

Exploring the Cultural Factors Influencing Parent-Child Communication in Intergenerational Families

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the cultural factors influencing parent-child communication in intergenerational families.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design, using semi-structured interviews with 29 participants recruited through online platforms. Theoretical saturation was reached to ensure data adequacy. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software, following an inductive thematic analysis approach. The analysis identified key themes related to cultural expectations, intergenerational differences in expression, and cultural adaptation.

Findings: The results revealed that hierarchical communication patterns, role expectations, and linguistic differences significantly influenced parent-child interactions in intergenerational families. Many participants described communication structures rooted in cultural norms that emphasized obedience, emotional restraint, and parental authority. Generational differences emerged in emotional expressiveness and conflict resolution, with younger family members favoring open discussions, while older generations maintained indirect or reserved communication styles. The role of technology was also significant, as digital communication was perceived as convenient by younger generations but as impersonal by older family members. Furthermore, families navigated cultural adaptation by balancing traditional values with modern perspectives, with some experiencing tension in integrating both approaches.

Conclusion: Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping intergenerational family communication, influencing language use, emotional expression, and conflict resolution. While cultural traditions reinforce family cohesion, they may also limit open dialogue between parents and children. Generational shifts in communication styles and the increasing use of digital communication necessitate adaptive strategies for maintaining effective intergenerational relationships.

Keywords: intergenerational communication, cultural expectations, family dynamics, generational differences, parent-child interaction, cultural adaptation

1 Introduction

Intergenerational family communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction that shapes relationships, identity formation, and the transmission of cultural values. As families navigate evolving societal norms, globalization, and technological advancements, the dynamics of parent-child communication become increasingly complex, particularly in culturally diverse settings. Understanding the factors influencing these interactions is crucial for promoting healthy family relationships and ensuring effective communication across generations. Prior research highlights the importance of cultural norms, social expectations, and individual adaptation in shaping parent-child dialogues (Navabinejad, 2024).

Culture plays a crucial role in structuring family interactions, dictating expectations regarding respect, emotional expression, and authority (Madigele, 2024). Many cultures emphasize hierarchical relationships between parents and children, where deference to elders is a core expectation. This hierarchical structure influences how authority is communicated and often leads to one-directional dialogue, where children are expected to listen rather than contribute equally to discussions (Kea et al., 2024). Such cultural narratives reinforce familial cohesion but may also limit open and reciprocal communication, particularly as younger generations are increasingly exposed to more egalitarian values through education and socialization outside the home (Bilač et al., 2024). The transmission of cultural values through language further complicates intergenerational communication. While some families prioritize bilingualism to maintain cultural heritage, linguistic gaps between generations often create misunderstandings and affect emotional closeness (Yang, 2023).

Intergenerational differences in communication styles have been extensively documented, particularly regarding emotional expressiveness and conflict resolution (Zadhasan, 2023). Older generations, having been raised in environments that valued restraint and indirect communication, may struggle to understand the more open and expressive styles of younger family members (Jung, 2023). This discrepancy can lead to misinterpretations, where the lack of explicit verbal affirmation from parents may be perceived by younger generations as emotional distance rather than cultural modesty (Diggs & Socha, 2023). Furthermore, advancements in technology have altered the way family members communicate, with younger

individuals favoring digital interactions, while older family members often prefer traditional face-to-face conversations (Klymenko, 2021). Digital communication methods, such as messaging apps and social media, have facilitated connection across geographical distances but have also contributed to generational misunderstandings due to differences in communication etiquette and perceived emotional depth (Falope, 2021).

The negotiation of cultural identity within intergenerational families also plays a significant role in shaping parent-child communication (Mujiyono et al., 2024). As individuals are exposed to different cultural influences, they must balance adherence to traditional values with the adoption of modern perspectives (Derrington & Paquette, 2021). This balancing act is particularly pronounced among immigrant families, where children often integrate host culture values more readily than their parents, leading to generational gaps in expectations and communication patterns (Thadi et al., 2021). For instance, in many collectivist cultures, family decision-making is a communal process, whereas younger generations influenced by individualistic values may advocate for personal autonomy (Swanson et al., 2021). These contrasting perspectives can lead to conflict, as parents may perceive their children's desire for independence as a rejection of cultural traditions rather than a natural adaptation to a changing social landscape (Kalfin et al., 2024).

The role of family rituals and traditions in communication further underscores the importance of cultural continuity in intergenerational interactions (Navabinejad, 2024). Many families rely on structured rituals such as religious practices, meal-time discussions, and cultural festivals to reinforce values and strengthen bonds (Meyer & Stambe, 2020). These traditions serve as opportunities for intergenerational storytelling, in which elders pass down knowledge, moral lessons, and cultural narratives to younger family members (Li & Guan, 2020). However, as societal changes influence individual lifestyles, younger generations may participate less actively in these rituals, leading to concerns about cultural erosion (Zarrabi et al., 2019). The extent to which parents and children engage in these traditions affects their communication, with those who actively participate in shared cultural practices often reporting stronger familial ties and better mutual understanding (Shaw, 2019).

Studies examining family communication patterns highlight the importance of adaptability and openness in fostering healthy intergenerational relationships (Parker-Jenkins et al., 2019). Families that adopt flexible

communication styles, allowing for both traditional and modern conversational norms, tend to experience lower conflict and higher levels of trust (Park & Bae, 2019). The ability to navigate between hierarchical and egalitarian communication structures enables parents and children to maintain a balance between cultural preservation and personal expression (Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2019). Additionally, parental willingness to adapt to changing societal norms plays a crucial role in maintaining positive interactions with younger family members (Deater-Deckard, 2017). When parents acknowledge and respect their children's perspectives, communication becomes a reciprocal exchange rather than a top-down directive (Cullen et al., 2017).

The significance of cultural expectations, generational shifts, and adaptation processes in shaping parent-child communication underscores the need for further exploration of these dynamics. The present study explores the cultural factors influencing parent-child communication in intergenerational families.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study employs a phenomenological research design to explore the cultural factors influencing parent-child communication in intergenerational families. The phenomenological approach allows for an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences, providing insight into the nuances of cultural influences on communication patterns. The study's participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences in intergenerational family communication. A total of 29 participants were recruited through online platforms, including social media groups and community forums dedicated to family relationships. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that additional data collection no longer contributed new themes or perspectives to the study. Participants represented a range of intergenerational family dynamics, including parents, adult children, and grandparents, to capture a comprehensive understanding of the cultural factors at play.

2.2 Measure

2.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews, which provided the flexibility to explore key themes while allowing participants to share their experiences freely. The interview protocol was designed based on a review of existing literature on intergenerational communication and cultural influences on family dynamics. Questions focused on participants' perceptions of communication styles, generational differences, cultural expectations, and the role of traditions and values in shaping parent-child interactions. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted via video calls to accommodate participants from various locations. With informed consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participants' names and any identifying information.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, using NVivo software to facilitate coding and theme development. The analysis process began with an initial round of open coding, identifying key concepts and recurring patterns in the data. These initial codes were then grouped into broader themes related to cultural influences on parent-child communication. Axial coding was employed to examine relationships between themes and refine the categorization of findings. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison techniques were used to ensure consistency in coding and theme development. The final themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately captured participants' experiences, and findings were interpreted in the context of existing literature on cultural communication patterns within intergenerational families.

3 Findings and Results

The demographic analysis of the study's 29 participants revealed a diverse representation of intergenerational family members, including parents ($n = 12$, 41.4%), adult children ($n = 10$, 34.5%), and grandparents ($n = 7$, 24.1%). The participants ranged in age from 25 to 75 years, with a mean age of 47.8 years ($SD = 13.6$). Gender distribution showed a relatively balanced sample, with 16 participants identifying as female (55.2%) and 13 as male (44.8%). Participants came from various cultural backgrounds, including Asian (n

= 10, 34.5%), Middle Eastern (n = 8, 27.6%), European (n = 6, 20.7%), and Latin American (n = 5, 17.2%). Most participants were bilingual or multilingual (n = 22, 75.9%), with some experiencing language barriers in family communication. In terms of education, the majority held a university degree (n = 18, 62.1%), while the remainder had either a high school diploma (n = 7, 24.1%) or postgraduate qualifications (n = 4, 13.8%). The length of time participants

had lived in their respective host countries varied, with 15 individuals (51.7%) residing in a non-native country for more than 15 years, while others had either recently migrated (n = 6, 20.7%) or spent their entire lives in their native culture (n = 8, 27.6%). The diversity in demographic characteristics provided rich insights into the varying cultural influences on parent-child communication across different generational contexts.

Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Category	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
Cultural Expectations and Norms	Hierarchical Communication Patterns	Respect for elders, Obedience, Deference in decision-making, Limited child autonomy
	Role Expectations in Family Communication	Parental authority, Gender-based roles, Emotional restraint, Expectation of conformity
	Influence of Cultural Traditions	Ritualistic communication, Family storytelling, Religious discussions, Celebration customs, Generational knowledge transfer
	Language and Code-Switching	Native language preservation, Bilingual communication, Language barriers, Generational language gaps, Identity connection through language
Intergenerational Differences in Expression	Emotional Expressiveness Variations	Reserved parental emotions, Open emotional discussions in younger generations, Intergenerational emotional disconnect
	Technology's Role in Communication	Digital communication preferences, Misinterpretation through texts, Increased accessibility, Generational gaps in technology use, Overreliance on virtual interactions
	Conflict Resolution Styles	Indirect vs. direct confrontation, Avoidance strategies, Parental authority in disputes, Mediation by extended family, Importance of family harmony
Cultural Adaptation and Negotiation	Views on Privacy and Boundaries	Expectations of shared information, Privacy as disrespect, Emotional independence, Frequent parental involvement, Difference in personal space perception
	Balancing Traditional and Modern Values	Negotiation between independence and obedience, Adapting cultural values in modern settings, Selective adherence to traditions, Bridging generational gaps
	Acculturation and Cultural Identity	Identity struggles, Influence of host culture, Bilingualism as a bridge, Preservation of native customs, Generational shifts in cultural affiliation
	Parental Adaptation to Changing Norms	Flexibility in parenting styles, Increased openness in discussions, Learning from younger generations, Re-evaluating traditional norms

The analysis of interview data revealed three overarching themes related to the cultural factors influencing parent-child communication in intergenerational families: Cultural Expectations and Norms, Intergenerational Differences in Expression, and Cultural Adaptation and Negotiation. Each theme encompassed multiple subcategories, highlighting the complexity of communication patterns across generations.

Cultural Expectations and Norms

The first theme, Cultural Expectations and Norms, encapsulates the ways in which family communication is shaped by traditional values and societal expectations. Within this theme, Hierarchical Communication Patterns emerged as a key subcategory, reflecting the role of respect and obedience in intergenerational interactions. Many participants described their upbringing as one in which parental authority was unquestionable, limiting open dialogue. One participant stated, "I was taught never to challenge my parents' decisions. Even now, as an adult, I hesitate to voice my disagreement." This hierarchy often

resulted in restrained communication, where children were expected to listen rather than actively contribute to discussions.

Another subcategory, Role Expectations in Family Communication, highlighted the influence of culturally defined roles on conversational dynamics. Participants noted that gender played a crucial role in determining who could express emotions freely and who was expected to maintain restraint. A male participant shared, "In my family, men are expected to be strong and not discuss feelings, while my sisters could openly talk about their emotions with my mother." Such expectations reinforced communication patterns that prioritized authority and emotional control within the family structure.

The influence of Cultural Traditions was also evident in shaping communication. Many participants recalled family storytelling as a significant part of their upbringing, with elders passing down wisdom through structured narratives. "Our grandfather would gather us every evening and tell

stories from his childhood. It was his way of teaching us life lessons," one interviewee recalled. Similarly, religious discussions and ritualistic communication were noted as central elements in maintaining cultural continuity.

The final subcategory within this theme, Language and Code-Switching, underscored the impact of language use on communication. Many participants spoke about the challenge of preserving their native language while adapting to the dominant language of their country. One participant explained, "My parents insist we speak our mother tongue at home, but sometimes I mix languages without realizing it." Bilingualism often served as both a bridge and a barrier, facilitating intergenerational connection while also highlighting linguistic gaps that occasionally led to misunderstandings.

Intergenerational Differences in Expression

The second major theme, Intergenerational Differences in Expression, revealed variations in how different generations within the family conveyed emotions, resolved conflicts, and engaged in daily conversations. The subcategory of Emotional Expressiveness Variations illustrated generational shifts in the willingness to discuss feelings. Many participants described their parents as emotionally reserved, avoiding discussions about personal struggles or vulnerabilities. "My mother never told me she loved me in words, but I always knew through her actions," one participant shared, emphasizing the nonverbal nature of affection in many families. In contrast, younger generations expressed a preference for open emotional discussions, often leading to generational misunderstandings.

The role of technology in family interactions was another key area of difference, captured in the subcategory Technology's Role in Communication. Many younger participants described digital communication as their primary means of staying connected with family members, while older generations often struggled with these mediums. "I text my parents daily, but they still prefer phone calls or face-to-face conversations," one participant noted. Some also reported misinterpretations arising from text-based interactions, with messages being perceived as abrupt or disrespectful due to generational differences in communication norms.

The subcategory Conflict Resolution Styles highlighted generational discrepancies in handling disagreements. Many participants noted that their parents preferred indirect or avoidance-based approaches to conflict resolution, often emphasizing family harmony over open confrontation. One participant described, "My father never openly argued; he

would just remain silent for days until the issue faded away." In contrast, younger family members tended to favor direct discussions, sometimes leading to friction in intergenerational interactions.

Another significant difference was found in Views on Privacy and Boundaries. Several participants described their parents' expectations of open sharing within the family, sometimes at odds with their own desire for personal space. "My mother still asks me where I am going and with whom, even though I'm married," one participant explained, illustrating the lasting influence of intergenerational control. Differences in perceptions of privacy often led to conflicts, with older generations perceiving secrecy as a sign of disrespect.

Cultural Adaptation and Negotiation

The third theme, Cultural Adaptation and Negotiation, addressed the evolving nature of family communication as generations navigate between traditional and modern values. The subcategory Balancing Traditional and Modern Values revealed that many families actively negotiated the extent to which they adhered to cultural traditions. One participant reflected, "I respect my parents' traditions, but I also want the freedom to make my own choices. It's a constant balancing act." Many families found themselves selectively adopting cultural norms, blending elements of both their heritage and the dominant culture in their country of residence.

The theme of Acculturation and Cultural Identity was also prominent, with participants describing their struggles in navigating multiple cultural expectations. "At home, I am expected to follow one set of values, but outside, the world operates differently," one participant explained, reflecting the identity conflicts faced by children of immigrant families. Many noted that bilingualism played a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity while also facilitating integration into a new environment.

The final subcategory, Parental Adaptation to Changing Norms, explored how parents responded to shifts in cultural expectations over time. Some participants observed that their parents had become more flexible in their communication styles, allowing for greater openness in discussions. "My father was strict when I was a child, but now he actually listens to my opinions," one participant remarked. This adaptation often resulted from exposure to new cultural norms and interactions with younger generations who challenged traditional ways of thinking.

The findings of this study illustrate the dynamic nature of parent-child communication in intergenerational families,

shaped by cultural expectations, generational shifts in expression, and the ongoing negotiation of traditions and modern values. These themes highlight the complexities involved in maintaining effective and meaningful communication across generations, underscoring the importance of cultural awareness and adaptability in family relationships.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that cultural factors significantly shape parent-child communication in intergenerational families, with key influences emerging from cultural expectations and norms, intergenerational differences in expression, and the negotiation of cultural adaptation. These results align with previous research that highlights the role of hierarchical family structures, linguistic barriers, and evolving communication patterns in shaping intergenerational dialogue (Mujiyono et al., 2024; Navabinejad, 2024). The study demonstrates that while cultural traditions reinforce family cohesion, they may also restrict open communication between parents and children. Additionally, generational shifts in emotional expressiveness, the adoption of digital communication, and differing perspectives on autonomy further contribute to communication challenges. These insights expand on existing literature by highlighting the nuanced ways in which cultural identity, socialization processes, and technological changes influence family communication dynamics (Kea et al., 2024; Madigele, 2024).

One of the most prominent findings in this study was the influence of hierarchical communication patterns on parent-child interactions. Many participants described their experiences growing up in family structures where respect for elders was emphasized, often at the expense of open dialogue. This result is consistent with previous studies that have found that many collectivist cultures prioritize obedience and authority in family communication, reinforcing a top-down structure in which children are expected to listen rather than engage in reciprocal discussions (Kalfin et al., 2024). However, this study also highlights that such hierarchies may create emotional distance between generations, particularly when younger family members have been exposed to more egalitarian values through education and peer interactions (Bilač et al., 2024). This finding aligns with research indicating that generational exposure to different sociocultural

environments often leads to tensions in family communication (Jung, 2023; Yang, 2023).

Another key theme in the study was the impact of language and code-switching on intergenerational communication. Many participants noted that linguistic barriers played a role in shaping family interactions, particularly when younger generations struggled with their native language or when parents had difficulty adjusting to the dominant language of their host country. Prior research confirms that bilingualism within intergenerational families can both facilitate and hinder communication, depending on the extent to which both generations share a common linguistic foundation (Diggs & Socha, 2023; Zadhan, 2023). This study adds to the growing body of literature by illustrating how language gaps may not only result in miscommunication but also in emotional detachment, as children and parents may struggle to fully express their feelings in a mutually understood language (Klymenko, 2021).

The results also highlighted significant intergenerational differences in emotional expressiveness and conflict resolution styles. Many older participants described growing up in households where emotional restraint was encouraged, whereas younger participants expressed a preference for open discussions about feelings and personal experiences. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that cultural norms heavily influence emotional expression in families, with many traditional family structures emphasizing emotional control and indirect communication (Derrington & Paquette, 2021; Falope, 2021). The generational shift toward greater openness in emotional communication may be attributed to increased exposure to global media, education, and evolving social norms (Swanson et al., 2021; Thadi et al., 2021). However, as this study found, this shift often leads to misunderstandings, with older generations perceiving open emotional discussions as unnecessary or even inappropriate (Meyer & Stambe, 2020).

Additionally, technology's role in shaping family communication emerged as a significant factor in intergenerational interactions. Many participants described a shift toward digital communication methods such as texting and social media, which, while facilitating connection, also introduced new challenges. Older generations often found digital communication impersonal, whereas younger family members saw it as a practical and effective means of staying in touch. These findings are in line with previous research on the impact of modern communication tools on family

relationships, which suggests that while technology can bridge geographical distances, it may also contribute to misunderstandings due to generational differences in digital literacy and communication etiquette (Li & Guan, 2020; Zarrabi et al., 2019). This study further supports prior literature by demonstrating that while technology provides opportunities for continued communication, it also changes the nature of familial interactions, sometimes reducing face-to-face conversations that are traditionally valued in many cultures (Parker-Jenkins et al., 2019; Shaw, 2019).

Another important aspect of the findings was the negotiation of traditional and modern values in intergenerational communication. Many participants described the difficulty of balancing cultural expectations with contemporary social norms. Parents often expected their children to adhere to traditional values, while younger generations sought greater independence in decision-making and personal expression. This tension has been widely documented in studies on cultural adaptation, particularly among immigrant families who navigate multiple cultural influences simultaneously (Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2019; Park & Bae, 2019). The findings support research indicating that families that successfully negotiate this balance tend to have healthier communication patterns, as both generations demonstrate flexibility and mutual understanding (Cullen et al., 2017; Deater-Deckard, 2017).

Overall, the study's findings reinforce the idea that parent-child communication in intergenerational families is deeply influenced by cultural norms, generational shifts, and adaptive strategies. The results align with prior research while also offering new insights into the complexities of language use, emotional expression, and technology-driven communication in contemporary family dynamics. These findings highlight the need for greater awareness of cultural expectations and generational differences to foster more effective and meaningful interactions between parents and children.

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to participants recruited through online platforms, which may have resulted in a bias toward individuals who are more technologically proficient and open to discussing their experiences in a digital format. This limitation may have excluded individuals with limited access to digital communication or those from more conservative family backgrounds who may have different communication patterns. Additionally, as a qualitative study, the findings are not generalizable to all intergenerational families but rather

provide an in-depth understanding of lived experiences within specific cultural contexts. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces the possibility of recall bias, as participants may have selectively remembered and described their communication experiences. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a more diverse sample and employing mixed-method approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational communication.

Future research should explore intergenerational communication across a wider range of cultural backgrounds to examine how different societal norms influence parent-child interactions. Comparative studies between collectivist and individualistic cultures could provide deeper insights into how cultural expectations shape communication styles. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how intergenerational communication evolves over time, particularly in response to external influences such as migration, globalization, and technological advancements. Future research could also explore the role of non-verbal communication, as cultural norms often dictate implicit ways of expressing emotions and authority. Finally, investigating the impact of family communication workshops or interventions could provide practical strategies for improving intergenerational dialogue and reducing conflict arising from cultural and generational differences.

Given the complexities of intergenerational communication, families should strive to foster an environment of open dialogue and mutual respect. Parents can benefit from being more receptive to their children's perspectives, acknowledging the generational shifts in values and communication preferences. At the same time, younger generations should recognize the cultural significance of traditions and seek to bridge the gap between modern communication styles and familial expectations. Educational programs and workshops on intergenerational communication could provide families with strategies to navigate linguistic barriers, emotional expression differences, and the integration of technology in family interactions. Furthermore, mental health professionals and counselors working with diverse families should consider cultural factors when addressing parent-child communication challenges, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and tailored to the unique dynamics of intergenerational families.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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