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The Impacts of Early Migration on 1.5-Generation Immigrants

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Introduction

Transnational migration, also referred to as migrating across national borders has been an emerging form of migration since the late 1990s. The most recent estimate is 281 million migrants in 2020, equivalent to 3.6% of the global population (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022), with this rate increasing faster than predicted. As Lee and An (2022) state, it is an era of transnational migration. Such trends have generated a range of studies exploring how immigrants reconstruct their identities, with a specific focus on understanding how immigrants' connections to diverse cultures through technology and media affect their activities and experiences (Bhatia, 2007).

Such migration has been linked to both positive and negative mental health outcomes. For instance, previous research argued that migration left immigrants with an incomplete sense of belongingness to either society and having to constantly negotiate between their identities in different places (Dolberg & Amit, 2022; Wang & Collins, 2016). However, recent explorations of transnational migration emphasise the benefits of the continuous process of reconstruction of one's identity and belongingness to more than one society (Schiller et al., 1995). Such 'hybridity' is often common amongst many immigrants, and some studies show that embracing a multicultural acculturation strategy may have associations with better mental well-being and general satisfaction (Dolberg & Amit, 2022). Transnational migration demands the individual to negotiate and simultaneously hold multiple identities from both their original society and their host society (Schiller et al., 1995; Ahn 2020). As a result, transnational immigrants have intercultural linkages that are advantageous to their well-being. Thus understanding their experiences and how they navigate through the challenges of being a minority will advance our knowledge of the impact of settlement processes in a global world (Yoon, 2012).

How individuals manoeuvre differs according to the age at which they migrated. First-generation immigrants are generally the "parent" generation or individuals who moved away from their home country after they have become an adult, whereas second-generation immigrants would be their children, fully born and raised in the host country. Previous literature suggests that first-generation immigrants mainly identify themselves with their home country, whereas second-generation immigrants are more likely to identify with their host country. Such differences have also emerged in the experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants, with these findings suggesting different trends for this particular group. Researchers have yet to reach a consensus on the precise definition of 1.5-generation immigrants, but this can be generally understood as those born in their home country but emigrated during their childhood between the ages of 6-12 (Rumbaut, 2004; Ahn, 2020). This group thus represents the best sample to explore the impact of migration as they engage in socialisation in two different cultures during their formative years (Tyrrell, 2018); and developmental psychologists emphasise the significance of childhood for psychosocial development. Hence, individuals in this community may feel a sense of "in-between-ness", and may face confusion in the formation of identity with various conceptions of home.

This has been supported by the few studies that have explored the impact of immigration on identity formation within this group, with findings highlighting that identity formation within this group is fluid, taking on different forms at different points in time. Most of these studies have been performed among 1.5-generation Korean Americans. For instance, Park et al. (1999) found that many 1.5-generation Korean-Americans reach two extremes concerning their identities - overly Koreanized or overly Americanized - and this varies at different times during their lifetime. Some tend to assimilate into the country of destination during childhood but also re-acculturate into a Korean American. It is a complex process that depends largely on the context, leading to frequent compartmentalisation (Ahn, 2020).

Specifically, they may use their host language in public spaces, whereas their home language may be used to form close friendships or relationships in their personal space. Yoon (2012) labelled this as the formation of a dual identity, which accommodates both their experiences in the heritage and host culture. Therefore, maintaining their biculturalism or multiculturalism seems to be an important component when it comes to 1.5-generation immigrants. Further research supports the deliberate intention to develop this hybrid identity. For instance, social media has emerged as a useful tool for 1.5-generation immigrants as it allows them to browse ethnic content and connect with others who share a similar hybrid identity. Lam (2009) supported this by showing that youths often had multilingual forms of messaging with their peers online and switching between languages.

Overall the research thus suggests that 1.5-generation immigrants have unique experiences with identity formation, sense of belonging, and language switching; yet few studies have explored how these factors interact across multiple groups of transnational migrants - such as African, Caribbean, and European migrants.

Aim and rationale

The present study was designed to compare the experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants across a range of countries. It specifically analysed how migration has impacted their identity formation, language switching, and sense of belongingness to their culture of origin and host cultures. The current literature seems to focus on specific minority groups in a host society, which highlights the need to expand the sample to different ethnic groups from multiple host cultures. This would broaden the understanding of 1.5-generation immigrants as a population and distinguish their experiences from other immigrants. The following research questions aim to narrow the research gap:

- How do 1.5 -generation immigrants manage their use of language when they are in their heritage-majority (HM) versus non-heritage-majority (NHM) contexts?
- What methods do 1.5 -generation immigrants use to adapt when they are in HM versus NHM contexts?
- How do 1.5 -generation immigrants' sense of belongingness differ when they are in HM versus NHM contexts?

Method

This research aimed to explore the experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants and identify commonalities and differences regarding their sense of belonging, identity formation, and language use. Strategies such as opportunity and snowball sampling were employed to engage a diverse sample from different backgrounds and emigrated countries. Participant recruitment was conducted through mass-emailing undergraduate, and postgraduate students and staff members at the University of York and the University of Hong Kong, and posters were promoted on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Thirty-three adult participants, the majority of whom were females (n=24) participated in the study. On average, participants were 23.42 years of age (SD=6.736), with a minimum age of 18 and a maximum of 46. The sample mainly comprised undergraduates (n=25), with 2 PhD students, 1 masters

student, 1 further education student and 4 who identified as ‘Other’. Table 1 shows participants’ country of origin.

Country of origin	Number of participants
Australia	1
China (including Hong Kong)	7
England	1
Indonesia	1
Italy	7
Malaysia	1
Nigeria	2
Philippines	3
South Korea	9
Spain	1

The number of years emigrated from the home country (M=13.58, SD=7.669) varied greatly with the least and longest number of years being 5 and 34 respectively. Many (n=15) are currently residing in a city other than the first host city or country they emigrated to. All participants spoke at least two languages, twenty-nine spoke three languages, sixteen spoke four languages and five spoke a fifth language. On average, participants became less fluent as they spoke more languages with average first language fluency being 9.6, second language fluency being 8.7 and average fifth language fluency being 3.8.

After informed consent was given, participants filled out an online survey. This survey began with a demographics questionnaire which asked for details such as age, gender, ethnic background, travel history, and languages spoken. Once this was completed, participants completed a series of open-ended questions as listed below. They were asked to write for a minimum of 5-10 minutes, after which the survey ended with a debrief sheet explaining the aims of the study and providing support information if needed. The survey responses were evaluated using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

	Questions
1.	Which language are you now more comfortable speaking? On which occasions and around which groups of people (school/church/friends/family)? How has this impacted you?
2.	How has your use of the various languages changed throughout your lifespan? Does your use of language now differ from how you used it when you were younger?
3.	How does speaking more than one language affect your everyday life (e.g. use of social media)?
4.	Which culture do you most identify with? Why?
5.	What strategies have you used to form your sense of cultural identity? Do you feel any identity conflict?
6.	Do you try to retain your connections with your culture of origin? If so, how?
7.	Do you struggle in your different social circles (school/church/family/friends)? Why?
8.	Do you ever feel like you do not belong? In what context, do you feel the most alienated?
9.	How were you able to overcome situations where you felt out of place? Which strategies helped the most?

Results

We discovered five themes in response to the research questions proposed, which were:

1) Language switching
2) Nurturing the host culture identity
3) Being "hybrid"-positive
4) Feeling like a forever "stranger"
5) Global citizenship

Language switching

All participants lived in a country where the majority language spoken is different from their mother tongue, meaning they could speak two or more languages. Hence, all had a frequent tendency to switch languages according to the context in which they found themselves or the people with whom they were interacting. Language formed a large part of their identity, and how they perceived themselves and their environment. This theme included several sub-themes which are described below:

<u>Restricted use of heritage languages</u>

When asked about the differences in usage of the heritage and host language, most indicated that they preferred using heritage languages with their close family and friends. For instance, Participant 10 believed her lower proficiency in her mother tongue prevented her from using the language comfortably in more public spaces.

"I actually feel like I am a little more shy when I am among my Korean peers at church because sometimes I feel like my Korean isn't as good as others. I only speak Korean at home, and I think this has helped me maintain a good balance to speak Korean and English to a certain fluent level."

Participant 19 reported a similar experience of differentiating between languages when it came to professional and casual contexts.

"I speak English to everyone in education and employment of course and the low level Italian with my close family."

Increased use of host language over time

However, as the duration of residence in the host country prolonged, there seemed to be an increased use of the host language. Though the host language was largely used for educational purposes in childhood, over time, the language appeared to become a preferable alternative for many. For instance, Participant 19 noted this change in frequency of languages throughout the years.

"When I was younger in Italy, I only spoke Italian. Since I moved here when I was 11, I have mostly switched to English and use that on a daily basis."

Being a skilled multilingual

As proficiency increased, most participants reported having achieved a high fluency in both languages and having developed the ability to shift between languages at their own will in different contexts. For instance, participant 14 remarked that he felt that he could cater to the group of people that he interacted with, and was not tied down to a specific language.

"I tend to switch depending on what group of people I am conversing with. I speak the language that people in the group can understand better."

Similarly, for Participant 27, instead of having one preferable language, she felt the most relaxed when she was able to use a mix of the languages.

"I don't have one language I feel most comfortable speaking- instead, I am most comfortable when I am in an environment where I can speak a mix."

Nurturing the host culture identity

A second theme evolved around the various ways in which participants have embraced their host culture identity, starting from their upbringing from childhood to their current social circles. This theme included several sub-themes which are described below:

Parenting styles

The role of parents and the parenting strategy adopted were highly influential in developing a sense of cultural identity. Research suggests that as the parental generation of the participants belonged to first-generation immigrants, they would have had a higher sense of culture of origin identity (Ahn, 2020). This was reinforced in participants' childhood upbringing, where their parents maintained a sense of heritage culture at home to counterbalance learning the host culture through exterior social circles. This is evident in the response of Participant 12 when asked which culture he identified most closely with.

"I was still raised by Korean parents, and had myself educated till the age of 12, which was long enough to embed the Korean culture strongly in my head."

Further support emerged from other participants who identified their cultural identity formation as a process that occurred during their formative years as a result of the family influence.

"I most identify with my Korean roots, and I feel like this has a lot to do with my family. I always speak Korean when I am at home, I spent my early years in Korea, it's just home for me."

"I identify the most with Italian culture because Italy is the country where I was born and where I started to get formed."

Grouping with people of the same culture of origin/third-culture kids

A common pattern noticed in participants' responses was the tendency for them to find a social circle with people of the same culture of origin or other third-culture kids (TCKs), primarily due to the sense of connection and increased feelings of belongingness that these social groups provided. This can be seen in the response of Participant 25 who stated that the key to not struggling in social circles was to find people of similar cultural backgrounds who they resonated with.

"I don't struggle with my social circles because most of them have similar third-culture backgrounds."

Participant 27 also highlighted that her ideal social setting was one where everyone was open-minded to learning and accepting cultural diversity.

"I deal with this conflict best when I'm surrounded by people with similar experiences, third culture kid adults, or when I'm in international cities where many people come from all over."

Being 'hybrid'-positive

A ‘hybrid’ strategy is one that involves accommodating and integrating to find a right balance between the culture of origin and host culture (Wang & Collins, 2016). A similar ‘hybrid’ theme emerged which captured the impact of 1.5-generation immigration in a positive light in relation to the benefits of maintaining dual or more cultural identities.

This theme included several sub-themes which are described below:

Cultural accommodation/integration

This was a common strategy utilised by participants to equally maintain both identities. Cultural accommodation can further be divided into two approaches:

1) employing a mix of languages and
2) making use of a mix of interpersonal approaches.

Employing a mix of languages

Participants reported that their fluency in the different languages were not equivalent, thus at times, certain concepts were harder to explain in the host language when trying to speak in the heritage language or vice versa, as Participant 22 mentioned.

“I found that I can express certain concepts better in one language while I struggle more in the other.”

Intrinsic sense of hybrid identity

Aside from naming certain strategies adopted to maintain hybridity, participants largely responded that generally they did not necessarily have to apply a certain strategy, but instead the whole process was more intrinsic, and naturally obtained. Participant 24 describes his identity as follows:

“Both equally. I take the best I can take from each culture and apply it. Where both are good, it’s a mix.”

Embracing hybrid-friendly strategies

Immigrants made a habit of exposing themselves to as much of their heritage and home cultures as possible. They accessed news, entertainment, or media from both their heritage and host culture for example. Especially within the younger generation, these hybrid-friendly strategies were more observed on social media and the content they consumed. Participant 19’s Instagram account is an instance of this.

“Therefore I love that my Instagram for example is both English and Italian as I get a mix of the 2 cultures and double the comedy (like stand up comedy).”

For Participant 29, embracing hybrid-friendly strategies meant also being open to and welcoming opportunities to immerse herself in different cultures.

"Instead I welcome different cultures around me. I would spend Thanksgiving with my American friends and then New Year with my Chinese friends. I think it's best to appreciate all cultures equally."

Feeling like a forever 'stranger'

Though it is often true that the longer you reside in a place, you feel more at home; it does not completely diminish the feelings of being in a foreign place or an 'outsider' for 1.5-immigrants. For some participants, this feeling emerged from the fact that they were living in a host country very different to their home country.

Alienation from host cultures/language

It was difficult to fully assimilate into the local host culture including the host language, and easy for immigrants to feel alienated. This is especially the case for participants who moved at a later age, resided for a shorter period of time, or based on perceived prejudice by others. For Participant 4, he felt the most out of place when faced with a language difference.

"The sense of being alienated comes when there is no one who I can speak in my mother tongue."

Alienation also emerged as a result of perceived prejudice. For instance, Participant 15 explained that her host culture (Hong Kong) was not too accepting of new immigrants or foreigners into the local society.

"I left Australia too early for me to identify with it and for some reason Hong Kong always felt a bit exclusive in terms of who is accepted into its society."

She also posed a question which reflects on the theme well:

"How does one identify with a culture that views you as an outsider?"

Identity confusion/conflict

Participants faced identity confusion when there was dissonance between how others associated them with their heritage/host culture, and how they viewed or identified themselves. This resulted in conflicting inner values as they were not sure who they were meant to be, and how they were meant to behave based on different societal expectations or perceptions aligned with each culture. Participant 18 experienced this when going through immigration customs in China and Malaysia.

"Yes when ppl from China customs told me I'm a foreigner and not Chinese and when Malay customs speak in Malay and I don't understand the language."

Overall, for some participants, having an identity conflict and feeling like an outsider was inevitable, as discussed by Participant 13.

"I think as a minority, not belonging is something that I often feel and a feeling that is very much part of my life. I can't pinpoint a specific context but I think not belonging in some way surrounds a large proportion of my life."

Feelings of in-betweenness

The feelings of in-betweenness stemmed from not feeling a sense of belonging to one specific group, in this instance, within social groups. Within most settings, it was common to see friend-groups being formed based on one's ethnicity, but because this is more complex for 1.5-generation immigrants, it is difficult for them to form relationships within any one social group. For Participant 10, this takes place at the Korean church she attends, where she finds it difficult to fully fit in with the group.

"I struggle a bit at my Korean church. I don't know why but I feel more awkward, trying to fit into the social circle. I think it has a lot to do with me not being fully confident speaking in Korean with strangers or people I am not that close to."

Compartmentalisation

As a coping strategy to integrate, compartmentalisation was used to do different things in different spaces in order to manoeuvre the host culture, such as in order to assimilate in the workplace. As can be seen in Participant 15's words, she would usually be proactive in school projects, whereas she would have reduced interactions in social spaces.

"When it comes to social situations, isolation, honestly. Adopting an "if you view me as an outsider then I'll be the outsider" mindset and using exclusively English in group projects (embracing my differences and using them to my advantage would be a nicer way to put it). From the last project I remember, I also talked a lot so being proactive to a certain extent may also count as a strategy. In the workplace, assimilation is my go-to since those at the bottom of the food chain don't really get a say in altering established work cultures."

Similarly, Participant 28 would self-isolate and avoid social interactions when they feel left out.

"I usually just leave if I don't feel welcome or feel out of place."

Being 'unsettled'

This theme can be described as feeling othered, different or not accepted based on hybrid identity, hence the feeling of being "unsettled" in the host culture. Participant 27's personal story gives insight into how she feels othered by the community, though she personally identifies herself with it.

"In Hong Kong I often feel othered by the local community even though I strongly identify myself with the local culture. In Germany I also identify with the culture, but not as strongly as people generally expect, as most people assume I fully identify with German culture and don't know my backstory. I often still don't understand certain cultural norms or references in Germany."

Global citizenship

Becoming a global citizen refers to international-minded individuals who are willing to contribute to the benefit of the majority. As this survey had a target group of transnational migrants, all participants had an idea of a global mindset, and great appreciation and acceptance of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Appreciation of being a transnational migrant

First and foremost, participants appreciated their identity as a transnational migrant as it enabled them to accept and embrace cultural diversity. Participant 22 believes that their perspectives and values differ from others due to cultural differences and ways of upbringing.

"Reminding myself that my opinion/point of view/ideas weren't wrong but that I simply was brought up differently due to the culture in Italy."

An advantage that most participants agreed on was easier communication with individuals from different cultures, as well as finding an interest in learning more languages and enjoying accessing social media content based on different languages. Participant 17 touched on the benefits of being a transnational migrant in everyday life.

"Comfort level of the languages spoken is a gateway to different cultures and social groups. With age comes complexity of understanding of the language and cultural appreciation of their origins."

Positive future outlook

Due to their multicultural nature, 1.5-generation immigrants have a positive future outlook in terms of job prospects and further education opportunities in a global sense compared to peers who may not have had the chance to explore abroad. Participant 27 acknowledges the positive opportunities that may be available with proficiency in multiple languages.

"Speaking multiple languages also enables me to enter international or multicultural environments more easily in daily life, as well as entering more international workspaces."

Internationalisation through international schooling

Migrant parents tend to send their children to international schools when moving abroad to a host country, which in turn increases their exposure to other cultures, further increasing their internationalisation. Participants 10 and 12 showed more open-minded attitudes towards various cultures.

"I feel like attending an international school made me more open-minded about various cultures."

"However, due to the school that I attended (an international school, with students coming from 13 different countries from all around the world, but mostly Western European countries), I feel I was able to develop an international culture, so I really feel like my cultural identity is European in addition to Italian."

Transnational identity

Last but not least in the global citizenship theme, transnational identity appeared as one of the sub-themes. Beyond the hybrid identity that was mentioned earlier, a transnational identity is one that transcends national boundaries, and fully embraces the global citizen mindset. An example would be where they view themselves as more than just one's culture as Participant 31 describes.

"I prefer not to confine myself to only one culture as I had been surrounded by a myriad of cultures foreign to be due to having friends from different countries for the majority of my life. I feel that I have embraced different cultures which helped form my own unique identity."

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the first-hand experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants to understand the impacts of early migration on identity formation, language switching, and sense of belongingness to their heritage and host cultures. The results from the survey support the findings of previous literature on biculturalism, compartmentalisation and the use of social media as a medium to connect with other immigrants or third-culture kids (Ahn, 2020; Yoon, 2012; Lam, 2009).

The three initial research questions were investigated in depth through participants' responses. In response to the first question, our first theme of language switching covers the various aspects on how language use is dependent on the context and people. Language plays a crucial role for participants as it is an important form of communication, when interacting with others or consuming ethnic media content. The major difference in the non-heritage-majority (NHM) contexts is the avoidance or restricted use of heritage language in public spaces, usually associated with lower confidence or proficiency level. Thus, participants largely preferred using their heritage language in more intimate relationships, where they feel comfortable speaking. However, as participants spoke the host language more frequently, this enabled them to easily shift from one language to another.

For the second research question, participants had various conflicting strategies that were employed when adapting in HM and NHM contexts. This ties in with the cultural identity they perceived

themselves to have. For participants who were engaged with their culture of origin, this was due to their parents reinforcing the importance of keeping connected with their cultural roots. Therefore, they would aim to employ a 'hybrid' identity to maintain their heritage language and culture at home and in private spaces, whereas with acquaintances and distant relationships, they would adopt host culture behaviour. As they had multiple identities, it was flexible for them to switch between these identities.

Lastly, the third research question discusses the sense of belongingness. Identity conflict is a process that is commonly experienced by 1.5-generation immigrants as they struggle to balance between their perceived self and presenting self in NHM contexts. This leads to feelings of in-betweenness and a lack of belongingness, as well as compartmentalization to be different things in different contexts. However, as global citizenship plays a role in their lives, transnational identity is one that migrants adopt, as they view themselves beyond one's cultural identity and form an identity that is unique to them.

Strengths of this research include a diverse sample in terms of age, ethnicity, years lived in a host country and places participants migrated to. This enables a more holistic overview on transnational migrants and the emerging themes encapsulate different experiences from various countries. Nevertheless, there are limitations within this work. Though the criteria was immigrants, it excluded study abroad students, and adoptees, which may have influenced the experience of participants. Future works can focus around including specific groups of participants to understand and expand the spectrum of participants' migration backgrounds.

This provides an insightful outlook on the experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants, as well as potential areas that can be used to bridge gaps between communities and strengthen multiculturalism. These findings encourage maintaining good connections with both the heritage and host culture, and embracing cultural diversity. Furthermore, this work adds to the current literature by expanding on the complexities of cultural integration, acknowledgement of every immigrants' personal experience, and the importance of fostering inclusive communities.

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