

Resilience Through Language, Culture, and Community: A Qualitative Study of Multilingual and Multicultural Families

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families draw upon their cultural and linguistic assets to navigate challenges and foster resilience during the adaptation process. Using a strengths-based framework, a secondary qualitative analysis was conducted using narrative interview data from 15 multilingual immigrant mothers participating in a statewide early childhood evaluation. Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach to examine how resilience emerged through participants' lived experiences. Findings show how families used cultural practices, heritage language, and community engagement as tools for coping and adaptation. Three main themes of resilience were identified: (1) language as a link to cultural heritage, (2) cultural traditions as anchors of identity, and (3) community participation as access to social support and belonging. Results demonstrate that resilience operates as an everyday, culturally grounded process shaped through relational and community practices. These findings extend existing understandings of immigrant family resilience by highlighting how multiple forms of cultural wealth work together to support well-being. Implications for educational practice and policy include the importance of recognizing and supporting families' cultural and linguistic assets.

KEYWORDS: community, cultural wealth, immigrant families, language, resilience

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Background

Migration is more than geographic movement; it reshapes cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of identity (Barua & Maheshwari, 2025; Brance et al., 2024; La Barbera, 2015). Immigrant families, including first- and second-generation families, navigate cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, acculturation, and new sociolinguistic contexts (Johnson et al., 2022). During resettlement, families may also encounter social and structural barriers including discrimination, limited English proficiency, and financial strain that can complicate adaptation (Barua & Maheshwari, 2025; Bekteshi, 2024; Kerker et al., 2024). At the same time, these challenges are shaped by broader social and political conditions and may be mitigated through protective resources such as social support, language proficiency, family connectedness, and supportive community environments. Recent scholarship further emphasizes that immigrant family well-being is influenced not only by individual and family resources but also by the structural and community conditions that shape adaptation (Kerker et al., 2024).

Immigrant families have historically been examined through deficit-oriented perspectives that emphasize risks and vulnerabilities. Increasingly, scholarship conceptualizes resilience as a process through which families mobilize relational, cultural, and social resources to adapt and thrive (Brodsky et al., 2022; Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017). From this perspective, resilience is not understood as a fixed individual or family characteristic but as a dynamic process of positive adaptation supported by relationships, protective systems, and available resources (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, 2014). Research with immigrant families further suggests that resilience is supported by family, relational, social, and community resources as families navigate migration-related stress and structural adversity (Arce et al., 2020). Resilience is also shaped by sociocultural contexts that influence belonging, social participation, life satisfaction, and integration within immigrant communities (Estrada-Moreno et al., 2026).

To move beyond deficit-oriented approaches, this study is informed by Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005), which conceptualizes the knowledge, skills, relationships, and resources that communities of color draw upon while navigating systemic inequities. Yosso identifies multiple forms of capital, including linguistic, familial, social, navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital. These forms of cultural wealth are embedded in everyday family and community relationships and provide a framework for examining how marginalized communities mobilize existing assets rather than being defined primarily by barriers or perceived deficiencies. Contemporary applications of CCW with migrant youth further demonstrate the framework's usefulness for examining how family connections, aspirations, and navigational resources support young people as they negotiate educational and social environments (D'Costa et al., 2025).

Existing scholarship demonstrates that resilience among immigrant families is shaped through cultural, relational, linguistic, and ecological processes that unfold across everyday family and community life (Arce et al., 2020; Kerker et al., 2024; Rafieifar et al., 2025). Yet much of the literature continues to emphasize outcomes, such as academic achievement, psychological well-being, or social adjustment, with comparatively less attention to the processes through which resilience is enacted in daily life (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020; Walsh, 2021). Qualitative research suggests that resilience may develop through cultural negotiation, relational meaning-making, family relationships, communication, and community-based support (Rafieifar et al., 2025; Sametband & Strong, 2017; Scharp et al., 2020). However, fewer studies examine how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families mobilize these interconnected assets in everyday life, particularly while raising young children and navigating migration and settlement. This study

addresses this gap by exploring how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families draw on cultural and linguistic assets in everyday life as they adapt and build resilience during migration and settlement.

Review of the Literature

Immigrant Family Resilience as a Sociocultural and Relational Process

Resilience is commonly understood as the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully when faced with conditions that threaten its functioning or development (Masten, 2025). Rather than representing an individual trait that immigrant families either possess or lack, resilience can be understood as a process that develops through interactions among individuals, families, relationships, institutions, and broader sociocultural contexts (Masten, 2025; Walsh, 2021). Masten's concept of "ordinary magic" emphasizes that resilience frequently develops through everyday relationships and routines rather than through extraordinary individual characteristics (Masten, 2025). Family resilience scholarship likewise emphasizes shared meaning-making, relational strengths, communication, and culturally situated resources through which families adapt to changing circumstances (Doty, 2019; Walsh, 2021).

For immigrant families, resilience is closely connected to migration, adaptation, identity, and relationships across generations. Research shows that families may draw on internal, relational, faith-based, and community supports while negotiating migration-related stress and structural adversity (Arce et al., 2020). Research on unaccompanied immigrant youth similarly demonstrates how connections with family members, peers, and educators can function as protective resources in navigating adversity and supporting positive adaptation (Peña et al., 2018). These findings reinforce a broader understanding of immigrant resilience as relational and contextually situated rather than solely as an individual attribute.

Resilience also varies by generational status. First-generation immigrants often ground resilience processes in cultural traditions, family responsibilities, and community networks that help sustain continuity and identity over time (Alshabani et al., 2025). Second-generation immigrants often navigate dual identities and bilingual adaptation, developing hybrid cultural identities that enable them to participate in the dominant society while sustaining connections to their heritage (Gendron, 2024; Omole, 2024). Qualitative research with second-generation Korean American young adults similarly suggests that bicultural identity can function as an adaptive resource, contributing to cultural flexibility and resilience (Kim & Vietze, 2023). These patterns suggest that resilience in immigrant families involves not only navigating hardship but also cultural and intergenerational processes through which families adapt, persist, and thrive. Research further indicates that immigrant youths' development and positive adaptation are best understood within the cultural systems that shape how families navigate risk, opportunity, and identity (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020). Family resilience scholarship similarly shows how relational strengths, shared meaning-making, and cultural values can contribute to intergenerational adaptation (Doty, 2019). Taken together, this scholarship positions immigrant family resilience as an ongoing sociocultural process through which families negotiate continuity, adaptation, identity, and belonging.

Intergenerational Adaptation and Family Meaning-Making

Immigrant parents and children often experience adaptation across different social, linguistic, and institutional environments. Parents may seek to preserve cultural values, family practices, and connections with communities of origin while children participate in schools and peer environments shaped by the dominant society. These differences can produce acculturative gaps and patterns of intergenerational dissonance, but they may also generate opportunities for negotiation, learning, and adaptation within families (Kim et al., 2013).

Research on family resilience suggests that these intergenerational processes are mediated through communication, shared meaning-making, family relationships, and culturally situated understandings of identity and responsibility. Rather than treating generational differences only as sources of conflict, sociocultural and ecological perspectives emphasize how families negotiate change through relational processes embedded within individual, family, structural, and cultural systems (Gillen et al., 2024). When families maintain communication and develop shared meanings across cultural and generational differences, these everyday negotiations can support adaptation rather than undermine family cohesion.

These intergenerational processes may become particularly complex within multilingual and multicultural families, where adaptation occurs across multiple linguistic and cultural contexts. Research suggests that family communication, heritage-language practices, cultural identity, and intergenerational expectations are interconnected within these processes (deSouza et al., 2023; Song & Wu, 2024). Heritage-language continuity has also been associated with ethnic identity, family cohesion, psychological well-being, and social inclusion among multilingual and second-generation immigrants (Karpava, 2021), while cultural pride, belonging, and hybrid identity formation may support positive adjustment among immigrant youth and adults (Omole, 2024). Together, this scholarship illustrates how immigrant families negotiate adaptation through interconnected relational, linguistic, and cultural processes across generations.

Cultural Wealth and Ecological Resources in Immigrant Family Adaptation

Family resilience also develops within broader ecological and structural systems. Schools, community organizations, religious institutions, social networks, and culturally responsive environments may provide immigrant families with informational, emotional, relational, and institutional resources. Research with recently migrated undocumented Latinx youth similarly highlights peer, school, family, and community support as potential resources for building resilience amid migration-related stressors (Talleyrand et al., 2022). Recent scholarship emphasizes that immigrant-family well-being is shaped not only by individual and family resources but also by access to supportive community environments, institutions, policies, and culturally responsive services (Kerker et al., 2024). Stronger community connections may likewise support social participation, belonging, life satisfaction, and reduced social isolation or rejection (Estrada-Moreno et al., 2026).

Educational settings are also important components of these ecological systems. Schools and early childhood programs can connect families with information, services, social relationships, and opportunities to participate in their children's education. School-family partnerships and community programs may therefore support adaptation when they acknowledge families' linguistic and cultural resources rather than positioning difference as a deficit (Park, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Contemporary research using CCW with Latiné migrant

youth similarly illustrates how family connections, aspirations, and navigational resources help young people negotiate educational environments while also revealing the structural conditions that can limit their opportunities (D'Costa et al., 2025).

Viewed through a strengths-based perspective, this scholarship situates immigrant family adaptation within overlapping family, institutional, community, and sociocultural contexts. These contexts shape both the resources available to families and the environments within which adaptation occurs (Kerker et al., 2024). CCW (Yosso, 2005) offers a complementary framework for examining the knowledge, relationships, and resources available within these contexts without approaching immigrant families primarily through deficit-based assumptions. This perspective highlights the cultural wealth families bring to adaptation while also recognizing the broader institutional and structural environments in which those processes take place.

Rationale

Although scholarship increasingly recognizes resilience as an important dimension of immigrant family adaptation, research has often emphasized risk, vulnerability, trauma, or measurable outcomes rather than the everyday processes through which families enact resilience (García Coll & Marks, 2012; Gillen et al., 2024; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Less attention has been given to how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families mobilize relational, sociocultural, and family-based resources during ordinary experiences of adaptation and settlement. This gap is particularly important in families raising young children, where adaptation unfolds across home, educational, institutional, and community environments.

The present study uses a strengths-based perspective and Yosso's (2005) CCW framework to examine how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families draw upon existing assets as they navigate life in the United States. Rather than examining resilience solely as a response to adversity or as an individual outcome, this study considers resilience as an everyday process embedded in family relationships, cultural meaning-making, and interactions within broader social environments. The study seeks to deepen understanding of immigrant family resilience while informing educational, community, and policy practices that recognize and support the strengths families bring to adaptation and settlement.

Theoretical Overview

Traditional deficit perspectives tend to characterize immigrant families by identifying potential risks or barriers they may encounter. Conversely, strengths-based approaches acknowledge the resources that immigrant families draw on to adapt and succeed. By focusing on families' assets rather than deficits, strengths-based approaches examine everyday family practices and knowledge that immigrant families can draw on as resilience strategies while adapting to life in a new society.

Saleebey's (1996) strengths-based framework positions families as resilient and resourceful systems. Strengths-based models recognize resilience as a process that families develop through caregiving practices, meaning-making, cultural knowledge, and skills that help them navigate the dominant culture. In other words, strengths-based approaches do not view resilience as something built only in response to deficits or trauma, but rather recognize everyday family interactions as potential sources of resilience. Families may engage in caregiving practices, share stories and

knowledge across generations, provide mutual assistance, and preserve cultural practices that sustain family relationships and cultural identity.

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework complements this strengths-based perspective by identifying six forms of cultural capital—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital—as sources of knowledge and strength that marginalized communities draw upon to navigate social institutions and challenge deficit-based understandings of their experiences. Within multilingual and multicultural families, these forms of cultural wealth may operate through everyday family relationships, knowledge, communication, social connections, and navigation of institutions. Together, Saleebey's (1996) strengths-based perspective and Yosso's (2005) CCW framework provide a conceptual basis for understanding resilience through the resources and knowledge families mobilize as they negotiate adaptation, identity, belonging, and participation within broader social environments.

In this study, these frameworks guided the interpretation of participants' narratives by attending to how families mobilized multiple forms of cultural wealth—including linguistic, familial, and social resources—as part of their everyday resilience practices. While Yosso's (2005) model identifies distinct forms of capital, this study does not apply these categories as fixed analytic structures. Instead, they serve as a conceptual lens to interpret patterns that emerged inductively from participants' narratives.

Researchers' Identities

The research team consisted of a doctoral student and three faculty members from two Midwestern universities. The doctoral student is fluent in Spanish and English, and his background with migration and linguistic adaptation provided valuable insight into the challenges faced by immigrant families in this study. These linguistic and cultural perspectives also informed the interpretation of participants' narratives, particularly in understanding how language, identity, and belonging intersect within migration experiences. The other members of the research team were three White, U.S.-born, English-speaking female faculty members, each with over 25 years of experience in early childhood education, community-engaged research, and early childhood settings. While team members brought different lived experiences and positionalities, these perspectives contributed to the broader research context and interpretation of participants' narratives. Ongoing reflexive discussions between the doctoral student and one faculty member were used to examine how positionality shaped the interpretation, analysis, and representation of participants' experiences.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how multilingual and multicultural immigrant families draw upon cultural and linguistic resources to navigate adaptation and build resilience within their family systems as they adjust to life in a new sociocultural community. The study examined families' daily routines, intergenerational processes, and community involvement to understand how resilience was enacted within family systems. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do multilingual and multicultural immigrant families draw upon linguistic and cultural assets to build and sustain resilience?
2. How do these assets operate intergenerationally and within processes of community engagement?

Methods

A secondary qualitative analysis was conducted using interview data collected for a statewide evaluation focused on access to early care and education. While resilience was not a focus of the original project, the existing interviews included participants' accounts of family life, language, cultural practices, relationships, and experiences within their communities. The secondary analysis provided an opportunity to examine these accounts through a strengths-based perspective, with particular attention to how multilingual immigrant families described processes of adaptation and the resources they drew upon in their everyday lives. This study applied a strengths-based lens to the analysis and interpretation of secondary data. As a result, the analysis prioritized understanding participants' cultural, linguistic, familial, and social assets rather than framing migration experiences through a deficit lens. Secondary qualitative analysis allows researchers to use existing qualitative data to investigate new research questions or apply a new perspective to the original data (Tate & Happ, 2018).

These existing narratives provided a meaningful foundation for examining resilience as an emergent concept in the secondary analysis. Rather than defining resilience as a predetermined analytic category, the analysis attended to how participants described adaptation, resourcefulness, relationships, identity, and forms of support in their everyday lives. The strengths-based and CCW frameworks informed interpretation of these patterns without functioning as predetermined coding categories.

Setting

Interview data were collected through a university-state agency partnership conducted in a Midwestern state. Interviews were completed virtually via Zoom or phone. Participants lived in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the state. Participants were recruited from across the state to capture geographic and cultural variation.

Participant Selection

Recruitment for the initial study included primary caregivers of children from birth through kindergarten who indicated that their home language was Spanish, Hmong, or Somali (either as a first or second language). Fifteen women from culturally diverse backgrounds participated in the study: seven Latina/Hispanic, six Hmong, and two Somali mothers. These individuals represented the full subset of multilingual immigrant caregivers in the original dataset who met the criteria for this secondary analysis. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 summarizes participant demographic characteristics.

This secondary analysis included all participants from the larger dataset who were identified as primary caregivers in multilingual immigrant households. Although the sample was small, participants represented diverse migration histories, educational backgrounds, household compositions, and socioeconomic circumstances, providing varied perspectives on multilingual

immigrant family experiences within a Midwestern context. All participants were primary caregivers of young children enrolled in early childhood programs.

Table 1
Demographics of Interview Participants

ID	Primary Language	Secondary Language	Adults	Children	Marital Status	Income	Education
L1	English	Spanish	2	1	Married	\$75,000-\$99,000	Master's
L2	English	Spanish	2	2	Single	\$15,000-\$24,999	Some college
L3	Spanish	None	4	3	Married	\$10,000-\$14,999	Some HS
L4	Spanish	None	4	2	Single	\$25,000-\$34,999	Some HS
L5	Spanish	None	2	3	Single	\$15,000-\$24,999	Some HS
L6	English	Spanish	2	2	Partner	\$15,000-\$24,999	HS
L7	Spanish	None	2	6	Married	\$35,000-\$49,999	Some HS
H1	Hmong	English	4	2	Single	Less than \$10,000	Some HS
H2	English	Hmong	2	2	Partner	\$25,000-\$34,999	Some college
H3	English	Hmong	2	1	Partner	\$25,000-\$34,999	HS
H4	Hmong	English	2	4	Married	\$25,000-\$34,999	Bachelor's
H5	Hmong	None	2	3	Married	\$15,000-\$24,999	Some HS
H6	English	Hmong	2	2	Partner	\$50,000-\$74,999	Master's
S1	Somali	Kiswahili	2	2	Married	\$15,000-\$24,999	Some HS
S2	Somali	Kiswahili, English	2	5	Married	\$75,000-\$99,000	Bachelor's

Note. Adults = number of adults in the household. Children = number of children in the household. Income = annual household income. HS = high school.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the original study was obtained from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Institutional Review Board (Protocol # IRB-FY2021-2022-11). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time. The present study involved a secondary qualitative analysis of de-identified interview data and was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were conducted in each participant's preferred language (Spanish, Hmong, Somali, or English) and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted by bilingual research staff fluent in Spanish, Hmong, Somali, or English. Recorded interviews conducted in English were transcribed from audio recordings, whereas interviews conducted in Spanish, Hmong, or Somali were transcribed and translated into English. Participants received a \$20 gift card for their participation.

Interview questions focused on families' lived experiences with early childhood programs and educators. Although resilience was not explicitly addressed in the interview protocol, participants frequently discussed family adaptation, relationships, and everyday experiences. The secondary analysis therefore reexamined these narratives through a strengths-based resilience lens to understand how families described adaptation and the resources they mobilized. Appendix A presents the original interview protocol used in the primary data collection. No pilot interviews were conducted before data collection. Procedures, informed consent, and interview documentation were consistent across participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This six-phase process included:

- 1) familiarization with the data
- 2) generating initial codes
- 3) searching for themes
- 4) reviewing themes
- 5) defining and naming themes
- 6) producing the report

An inductive approach was used to identify patterns within participants' narratives. This approach was particularly appropriate given the secondary nature of the dataset because it allowed patterns related to resilience to be identified from participants' accounts rather than organizing the analysis according to predetermined thematic categories. Initial coding therefore remained close to participants' accounts rather than beginning with predetermined codes derived from the strengths-based or CCW frameworks.

The first author completed the coding, and no other coders were involved in this secondary analysis. Ongoing discussions with a faculty mentor were used to reflect on coding decisions, theme development, and interpretation throughout the analytic process. Initial codes included "language barriers," "social support," "maintaining cultural traditions," "adaptation," and "educational engagement." Codes were subsequently compared and grouped into broader patterns, and candidate themes were repeatedly reviewed against the coded extracts and the broader dataset. For example, "language barriers" contributed to a broader pattern concerning how families navigated linguistic challenges, while codes concerning cultural traditions contributed to patterns related to cultural continuity and family adaptation. Themes were reviewed, refined, and named through this iterative process. In this way, resilience was examined as an emergent construct grounded in participants' accounts rather than as a set of predetermined thematic categories.

Data were managed and coded manually using word-processing tools; no qualitative analysis software was used. Patterns in the data were also examined in relation to relevant

participant characteristics and contextual information, such as linguistic background and length of time in the United States, to consider how experiences varied across contexts. Following the inductive development and refinement of themes, the strengths-based perspective and CCW framework were used as interpretive lenses for considering how the identified patterns reflected the resources, relationships, knowledge, and forms of cultural wealth that families mobilized in their everyday lives.

Validity

Methodological steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of this secondary qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic and iterative thematic analysis procedure guided the analytic process. Codes and themes were repeatedly compared with the source data to assess their coherence and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives. Ongoing reflexive discussions between the first author and a faculty mentor were used to reflect on coding decisions, theme development, and interpretation throughout the analytic process. Because this was a secondary analysis of pre-existing data, member checking was not possible, and the analysis did not involve multiple qualitative data sources that would permit methodological triangulation.

Steps taken during the original interview process also contributed to the credibility of the data used in the secondary analysis. Trained multilingual research assistants conducted interviews in participants' preferred languages, and transcripts were subsequently translated into English when interviews were conducted in languages other than English. Conducting interviews in participants' preferred languages supported participants' ability to describe their experiences in the language in which they were most comfortable. Trustworthiness was further supported through direct participant quotations, allowing readers to evaluate the connection between participants' accounts and the study's interpretations. Finally, the findings were interpreted with attention to the limitations inherent in secondary qualitative analysis, including lack of control over the original interview questions and data-collection procedures.

Findings

Three major themes emerged, illustrating how multilingual and multicultural families remained connected to language, culture, and relational practices while supporting their children's adaptation to life in a different cultural context. These themes were: (a) Language as a Link to Cultural Heritage, (b) Cultural Traditions as Anchors of Identity, and (c) Community Participation as Access to Social Support and Belonging. Participants' narratives provided insight into the daily practices families engage in to preserve culture, overcome challenges, and adapt to life in the United States. Together, these findings demonstrate that resilience emerged as a set of interconnected cultural, linguistic, and relational practices through which families adapted, maintained identity, and supported their children across various contexts.

Theme 1: Language as a Link to Cultural Heritage

Participants described heritage language as crucial for maintaining connections to culture and family heritage. Some caregivers believed that parents play an important role in teaching their children language and connecting them to ancestral roots. For example, one Latina participant (L2)

stated, “My grandchildren were born here, but their roots are [Mexican] because their mothers are Mexicans, and so their roots are Hispanic, even though they were born here. So, I think this comes from home.”

However, some caregivers also described physical distance as a barrier to exposing their children to the heritage language. One Latina mother (L1) explained how distance from family impacted their ability to teach their children their heritage language by stating, “All of our family is in California... they are the ones that speak Spanish. So, it is hard being the only person to bring it in.” These interviewees described how heritage language is both maintained through extended family networks and challenged by geographic separation. Some families described intentionally creating home language environments that supported bilingualism or multilingualism. One Hmong mother (H1) described how she and her husband taught their children both English and Hmong, saying, “We try teaching them how to speak English and Hmong... because they will learn English anyway when they go to school.” Many parents shared the sentiment that schools were the primary source of English language acquisition, while the home was the primary site for maintaining heritage language and culture. Across participants, these accounts suggest that heritage language maintenance was intentionally sustained through everyday family practices, even when geographically separated, supporting cultural continuity and intergenerational connection.

Similarly, other caregivers described their children’s early childhood programs as reinforcing their children’s abilities to speak their heritage language. One Somali mother (S1) described asking her childcare provider to teach her child aspects of the Arabic language by saying, “I told them [childcare] to teach... basic Arabic letters... Today, he is perfect in English compared to the Somali language.” This example illustrates how families actively collaborated with educators to support both English development and heritage language exposure, reflecting a form of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) that contributed to children’s cultural and educational development.

Families also explained that language barriers posed challenges when learning and managing various educational systems. One Hmong mother (H6) stated that language was more than speaking English when she said, “I am fluent in English... but even I do not completely understand the different systems at play here. It’s sometimes complicated and time-consuming, and I can only imagine if you are not an English speaker, you’re falling through the cracks.” Caregivers recognized that these barriers affected their children’s access to resources, their ability to ask questions, and their opportunities to advocate for themselves. At the same time, families described using heritage language at home to pass down stories, maintain close relationships, and strengthen familial bonds. In this way, bilingualism and multilingualism were viewed as mechanisms for staying connected to their children and preserving cultural heritage, reflecting forms of linguistic and familial capital (Yosso, 2005) that supported resilience.

Despite these challenges, many families were resourceful in finding support systems for translations and communication, including extended family members, community networks, and institutional staff. Across interviews, families discussed unique opportunities and barriers that stemmed from their linguistic abilities. While some obstacles arose from language differences, many immigrant families described language as foundational to their daily lives. It grounded their sense of cultural identity and provided strengths they could lean on as they learned about new educational systems and environments. These accounts show how families use linguistic resources and community supports to navigate educational systems and institutional challenges.

Theme 2: Cultural Traditions as Anchors of Identity

Caregivers expressed that their culture was deeply rooted in their children's identity and played a central role in how families navigated life in the United States. Many described the importance of maintaining cultural traditions while supporting their children to acclimate to life in a new social context. L2 described how their family learned to balance both cultures by saying, "We have learned to be bicultural, helping so that our roots are not lost." Across interviews, balancing life in the U.S. while staying connected to cultural roots emerged as an important aspect of life that supported adaptation and identity maintenance.

Parents shared responsibility for maintaining cultural values at home. Instead of seeing school and home as competing spaces, caregivers described them as complementary settings in which children learn to navigate different cultural expectations. L1 stated: "It is lovely to see different cultures represented and for my daughter to see that there are many varieties around us and in the world." Exposure to different cultures gave children opportunities to recognize cultural differences as a strength. Cultural values were ingrained in daily routines, shaping how children learned to interact with others and understand their role within family and community. L2 expressed that family was the main driving force in her life. She said, "My family was always my priority... I adjusted my time to be there for my daughters and my grandchildren." These caregiving practices highlight how cultural traditions are sustained through relational and intergenerational processes, reflecting forms of familial capital (Yosso, 2005) that support resilience by reinforcing identity, belonging, and mutual responsibility.

Somali caregivers noted that religion was an important aspect of their culture that they wished to maintain with their children. They wanted schools to accommodate their cultural needs by allowing students to pray. One Somali mother (S2) stated that she gave "recommendations and asked that students be given a place to pray... and the school provided those things." Having the ability to pray at school allowed the children to feel comfortable and reconnect with their cultural traditions throughout the school day, reinforcing cultural continuity and a sense of belonging. This example shows how families navigated institutional spaces to advocate for their children, highlighting forms of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) that fostered resilience within educational systems.

Across interviews, participants described culture as something enacted through everyday practices such as cooking together, holidays, storytelling, and sharing caregiver responsibilities. These routines were not only expressions of cultural identity but also tools through which children internalized values and learned to navigate social expectations. Cultural traditions helped children build a strong sense of identity and belonging, offering a stable foundation as they navigated various cultural settings. In this way, culture served as a dynamic and lived resource, showing how families actively maintained resilience through everyday practices that strengthen identity, continuity, and intergenerational bonds.

Theme 3: Community Participation as Access to Social Support and Belonging

Parents and caregivers consistently referenced community participation as a primary resource in supporting their families' adaptation to life in the United States. Families discussed schools, childcare, parent groups, and religious organizations as key sources of assistance and connection. These spaces offered encouragement, access to resources, and a sense of belonging that helped families adapt to new environments. One Hmong mother (H4) who worked with Head

Start explained how social events were held to encourage family involvement by stating, “When I was still working with Head Start... they have family events... to bring the family and the school together.” These kinds of family events created a welcoming space for parents to ask questions, build relationships with educators, and access important information, showing how community involvement acted as a form of resilience by supporting families’ engagement with educational systems.

Early childhood programs such as Head Start further strengthened these community connections. Head Start was frequently mentioned as a valuable resource because it offered home visits, taught parents educational lessons, and held events where children and parents could learn together. These opportunities allowed families to build relationships with educators and gain knowledge and skills that supported connections between home and school. In this way, early childhood programs served as places where families built confidence and accessed resources, reflecting forms of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) that supported resilience in navigating institutional systems.

Families also found support from informal networks, including relationships with other parents. H6 stated that she reached out to another parent for support, stating, “I reached out to connect with a parent, and they were getting me techniques, community, and resources.” Parents supporting other parents created opportunities for shared learning. Parents learned what to expect from school, what resources were available, and how they could help their children at home. These interactions show how families created community-based support systems, reflecting social capital (Yosso, 2005) that helped build resilience through shared knowledge and strong relationships.

Religious organizations were another source of community support. Many families used churches as community centers, central spaces for connection and belonging. L2 shared how she found community after moving to the United States by saying, “I have always been part of organizations in the community since I arrived... what helped me a lot was the church.” Many families shared how churches helped them with emotional support, English-language learning, gathering with other families for social events, and guidance on navigating life in the United States. These spaces served as both cultural and social anchors, supporting families’ well-being and strengthening their sense of belonging in a new environment.

Across interviews, participants highlighted that engaging with community networks helped them access resources, build confidence, and feel less isolated as they navigated unfamiliar systems. By interacting with educators, community leaders, and other families, participants gained emotional, informational, and practical support. These experiences show how community participation served not only as a means of accessing services but also as a relational infrastructure that fostered a sense of belonging and collective support. In this way, community engagement became a key source of resilience, enabling families to adapt, build confidence, and support each other during the cultural and linguistic transition. These interconnected practices reflect multiple forms of cultural wealth that families mobilize in everyday contexts to support adaptation and well-being.

Discussion

The findings of this study build upon existing research on immigrant family resilience by demonstrating that resilience is enacted through everyday cultural, linguistic, and relational practices. While resilience has been theorized as a dynamic process of adaptation in the context of adversity (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2006), family resilience scholarship also emphasizes the

importance of relationships, shared meaning-making, and culturally situated resources in processes of adaptation (Walsh, 2021). This study extends this understanding by illustrating how resilience is embedded in daily routines, intergenerational relationships, and interactions with broader social environments. Using Saleebey's strengths-based approach and Yosso's (2005) CCW framework, the findings illustrate how families draw upon multiple forms of cultural wealth, including linguistic, familial, social, and navigational capital, to support adaptation and family well-being.

One important pattern across the findings is that these resilience processes were interconnected and often reciprocal. Home language use supported cultural continuity; cultural practices strengthened intergenerational relationships and identity; and community participation created opportunities for families to access informational, relational, and emotional resources. Families therefore did not rely on a single area of strength to build resilience but mobilized multiple resources across different areas of family life. This interconnectedness is consistent with family resilience perspectives that locate adaptation within relational and sociocultural processes rather than within isolated individual characteristics (Gillen et al., 2024; Walsh, 2021). It also extends a CCW perspective by illustrating how different forms of capital may operate together in everyday family life rather than functioning as discrete resources (Yosso, 2005). The findings therefore suggest that immigrant family resilience develops through relationships among cultural, linguistic, familial, and social resources.

In particular, the centrality of language in participants' narratives underscores how linguistic practices can function as mechanisms of resilience within family relationships. Participants described heritage-language use as a means of maintaining cultural identity, strengthening family bonds, and facilitating communication across generations. These findings are consistent with research demonstrating that heritage-language practices are connected to parent-child communication and family relationships and are better understood as relational processes rather than solely as matters of individual language proficiency (deSouza et al., 2023). They also resonate with research showing that heritage-language maintenance involves processes of identity, emotion, family expectations, and belonging across generations (Song & Wu, 2024). The present study extends this scholarship by illustrating how everyday language practices can simultaneously sustain intergenerational relationships and help families navigate educational and institutional environments. These practices reflect Masten's (2025) concept of "ordinary magic," in which resilience develops through routine relationships and interactions, while also illustrating linguistic and navigational forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Cultural practices similarly operated as relational resources through which families sustained identity and continuity across generations. Participants described cultural values and practices as embedded in daily caregiving routines, religious activities, parenting, and family relationships. These findings align with scholarship conceptualizing immigrant family resilience as grounded in culturally situated family relationships, meaning-making, and everyday practices (Doty, 2019; Walsh, 2021). They also complement research showing that immigrant and second-generation families negotiate cultural identity across generations rather than simply choosing between heritage and dominant cultural contexts (Omole, 2024). Similarly, research with second-generation Korean American young adults suggests that bicultural identity can function as an adaptive resource, contributing to cultural flexibility and resilience (Kim & Vietze, 2023). The findings further suggest that cultural traditions function not only as expressions of identity but also as active processes through which families maintain intergenerational connection and continuity while adapting to changing social environments. Viewed through CCW, these practices

demonstrate familial and aspirational forms of capital that can reinforce belonging and sustain hopes and commitments across generations (Yosso, 2005).

Community engagement also emerged as an important dimension of family resilience. Participants identified schools, early childhood programs, religious institutions, community organizations, and informal networks as sources of social, emotional, informational, and practical support. These findings are consistent with scholarship emphasizing that immigrant-family well-being is shaped not only by individual and family resources but also by access to supportive community environments, institutions, and culturally responsive services (Kerker et al., 2024). Participants described community spaces as places where they accessed information, developed relationships, and strengthened their sense of belonging. In educational contexts, these findings also support research demonstrating how families draw upon familial, social, and navigational resources to negotiate institutional environments (D'Costa et al., 2025). The present study extends this literature by showing how community engagement can operate simultaneously as a practical resource and a relational space in which families build connections, exchange knowledge, and develop a sense of belonging. Through these relationships, families mobilized social and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) while adapting to educational and community environments.

This study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing immigrant family resilience as a process continually enacted through everyday relationships and practices. The findings suggest that resilience is not only mobilized in response to moments of adversity but is also developed through routine linguistic, cultural, familial, and community interactions. By bringing Saleebey's strengths-based perspective together with Yosso's (2005) CCW framework, the study demonstrates how multiple forms of cultural wealth can operate relationally and simultaneously within families' everyday adaptation. The findings also extend understandings of resilience within the context of families with young children by illustrating how home, early childhood programs, educational institutions, and community environments intersect in families' adaptation experiences. Rather than positioning immigrant families primarily in relation to risk or vulnerability, this study highlights how families actively mobilize existing knowledge, relationships, cultural practices, and social resources to sustain identity, belonging, and adaptation.

Limitations

The present study is subject to several limitations. First, this research is a secondary analysis of data collected for a larger cross-cultural study examining families' perspectives on early childhood services in their communities. Consequently, resilience was not explicitly integrated into the original interview questions, and some experiences relevant to the present analysis may not have been fully addressed by participants. As a result, while the data offered rich insights into participants' lived experiences, resilience was not consistently or explicitly discussed across all interviews. Second, interviews were conducted remotely, limiting the researchers' ability to observe nonverbal expressions and contextual cues that may be available during in-person qualitative interviews. Third, the sample included immigrant families from a single Midwestern state and may not reflect the breadth of immigrant experiences and multilingualism across the United States. Additionally, because participants were primary caregivers of young children enrolled in early childhood programs, the findings may not reflect the perspectives of caregivers of older children or individuals in different caregiving roles. Lastly, while interviews conducted in languages other than English were transcribed and translated into English, some cultural and

linguistic nuances may have been lost in translation. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Furthermore, given the small sample and the study's focus on Spanish-, Hmong-, and Somali-speaking families, the findings are not intended to be generalized to immigrant families with different migration histories, sociopolitical contexts, or linguistic experiences. Future research could build upon the current study by including families from additional linguistic groups and geographic regions. Nevertheless, the richness of participants' narratives provides insight into everyday processes through which multilingual immigrant families maintain cultural continuity and navigate adaptation.

Implications

This study offers implications for educational practice, community work, and policy by highlighting how multilingual immigrant families draw upon cultural, linguistic, relational, and community resources in everyday processes of resilience and adaptation.

First, the findings suggest that schools can move beyond viewing language and culture as background features and instead recognize them as resources that support children's development and family engagement. Participants described meaningful experiences when educators communicated in their heritage language and acknowledged cultural parenting practices. Schools can strengthen family engagement by creating intentional structures for learning about families' linguistic practices and cultural knowledge. For example, schools might establish family-centered events, such as multilingual family dialogues or cultural exchanges, where caregivers can share their knowledge and experiences. Professional development can also move beyond general cultural awareness to include specific strategies for engaging multilingual families, such as incorporating home-language use in communication and recognizing diverse forms of family involvement.

Second, the findings support positioning families as co-educators rather than solely as recipients of information. Participants demonstrated how cultural knowledge, caregiving practices, and intergenerational relationships can support children's development and well-being. Educational systems can build upon these resources through family-engaged approaches that create opportunities to incorporate families' cultural and linguistic knowledge into classroom practices and learning experiences. This might include opportunities for families to contribute to classroom activities, storytelling, or culturally grounded learning experiences that reflect students' everyday lives. Such approaches recognize families' existing knowledge and strengthen connections between home and educational environments.

Beyond school settings, the findings underscore the important role of community networks as spaces where families build social connections, access resources, and sustain cultural practices. Participants described relying on community organizations, faith-based groups, and informal parent networks for guidance, emotional support, and information-sharing. Community-based organizations can therefore serve as important partners in supporting immigrant families. Expanding access to multilingual programming, culturally grounded events, and opportunities for parent-led initiatives may strengthen these networks and create more inclusive spaces for families to connect and share knowledge.

At the policy level, the findings point to the importance of supporting multilingual and community-based infrastructures that help families navigate institutional systems. Policies that expand access to translation and interpretation services, support culturally responsive community programs, and facilitate partnerships between schools and community organizations may help

reduce structural barriers. Importantly, these efforts can extend beyond access to services by fostering environments that recognize and value families' cultural and linguistic strengths. Supporting collaborative relationships across educational and community systems may create conditions that promote belonging, social participation, and intergenerational well-being.

Future Research

Continued use of qualitative and mixed-method approaches may deepen understanding of immigrant family resilience. Methods that center families' experiences and everyday practices can deepen understanding of how resilience develops through relational and sociocultural processes. Although this study highlighted how multilingual and multicultural families mobilize resources in their everyday lives, future research should examine how resilience processes may differ across childhood and adolescence. Longitudinal research could provide insight into how language practices, cultural identity, family relationships, and community involvement interact with children's educational and social-emotional experiences over time.

Future research should also consider the broader contextual and structural factors that shape families' ability to draw upon cultural knowledge and navigate different social and institutional environments. For instance, how do immigration policies or institutional support for bilingualism and biliteracy shape families' opportunities to mobilize cultural and linguistic resources? Examining these broader conditions could deepen understanding of how structural supports and barriers interact with family-level resilience processes.

Researchers could also examine immigrant families from additional linguistic groups, geographic regions, and migration backgrounds. Comparative research across contexts may help identify both shared and culturally specific processes through which families draw upon their knowledge, relationships, and resources while adapting to life in the United States. Engaging immigrant families as research partners may provide further insight into culturally situated resilience processes while strengthening the relevance and accountability of research with immigrant communities.

Author Contributions

The first author completed the secondary analysis of the data and led the writing of the manuscript. The second author was the principal investigator on the original study and provided support for interpretation of findings and writing of the manuscript. The third and fourth authors conducted the original study and provided input on the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the approval of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Institutional Review Board (IRB) under protocol # IRB-FY2021-2022-11.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the original study.

Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data analyzed in this study are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality and ethical considerations.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix A

Original Interview Protocol Used in Primary Data Collection

1. Tell us about your experiences with (fill in all program name(s) like Head Start, 4K). Prompt: What did you like? Prompt: What could have been better? Prompt (if the family does not discuss all programs): Can you tell me about your experiences with [program name]?
2. Tell us about your experiences with (fill in support program names like WIC). Prompt: What did you like? Prompt: What could have been better? Prompt (if the family does not discuss all programs): Can you tell me about your experiences with [program name]?
3. How did you learn about these programs, and whether you were eligible? Describe the process. NOTE: If the family has already described how they learned about programs and whether they were eligible, skip this question or this series of questions. Prompt: How easy/hard is it to find and apply for the services you need? Prompt: Which aspects were easy and why? Prompt: Which parts were challenging and why?
4. In [insert program names like Head Start or 4K], how have you been involved in making decisions and setting goals for your child? Prompt: How do you and your child's teacher communicate? Is there back-and-forth sharing of information? Prompt: Are there any barriers or challenges to participating in your child's programs? Prompt: Are there other ways you would like to be involved? Prompt (if the family only discusses some programs and time allows): Ask the above questions about other programs.
5. In what ways have the early care and education programs you have participated in reflected your family's cultural traditions, customs, and home language? Prompt: How could this be improved or enhanced?
6. How have you given feedback to programs about your positive experiences and any concerns? Prompt: Have any changes been made in response to your feedback? Explain.
7. What needs to be added to the programs and services your family has participated in? What other services do you need?
8. We want to understand the experiences of families who are newcomers to the country and families who have been in the country for a while. Tell us about your experience as a newcomer or someone who has been in the country for a while. What programs and supports have you found to be helpful? How have your child's language or communication needs been supported in their early childhood program? Explain. Prompt: What about these programs could be better? What else do you wish were available to help keep your family?
9. For all families with a child under age three: If you have transitioned from one early childhood program to another (e.g., childcare to Head Start), how was your experience transitioning across programs? For all other families with a child over age three: Have you received any information about the transition to kindergarten, including your rights and choices related to services for

multilingual learners? If so, explain. Prompt: Do you have concerns about your child's kindergarten transition? If so, describe your concerns.

10. If you could recommend one thing to improve early care and education in your community, what would that be and why?

11. Do you want us to know anything about your experience navigating early childhood services?