining diversity-focused groups helped reinforce a sense of belonging. A mother reflected, *"We chose a school that celebrates every culture. It makes a difference when you see your traditions on the wall."*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed five core categories—Cultural Identity Transmission, Language and Communication, Navigating Racial Bias, Family Dynamics, and Community and Social Engagement—each comprising multiple subthemes that capture the complex processes of ethnic-racial socialization in mixed heritage families in Malaysia. These categories illustrate the intentional and nuanced ways in which parents negotiate the cultural identities of their children in households that straddle multiple ethnic, linguistic, and religious traditions.

In the domain of Cultural Identity Transmission, parents utilized storytelling, cultural rituals, food, naming practices, and religious activities to pass on their heritage. These practices were often deliberate, serving to root children in a lineage that might otherwise be fragmented or diluted in a multicultural setting. This aligns with findings by Walsh and Azmitia, who emphasized the symbolic function of shared cultural narratives—such as animated films and storytelling—as effective tools for transmitting identity within Latinx families (Walsh & Azmitia, 2022). Similarly, Souza et al. found that African and Caribbean heritage families relied heavily on oral traditions and rituals to manage intergenerational continuity, particularly during times of life transition or loss (Souza et al., 2024). The emphasis on food and holidays as cultural anchors is also consistent with the work of Zhou et al., who showed that even in transracially adoptive families, parents reintroduced elements of their children's birth culture as a form of reconnection and restoration (Zhou et al., 2020).

Language and Communication emerged as a central and often contentious component of socialization, with parents enforcing bilingual or multilingual strategies and encountering tensions around language preference and identity. Fatima's study of Pakistani families found that language transmission was deeply tied to perceptions of ethnic loyalty and was frequently influenced by the gendered roles of mothers and fathers within the household (Fatima, 2025). Likewise, Sander-Montant et al. demonstrated that a parent's personal language use significantly affects children's bilingual development, with maternal language use showing a particularly strong correlation with the child's heritage language proficiency (Sander-Montant et al., 2024). However, challenges such as language insecurity, translation burdens, and communication breakdowns also paralleled findings by Sibanda in the South African Malawian diaspora, where intergenerational language gaps created emotional distance between parents and children (Sibanda, 2023).

In Navigating Racial Bias, participants described strategies for preparing children for societal prejudice, responding to discrimination, and cultivating empathy. These findings echo Zhu et al.'s work, which showed that ethnic-racial socialization serves as a mediating factor between parental experiences of discrimination and children's emotional adjustment (Zhu et al., 2024). Moreover, Cho et al. observed that Chinese American parents who faced racial hostility during COVID-19 often shifted toward more proactive socialization approaches, emphasizing pride in cultural identity and resilience in the face of xenophobia (Cho et al., 2024). This suggests that perceived external threats can heighten parents' motivation to instill a strong ethnic identity in their children. Similarly, Ison et al. reported that the generational status of White adolescents in ethnically diverse families impacted the timing and nature of ethnic socialization, with earlier generations emphasizing protective strategies in response to racialized environments (Ison et al., 2023). The theme of internalized stereotypes found in this study also resonates with the insights of Yu, who showed that the erosion of heritage language fluency often correlates with diminished ethnic identity and self-esteem among minority youth (Yu, 2015).

Family Dynamics was another rich area, marked by intergenerational tension, co-parenting negotiations, and extended family involvement. These themes are consistent with Akbar and Woods' findings on special needs parenting in minority ethnic families, where cultural expectations from extended family members often conflicted with the primary caregivers' intentions (Akbar & Woods, 2019). Similarly, Mitchell and Lai observed that aging Asian parents sometimes exert significant influence over childrearing decisions, leading to power struggles and emotional strain within mixed heritage households (Mitchell & Lai, 2014). This tension reflects broader patterns of cultural transmission in which traditional family elders act as custodians of heritage, often clashing with modern parenting ideologies (Wang, 2018). The balancing act between maternal and paternal cultural norms also mirrors Mu and Francis-Tan's findings in China, where children of biethnic couples were more likely to identify with one parent's ethnicity over the other, depending on familial dynamics and societal validation (Mu & Francis-Tan, 2024).

Finally, the theme of Community and Social Engagement demonstrated how families seek supportive social environments—such as cultural events, community centers, diverse peer groups, and online platforms—to reinforce their

children's identities. These practices mirror those described by Sitinjak and Harianja in Indonesia, where inter-ethnic families actively seek out cultural institutions that affirm their mixed identities rather than requiring them to choose between them (Sitinjak & Harianja, 2022). Similarly, Souza et al. emphasized that living “between traditions” requires not only internal familial strategies but also community structures that validate these identities through representation and inclusion (Souza et al., 2023). The use of digital communities by parents in this study aligns with Kádár's observations on the role of virtual spaces in sustaining diasporic and hybrid identities across geographical distances (Kádár, 2022).

Taken together, these findings reflect the adaptive, creative, and often emotionally demanding processes through which mixed heritage parents engage in ethnic-racial socialization. The grounded theory that emerged from this study contributes to existing literature by offering a contextually grounded perspective on Malaysia, a country that publicly embraces multiculturalism but also enforces ethnic divisions through policy and everyday practice. The findings also reveal how parents navigate not just cultural preservation but identity negotiation in a context where heritage, race, language, and religion are all salient social markers.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the depth of insights provided, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study's sample was limited to 25 participants, all residing in urban or suburban areas of Malaysia. This may exclude rural perspectives or those of families with less access to diverse communities and educational resources. Second, the study focused solely on parental narratives, without including the voices of children who are the recipients of socialization. Third, the reliance on semi-structured interviews may have led participants to emphasize socially desirable responses or omit uncomfortable truths. Finally, the study did not differentiate based on specific mixed heritage combinations (e.g., Malay-Chinese vs. Indian-Arab), which could obscure important nuances in cultural negotiation.

Future research should expand the demographic and geographic diversity of the sample to include rural, lower-income, or refugee-background families. Comparative studies across countries with differing policies on multiculturalism could also yield valuable insights into how sociopolitical context shapes ethnic-racial socialization.

Incorporating the perspectives of children and adolescents will provide a more holistic understanding of how socialization messages are received, interpreted, or resisted. Additionally, longitudinal research could explore how socialization practices evolve over time and respond to changes in societal attitudes, family composition, or child development. Finally, future inquiries may benefit from exploring the role of technology, media, and education systems in either supporting or hindering cultural transmission in mixed heritage families.

Practitioners working with mixed heritage families—such as educators, counselors, and social workers—should be trained to recognize the unique identity dynamics these families navigate. Schools should implement inclusive curricula that reflect a wider range of cultural backgrounds and family configurations. Parenting programs can incorporate modules on ethnic-racial socialization to support caregivers in addressing discrimination, preserving heritage, and building open communication around identity. Community centers and digital platforms should provide safe spaces for families to share experiences, celebrate hybrid cultures, and access culturally relevant resources. Most importantly, policies must be crafted to affirm and support multicultural identities rather than forcing assimilation or singular identity models.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. The design of this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, under ethics code IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1402.153. All participants were fully informed that participation in this research was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without penalty.

References

- Akbar, S., & Woods, K. (2019). The Experiences of Minority Ethnic Heritage Parents Having a Child With SEND: A Systematic Literature Review. *British Journal of Special Education*, 46(3), 292-316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12272>
- Cho, H. S., Gürsoy, H., Cheah, C. S. L., Zong, X., & Ren, H. (2024). To Maintain or Conceal One's Cultural Identity? Chinese American Parents' Ethnic-racial Socialization During COVID-19. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 38(1), 26-37. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001169>
- Fatima, S. (2025). Family Language Policy and Heritage Language Transmission in Pakistan—the Intersection of Family Dynamics, Ethnic Identity and Cultural Practices on Language Proficiency and Maintenance. *Frontiers in psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1560755>
- Ison, A., Satterthwaite-Freiman, M., Sladek, M. R., & Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2023). The Role of Family Ethnic Socialization and Generational Status in White Adolescents' Ethnic-Racial Identity Development. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584231166118>
- Kádár, J. (2022). Ethnic Positioning in Southwestern Mixed Heritage Writing. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781793607911>
- Kulis, S., Robbins, D., Baker, T. M., Denetsosie, S., & Parkhurst, N. A. D. (2016). A Latent Class Analysis of Urban American Indian Youth Identities. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 22(2), 215-228. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000024>
- Li, G., Mei, Z., & Zhen, F. (2024). Friend or Foe? A Mixed-Methods Study on the Impact of Digital Device Use on Chinese-Canadian Children's Heritage Language Learning. 1(1-2), 55-84. <https://doi.org/10.1515/dsll-2024-0022>
- Li, S. (2020). Home Language-Learning Strategies Chosen by Chinese Immigrant Families. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(5), 155. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n5p155>
- Mitchell, B., & Lai, Y. Y. L. (2014). Intergenerational Conflict in Ethnically Diverse Ageing Families. *Families Relationships and Societies*, 3(1), 79-96. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674313x670151>
- Mu, Z., & Francis-Tan, A. (2024). Follow Father or Mother? Understanding the Monoethnic Identification of Biethnic Children in China. *Social Forces*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soae022>

- Nwanesi, P. K. (2024). The Bidayuh Cultural Identity "Issues" of the Progeny of Mixed Marriages. *Journal of Borneo-Kalimantan*, 10(1), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.33736/jbk.7196.2024>
- Sander-Montant, A., Bissonnette, R., & Byers-Heinlein, K. (2024). Like Mother Like Child: Differential Impact of Mothers' and Fathers' Individual Language Use on Bilingual Language Exposure. *Child development*, 96(2), 662-678. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14196>
- Sibanda, R. (2023). Echoes From the Motherland: Heritage Language Transmission Within the Malawian Community in South Africa. *Per Linguam*, 39(2). <https://doi.org/10.5785/39-2-1009>
- Sitinjak, V. N., & Harianja, N. (2022). Maintain or Shift? Focus on Inter-Ethnic Families in Indonesia. *International Journal on Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay*, 1(1), 39-45. <https://doi.org/10.32734/ijlsm.v1i1.10572>
- Soliz, J., Cronan, S., Bergquist, G., Nuru, A. K., & Rittenour, C. E. (2017). Perceived Benefits and Challenges of a Multiethnic-Racial Identity: Insight From Adults With Mixed Heritage. *Identity*, 17(4), 267-281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2017.1379907>
- Souza, J. D., Gillett, K., Salifu, Y., & Walshe, C. (2023). Living and Dying Between Cultural Traditions in African & Caribbean Heritage Families: A Constructivist Grounded Theory. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3621438/v1>
- Souza, J. D., Gillett, K., Salifu, Y., & Walshe, C. (2024). Living and Dying Between Cultural Traditions in African & Caribbean Heritage Families: A Constructivist Grounded Theory. *BMC Palliative Care*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-024-01503-6>
- Walsh, A. S., & Azmitia, M. (2022). Mexican-Heritage Ethnic Identity: How <i>Coco</i> Serves as Context for Ethnic Socialization. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 44(1), 44-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07399863221112484>
- Wang, J. (2018). The Relationship Between the Implementation of Parent's Educative Right and the Inheritance of Culture. <https://doi.org/10.2991/iccse-18.2018.49>
- Yu, S.-C. (2015). The Relationships Among Heritage Language Proficiency, Ethnic Identity, and Self-Esteem. *Fire Forum for International Research in Education*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.18275/fire201502021039>
- Zhou, X., Kim, J., Lee, H. W., & Lee, R. M. (2020). Korean Adoptees as Parents: Intergenerationality of Ethnic, Racial, and Adoption Socialization. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/kxd74>
- Zhu, Q., Wang, C., & Cheah, C. S. L. (2024). Parental Identity and Socialization Mediate Parental Racial Discrimination's Impact on Child Adjustment. *Journal of marriage and family*, 86(4), 965-987. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12992>
- Танатова, Д. К., Korolev, I., Yudina, T., Королева, С. Б., & Lidzer, E. A. (2018). Self-Identification in Mixed Ethnic Family. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7(4.38), 546-550. <https://doi.org/10.14419/ijet.v7i4.38.24620>