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The Future of Cantonese and Traditional Chinese Among Newly Arrived Hong Kong Immigrant Children in the United Kingdom – A Study on Parents’ Attitudes, Challenges Faced and Support Needed

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Abstract

Acculturation occurs where culturally different groups of individuals come into contact with each other, leading to cultural changes to either or both groups. For immigrants, home language maintenance is one aspect of acculturation. Studies have shown that home language maintenance is beneficial for immigrant children’s development in various ways. This mixed methods research looked at Hong Kong immigrants in the United Kingdom under the new British National (Overseas) Visa policy. It explored parents’ attitudes towards their children’s learning and maintenance of Cantonese and Traditional Chinese (the home language of local Hongkongers), the obstacles encountered and support needed for supporting their children’s home language development. Age-group-specific differences in findings were investigated. An online survey was used to collect responses from 96 parents regarding 146 children in three age groups: n = 28 in preschool, n = 73 in primary, and n = 45 in secondary. Results showed that almost 90% of respondents viewed Cantonese and Traditional Chinese development as important for their children, with the strongest reason being ethnic identity maintenance as a Hongkonger. More books and community gatherings were found to be needed for creating a contextualised home language environment for the children. Parents with preschool children were found to express significantly higher needs for multilingual development events than those with children in primary. The study suggested support measures and prompted future policies to consider age-group differences in home language learning support needs.

Keywords: acculturation, Hong Kong immigrants, home language maintenance, Cantonese and Traditional Chinese, mixed methods

The Future of Cantonese and Traditional Chinese Among Newly Arrived Hong Kong Immigrant Children in the United Kingdom

What will happen to the home language outside the home city? In July 2020, the United Kingdom (UK) government announced the Hong Kong (HK) British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) Visa policy (the Policy) in view of the political changes in HK (UK Visas and Immigration, 2020). The Policy allows BN(O) holders to obtain citizenship six years after settling in the UK. As of March 2022, there had been 113,742 grants of visa under the Policy (Home Office, 2022b). Sixty percent of visa holders relocated with their children (Home Office, 2022a). The present study focuses on the home language development of HK immigrant children in the UK.

Most local Hongkongers use Cantonese and Traditional Chinese (C/TC) as the respective oral and written forms of their first language, with English as an additional language. Among the UK population aged three or above in 2011, 92.3% spoke English (or Welsh in Wales) as their main language, while only 0.08% spoke Cantonese as their main language (Office for National Statistics, 2011). HK immigrant children in the UK may experience a language shift from mainly using C/TC to English. As research has shown the benefits of multilingualism for immigrant children (Eisenchlas et al., 2013; Evans & Liu, 2018; Green & Abutalebi, 2013; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Tseng, 2020), the present study explores HK immigrant children's future C/TC development in the UK from their parents' perspectives, which is a novel issue given the recency of this immigration wave. The present study provides empirical evidence for future research and policy deliberation on how to better support these children in their home language development. This paper comprises five sections: theoretical foundation, literature review, methodology, results, and discussion.

Theoretical Foundation

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation is where culturally different groups of individuals come into continuous first-hand contact with each other, leading to cultural changes for either or both groups; in reality, there are usually more changes to one group than the other (Berry, 1997; Juang & Syed, 2019). According to the bidimensional model in Berry (2001), there are different ways to acculturate, depending on how important a group sees their own cultural identity and their intention to be in contact with other cultures. Four acculturation strategies are formed: (i) integration – maintaining own culture while interacting with other cultures; (ii) assimilation – deserting own culture while embracing other cultures; (iii) separation – maintaining own culture while avoiding other cultures; and (iv) marginalisation – deserting own culture and avoiding other cultures (Berry, 2001; Hernandez, 2009). Strategies may vary with context and time. For example, cultural maintenance may be more preferred in private domains of life such as family than in public domains such as school or workplace (Berry, 1997; Tong, 1996). This model assumes that an acculturating group is free to choose their strategy, but not every group is being valued and accepted by others in reality. Integration can only be achieved in a multicultural society and where the acculturating group collectively strives to maintain their own cultural identity (Berry, 2001). The present study adopts this acculturation strategy model which is the dominant theory in the field (Navas et al., 2005). This model is more realistic than the previous unidimensional model which assumes that the end goal of acculturation is assimilation while undervaluing the importance of maintaining one's home culture (Gordon, 1964).

Home Language Maintenance in the Process of Acculturation

The present study focuses on home language maintenance (HLM) in the process of acculturation, which is not necessarily mutually exclusive with learning the majority language. HLM means continuing to use one's home language in a place where it is not the majority language (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). The opposite of HLM is *language shift* from using the home language to the majority language under assimilation pressure (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). Home language proficiency can disappear in third-generation immigrants or even earlier (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017; Fillmore, 2000). Ages of immigrant children may also affect how much home language is lost – HLM has been found harder for younger children who were exposed to the majority language earlier than elder children were (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). Institutional support and home language status maintenance may help to prevent the home language from disappearing (Van de Vijver et al., 2016). It is now widely acknowledged that HLM is beneficial for immigrant children linguistically, cognitively, academically, psychologically and socially

(Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017; Evans & Liu, 2018; Kallis & Yarwood, 2021; Kwon, 2017). The present study is significant at this early stage of Hongkongers' immigration wave if C/TC were to be maintained.

Literature Review

Benefits of HLM for Immigrant Children

Majority Language Development

Research suggests that immigrant children's home language ability helps them learn the majority language better and faster (Aileen & Petra, 2016; Eisenclas et al., 2013; Tseng, 2020). Thomas and Collier (2002) conducted a national study in the United States (US). They found that immigrant children with previous schooling in their home language for two to three years required only five to seven years to reach the average proficiency in the majority language, compared with seven to ten years required by those without prior schooling in the home language. Literacy skills and sound-symbol-meaning correspondence concepts in the home language can be positively transferred to the learning of the majority language (Benson, 2004; Eisenclas et al., 2013). The underlying pedagogical principle is the interdependence theory developed in Cummins (1979). Through learning the home language, immigrant children acquire the concept of language being a symbolic system. This ability to use and interpret language is transferable across languages (Swain et al., 1990). Once immigrant children have basic home language literacy and the communicative ability in the majority language, transferring such literacy skills to acquire majority language literacy becomes easier (Benson, 2004).

Development in the home language and the majority language is interdependent. Where home language use is encouraged outside school, immigrant children are likely to develop majority language competence in school. Where HLM is discouraged, these children would likely learn the majority language at the expense of home language competence, thus reducing the beneficial impact of home language ability on majority language development (Cummins, 1979). The positive impact on majority language development is based on home language literacy as opposed to mere oral proficiency. Swain et al. (1990) compared the effects of home language ability on children's learning of a third language in Canada. Children literate in their home language learnt the third language better than (i) those who could only speak but not read or write in the home language; and (ii) those who had no home language ability at all. Despite the foregoing research, some immigrant parents feared that HLM would impede their children's majority language development (Sevinç, 2022). This highlights the need for parental education on the benefits of HLM and bilingualism/ multilingualism, so that parents can make informed decisions regarding their children's language development (Tseng, 2020).

Cognitive and Academic Development

The attitude towards the bilingual effect on cognitive ability has changed. In the early 20th century, studies argued that learning two or more languages was detrimental to children's intellectual development due to cognitive overload (Saer, 1923). This was subsequently challenged for failing to control for confounds such as socio-economic status (Phelps & Filippi, 2020), and failing to measure children's full cognitive ability by testing them in their less proficient language (Mitchell, 1937). Around the mid-20th century, research controlling for confounds started to reveal beneficial effects of bilingualism on cognitive ability and academic achievement (Peal & Lambert, 1962). It was proposed that immigrant children must achieve a certain level of proficiency in their home language for it to have a beneficial effect on their cognitive and academic development (Cummins, 1976). Several mechanisms have since been proposed to account for how immigrant children's home language may help them develop cognitively and academically. These children may transfer concepts and skills in the home language to new learning (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). Their home language proficiency may facilitate their access to immigrant community's support in learning and academic development (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). Having to switch between home language and majority language according to contexts may enhance their executive function in terms of inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility (Green, 1998; Green & Abutalebi, 2013).

While there is supporting behavioural and neuroscientific evidence for the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, one must still be cautiously aware of contrary findings in other recent studies. For instance, Bialystok (2006) found that bilingual young adults did not always demonstrate better cognitive processing than their monolingual counterparts. Phelps and Filippi (2020) suggested that inconsistencies might stem from differences in methodology and interpretation, as well as other potential confounders such as age groups and qualitative variability in the bilingualism concerned. Given that the relationship between immigrant children's bilingualism and cognitive development is affected by a constellation of variables, future longitudinal research may add clarity (Phelps & Filippi, 2020).

Ethnocultural Identity Maintenance

Immigrants' ethnic and cultural identity is often associated with home language (Tseng, 2020). Home language may in itself signify ethnic identity, serve as a link to one's heritage culture, or be used for communication to bond with people of the same ethnic group (Tannenbaum, 2009). Immigrants often derive a sense of belonging by speaking the same home language as it denotes ethnic group membership (Cunningham & King, 2018; Kallis & Yarwood, 2021; Yang, 2008). Ethnocultural identity and HLM exhibit a two-way relationship. HLM helps immigrants maintain their ethnocultural identity. In turn, this identity and the resulting sense of belonging encourage HLM, especially where immigrant parents view the home language as an important heritage to pass on (Avenas, 1998; Tseng, 2020).

Socialisation

Home language serves as a communicative capital for socialisation. Especially for immigrant children with limited competence in the majority language, the early period of life in the host country can be full of unfamiliarity (Evans & Liu, 2018). Often, children from the host country are curious about these immigrant children's country of origin. Immigrant children can share their home language with peers for cultural and language exchange. The home language becomes a means for making friends in a new social environment, particularly at the initial stage of acculturation (Evans & Liu, 2018; Kallis & Yarwood, 2021).

Family Relationship Maintenance

HLM was found to help improve communication, maintain cohesion and transmit home culture among immigrant families. In a study of Greek-Cypriot immigrant families in the UK, some third-generation children found their Greek language proficiency useful for family communication, while those who lacked such competence described it as a barrier to family communication (Kallis & Yarwood, 2021). Speaking the same home language helps immigrant family members understand and share each other's thoughts, creating stronger bonds (Yang, 2008). If shared language erosion occurs where immigrant children learn the majority language faster than their parents do while losing home language ability, the loss of a common language may cause intergenerational conflicts due to a lack of mutual understanding (Eisenclas et al., 2013). Cox et al. (2021) found that more than 40% of Latino immigrant adolescents had more conflicts with their parents because of misunderstanding arising from not using a shared language. HLM also helps immigrant children maintain relationships with family members in their country of origin, especially those not conversant in the majority language (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017; Kallis & Yarwood, 2021). Through HLM, immigrant children can learn about the home culture, and transmit it to future generations (Cox et al., 2021; Eisenclas et al., 2013).

HLM Research Involving Other Immigrant Communities

Previous studies looked at HLM among non-HK immigrant communities around the world. In Ireland, Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir (2017) interviewed first-generation immigrant children and parents from countries such as Poland, Portugal and Chechnya. The participants viewed English as a linguistic capital to gain while recognising the importance of HLM for maintaining family relationships and identity. However, home language literacy development was found difficult especially for immigrant children who left their country of origin at a young age without a solid foundation of home language literacy. In California, Hashimoto and Lee (2011) conducted case studies on Japanese immigrant families. While parents were very committed to supporting their children's Japanese literacy development, the effectiveness of methods varied. Children lost interest in learning Japanese when decontextualised workbooks were used. However, they self-initiated reading activities when recreational materials were used. It was suggested that context-relevant print materials could

enhance immigrant children's home language exposure. The authors recommended immigrant communities to set up websites for sharing HLM resources and establishing peer connections. Also in the US, Yang (2008) investigated Hmong parents' views about their children's HLM. The parents placed importance on both learning English and retaining Hmong language. They conceded the inability to control their children's language preference ultimately. The authors recommended providing more Hmong language books in school libraries and exploring the possibility of Hmong language programmes. Being qualitative in nature, findings in these studies were not intended to be generalisable to other immigrant communities.

Other studies resonated with two ideas highlighted in Hashimoto and Lee (2011). The idea of contextualisation was echoed by Leung et al. (2018), where primary pupils in a Cantonese-English dual language immersion school in California were interviewed. The pupils recognised the importance of learning spoken Cantonese and written Chinese as integrated skills in context. Another idea – community action – was emphasised in Fillmore (2000), which studied Chinese immigrants in the US. They reckoned that immigrant communities could work together to maintain heritage language and culture for future generations. Parents could start by providing a home environment that encouraged mature use of home language within the family. These studies have shown positive attitudes towards HLM held by immigrant parents around the world, but the same issue among recent HK immigrant parents in the UK has not been studied yet. Thus, the present study fills in the gap.

Purpose of the Present Study

Literature has shown the importance of HLM as part of acculturation, especially for immigrant children's development. It has also been shown that HLM is more difficult for younger immigrant children due to earlier exposure to the majority language, suggesting that HLM needs may differ depending on age groups. Previous studies looked at various immigrant communities. The future of C/TC development among newly arrived HK immigrant children in the UK has not yet been studied. Using a mixed methods online survey, the present study addresses the research question: What are HK immigrant parents' attitudes towards HLM of their children in the UK? Here, an "attitude" is defined as evaluation and belief about an idea – whether supportive or not (Wolf et al., 2020). There are four sub-questions:

1. Do HK immigrant parents think that it is important for their children to learn and maintain C/TC in the UK? Why or why not?
2. What obstacle(s) do HK immigrant parents face in supporting their children's C/TC learning and maintenance in the UK?
3. What support do HK immigrant parents need for supporting their children's C/TC learning and maintenance in the UK?
4. Are there any differences in responses regarding children of different age groups?

Method

Sample

The present study focused on the recent wave of HK immigrant population in the UK who have the language ability to support their children's C/TC learning and maintenance if they wish to. Participants were invited if they (i) were a parent of (a) child(ren) aged below 18; (ii) immigrated from HK to the UK with their child(ren) under the Policy; and (iii) were proficient in C/TC. Participants were recruited by convenience sampling using social connections and online platforms (including Hongkongers in Britain and other related Facebook groups), and snowball sampling through recruited participants. Among the 132 parents who responded in relation to 201 children, 96 parents' responses in relation to 146 children were complete and valid. These children were categorised into three age groups for comparison: $n = 28$ (19.2%) in preschool (newborn to four years old), $n = 73$ (50%) in primary (five to 11 years old), and $n = 45$ (30.8%) in secondary (12 to 17 years old). The study obtained ethical approval (no.10957) by the University of Bristol School of Education Research Ethics Committee. Participants all consented to the study in writing before starting the anonymous survey.

Instrument

A self-administered online survey was used to reach participants in various cities across the UK to enhance representativeness of the sample. Participants were instructed to complete one survey per child. They were asked to indicate the age of the child concerned. Closed questions were used to explore participants' attitudes towards the importance of their children's C/TC development, and if responded positively, the obstacles faced and support needed for HLM. Each question contained options based on literature or the author's knowledge. Participants were asked to rate each option on a five-point Likert scale for ascertaining the extent of opinion and comparing between age groups (Katz & Rudolph, 2018). Optional open-ended choices were available for participants to express their opinion on each question. Participants could choose between the English and Traditional Chinese versions of the survey to ensure participation was not obstructed by a lack of English proficiency (Moreh, 2019).

Design

The novelty of the present topic required both quantitative data to ascertain any general trends of parents' attitudes and age-group-specific differences, and qualitative data to explore in depth the context and reasons behind them. Hence, the present study adopts a convergent mixed methods design, using an online survey that contains mainly closed-ended questions, supplemented with optional open-ended questions (Clements et al., 2017). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously in the same survey before being merged in the results reporting and discussion stages (Doyle et al., 2019).

Quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0. After deleting incomplete responses, valid responses were categorised into three age groups (preschool, primary and secondary) based on the age of child. The author used descriptive statistics to ascertain general trends of data across age groups. The trends concerned parents' attitudes towards the importance of C/TC development for their children, the obstacles encountered and support needed for HLM. Based on the assumption that there were three independent age groups of ordinal data on the Likert scale, the author used Kruskal-Wallis tests and pairwise post-hoc Dunn tests to ascertain any age-group differences in ranks between each option for individual questions (Dai, 2017).

For the qualitative data collected through optional open-ended questions, top-down theoretical thematic analysis was used to fit relevant data into corresponding research questions to generate codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). Relevant extracts of Traditional Chinese responses were then translated into English for reporting. Following parallel quantitative and qualitative analyses, findings from both types of data were reported by themes. This integrative analysis approach showed where the quantitative and qualitative findings converge and diverge (Fetters et al., 2013).

Results

Affective But Realistic Attitudes Towards C/TC Development

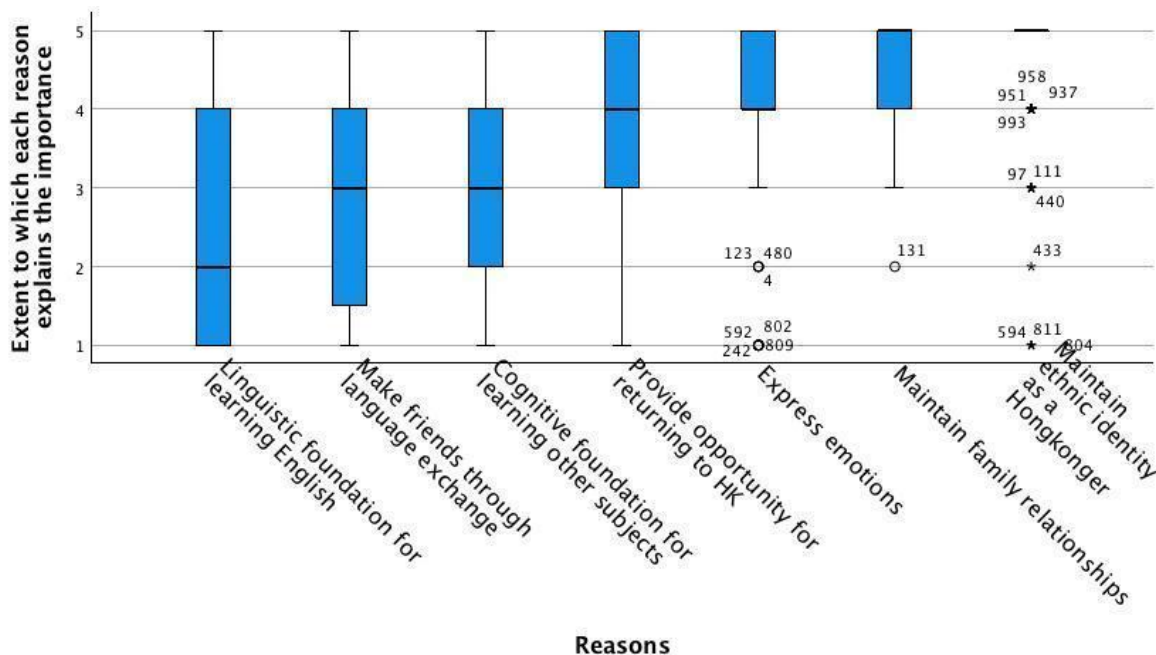
For C/TC learning and maintenance in the UK, 89.7% of respondents found it important for their children ($n = 131$), while 10.3% found it unimportant ($n = 15$). Among those who viewed C/TC development as important for their children, Figure 1 shows that ethnic identity maintenance was the strongest reason. Other common reasons included family relationship maintenance and emotion expression. Converging qualitative findings emphasised the preservation and transmission of C/TC as the mother tongue of Hongkongers, and its use within the family. Relevant extracts included: (i) “保留香港語言文化， 以使中文（廣東話）得以傳承” (“Preserve the language culture of HK to transmit C/TC”) (Respondent no. 42); (ii) “身為香港人當然希望保存廣東話及繁體字” (“As a Hongkonger, of course [I] hope to preserve C/TC.”) (Respondent no. 66); (iii) “日後與長輩溝通” (“For future communication with elderly relatives”) (Respondent no. 3); and (iv) “Cantonese will mainly be used with the family” (Respondent no. 55). Some qualitative responses also revealed a sense of realism – ultimately, it is up to the children to decide whether to learn and maintain C/TC.

Relevant extracts included: (i) “兩個女兒能否掌握母語作日後流利書寫及溝通，除建基於家庭學習外，還要看兩個小孩之意願。作為母親我會盡力協助，但日後能否達至一定水平實難預測。” (“Apart from home education, my two children’s preferences also determine whether they can master their mother tongue for proficient written and oral communication in the future. As a mother, I will try my best to help them, but it is uncertain if they can achieve a certain level [of C/TC] in the future.”) (Respondent no. 51); and (ii) “保留中文程度就隨緣，在家中會講中文，其他時間就隨她” (“For maintaining Chinese level, [I] let things run their natural course. [We] speak Cantonese at home. At other times, [I] let her decide.”) (Respondent no. 62).

Among those who did not think C/TC development was important for their children, more common reasons were the uncommon use of C/TC in the UK and the avoidance of resource diversion from learning English, as shown in Figure 2. Converging qualitative findings accorded a dispensable role to C/TC. For instance: (i) “[Cantonese is] not necessarily needed professionally.” (Respondent no. 85); and (ii) “The child will be British, so Chinese is merely an interesting hobby.” (Respondent no. 70). Other reasons revealed were the sufficiency of children’s existing C/TC proficiency, and the difficulty in learning TC. Relevant extracts included: (i) “中文/廣東語言，即使要保留但不必再化時間去深造。” (“Even if C/TC is to be preserved, no additional time is needed to master it.”) (Respondent no. 48); (ii) “He speaks Cantonese well, but learning to write TC is difficult for him.” (Respondent no. 46); and (iii) “TC writing is difficult and it is different from spoken Cantonese.” (Respondent no. 46).

Figure 1

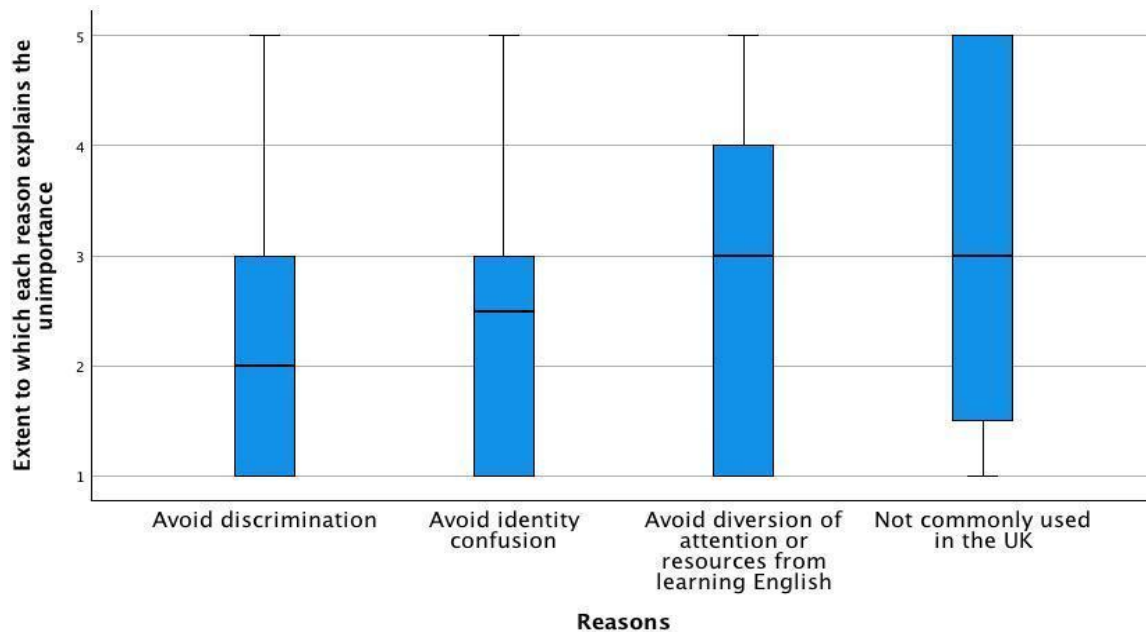
Box Plot Showing the Extent to Which Each Reason Explains the Importance of C/TC Development for the Children



Note: Explains the importance a lot (5), Explains the importance fairly (4), Somewhat explains the importance (3), Explains the importance a bit (2), Not my reason (1)

Figure 2

Box Plot Showing the Extent to Which Each Reason Explains the Unimportance of C/TC Development for the Children



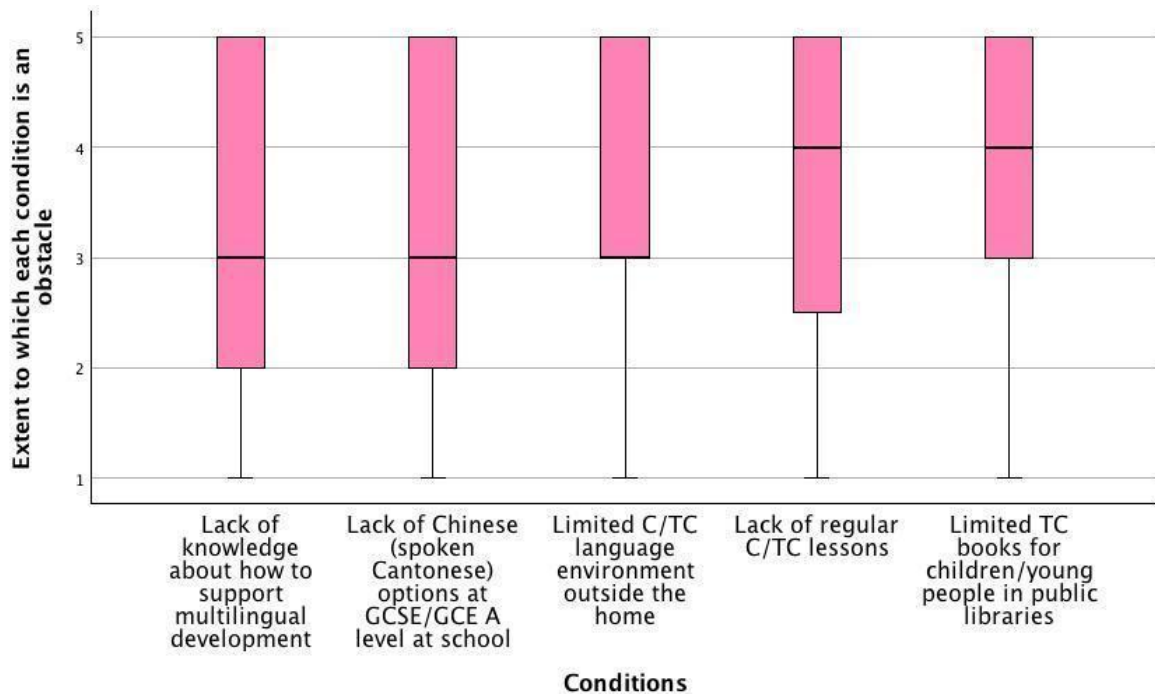
Note: Explains the importance a lot (5), Explains the importance fairly (4), Somewhat explains the importance (3), Explains the importance a bit (2), Not my reason (1)

C/TC Development Limited by Exposure and Motivation

Respondents who valued C/TC development were asked about the extent to which each condition was an obstacle for supporting their children's C/TC development. Figure 3 shows that the more common obstacles were limited TC books in public libraries, the lack of regular C/TC lessons, and limited C/TC language environment outside the home. Qualitative findings emphasised the lack of teaching knowhow and limited C/TC exposure in the UK. Relevant extracts included: (i) “在英格蘭地區可能比較容易找到社區組織舉辦任何廣東話活動，但在蘇格蘭/愛丁堡卻很少有廣東話活動舉行。” (“It may be easier to find Cantonese events organised by community associations in England, but these events very seldom take place in Scotland.”) (Respondent no. 33); and (ii) “缺乏知識/教材去教她讀寫中文” (“Lack knowledge and materials to teach [my child] Chinese reading and writing.”) (Respondent no. 29). Children's lack of interest and motivation to learn and maintain C/TC was shown to be another obstacle. For example: (i) “Children don't think learning Chinese is a must” (Respondent no. 7); and (ii) “I find that both of my children are not interested in Chinese writing, or reading Chinese books, because it is difficult to learn and different from what they speak.” (Respondent no. 46).

Figure 3

Box Plot Showing the Extent to Which Each Condition is an Obstacle to Supporting Children's C/TC Development in the UK



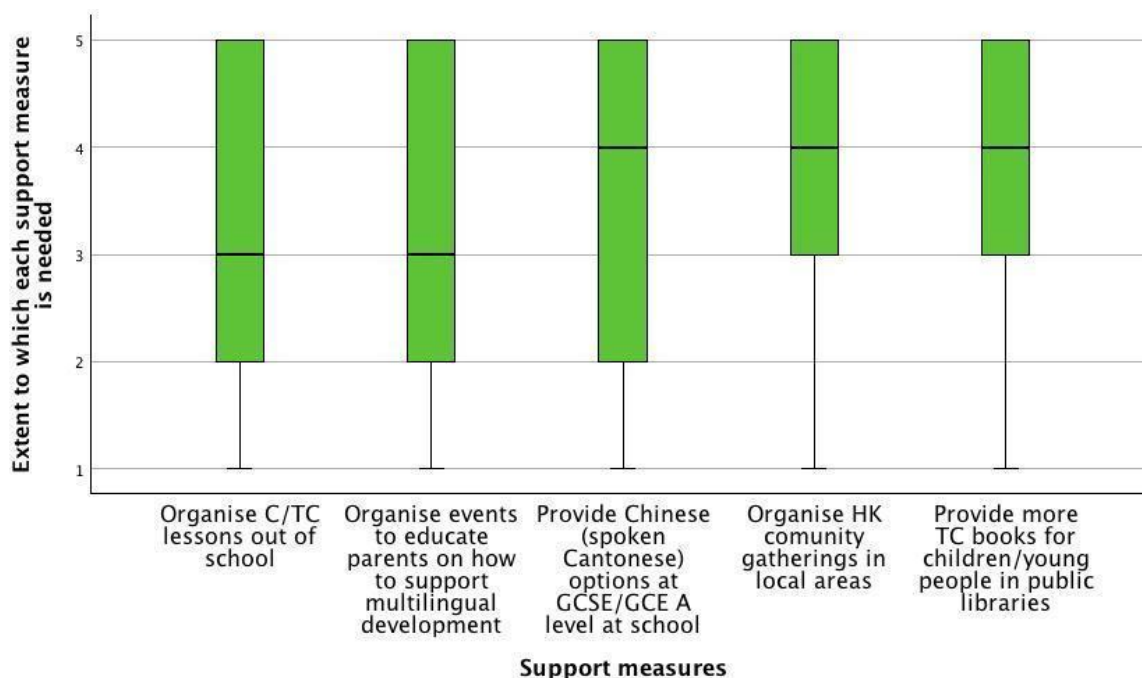
Note: Very much an obstacle (5), Fairly an obstacle (4), Somewhat an obstacle (3), Slightly an obstacle (2), Not an obstacle at all (1)

Community-based Informal Language Exposure Needed

Respondents who valued C/TC development were also asked about the extent to which each support measure was needed. Figure 4 shows that the provision of TC books in public libraries and HK community gatherings in local areas were more commonly needed. Converging qualitative findings emphasised the need for an applied C/TC environment with activities and books. Relevant extracts included: (i) “定期為小朋友提供實體活動，讓小朋友有興趣地繼續學習廣東話/繁體中文” (“Regularly organising in-person activities for children to keep up their interest in learning C/TC”) (Respondent no. 60); and (ii) “希望英國政府在公共圖書館多設立中文繁體書及相關audio book” (“Hope that the UK government can provide more TC books and audiobooks in public libraries”) (Respondent no. 66). Qualitative findings also revealed a community-based mindset among respondents, who believed that the HK immigrant community in the UK could share efforts to preserve and transmit C/TC to the next generation. For example: (i) “可分享一些資源在網上，如：四格故事創作，讓不同年齡的家長網上下載” (“Can share resources online, e.g. 4-grid storytelling, for parents to download for their children of different ages”) (Respondent no. 60); and (ii) “We can see how the Chinese communities built up in Vancouver and Toronto. The later the more, same to be happened here in the UK.” (Respondent no. 11)”.

Figure 4

Box Plot Showing the Extent to Which Each Support Measure is Needed for Parents to Support Children's C/TC Development in the UK



Note: Very much needed (5), Fairly needed (3) Somewhat needed (3), Slightly needed (2) Not needed at all (1)

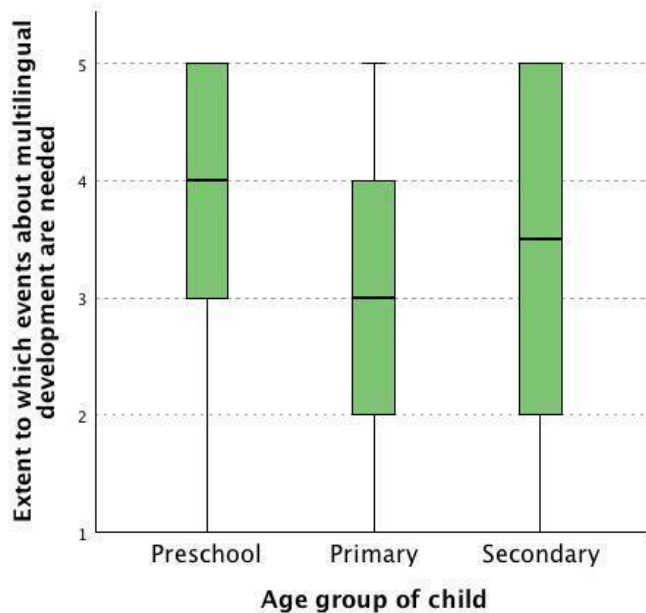
Language Development Needs Dependent on Age Group

To ascertain whether data differed between the three age groups, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted for each option under each research question with Likert-scale data. Where a statistically significant difference was found, a post hoc Dunn's test was run to find out between which groups the difference existed. Only one difference between age groups was found statistically significant. It concerned organising parental education events on supporting multilingual development under support measures needed, $H(2) = 8.84$, $p = .012$ (asym.). Pairwise post hoc Dunn's test with Bonferroni adjustments was only significant for preschool versus primary ($p = .009$). Figure 5 shows that respondents with preschool children needed parental education events on supporting multilingual development significantly more than those with primary children. For other age-group-specific differences that were not statistically significant but worthy of further exploration, please refer to Table 1 of Supplemental Materials.

Qualitative data converged with and extended the quantitative trends. Some respondents hoped that their younger children would have the opportunity to learn and maintain C/TC. One relevant extract read, “希望可以令較小年紀的小朋友都有機會學到廣東話/繁體字” (“Hope that younger children will have the opportunity to learn C/TC”) (Respondent no. 3). Some other respondents with older children were either content with their children's C/TC ability or more concerned with their children's loss of TC competence than Cantonese ability because reading and writing TC are more difficult and less practised in the UK. Relevant extracts included: (i) “已經有一定程度” (“Already achieved a certain level”) (Respondent no. 27); and (ii) “Both children [who are 12 and 14 years old] are already fluent in Cantonese speaking, which I don't worry that they would forget. I find that both of my children are not interested in Chinese writing, or reading Chinese books, because it is difficult to learn and different from what they speak.” (Respondent no. 70).

Figure 5

Box Plot Showing the Extent to Which Parental Education Events About Supporting Multilingual Development is Needed for Parents with Children of Different Age Groups



Note: Very much needed (5), Fairly needed (3) Somewhat needed (3), Slightly needed (2) Not needed at all (1)

Discussion

Almost 90% of respondents found C/TC development important for their children in the UK. Maintaining ethnic identity as a Hongkonger was the main reason. HK is one of the very few places using C/TC as the home language. C/TC uniquely signifies most local Hongkongers' ethnic identity (Groves, 2010). HK immigrant parents are keen to transmit this sense of belonging to their children through C/TC development (Tseng, 2020). Other reasons included family relationship maintenance and emotional expression. Most locally raised Hongkongers are used to expressing themselves and conversing with others in C/TC. This common language facilitates HK immigrant families in sharing thoughts and feelings to reduce misunderstanding and conflicts (Cox et al., 2021). HK immigrant children's C/TC ability allows them to communicate with elderly relatives who may not speak English (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). Findings suggested that respondents valued the family bonding function of C/TC.

Respondents thought that their children's C/TC development was mainly limited by language exposure and motivation. They shared the view that C/TC exposure through books, lessons and outside-home environment was currently limited in the UK. This obstacle appeared to be more evident in areas less populated by HK immigrants. Qualitative data revealed that children's lack of motivation to learn and maintain C/TC was another obstacle, especially for TC which is more difficult to learn than Cantonese. Qualitative responses suggested that non-educator parents were concerned about not knowing how to teach their children home language literacy. The lack of pedagogical knowledge echoed the findings in Hashimoto and Lee (2011). Immigrant parents interviewed in Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir (2017) equally found it hard to teach home language literacy to young children. This obstacle seems to be common among immigrant parents.

Findings demonstrated a particular need for informal C/TC language exposure. The majority viewed that books in public libraries and in-person activities among the HK immigrant community were needed. Respondents emphasised the importance of an applied language environment for learning C/TC in context. Contextualisation is key to maintaining children's interest and motivation in learning the home language

(Hashimoto & Lee, 2011; Leung et al. 2018). Qualitative findings revealed a mindset of community action among respondents. There appeared an optimistic attitude that the HK immigrant community in the UK would build up stronger networks to support children's C/TC development going forward. This mindset aligns with recommendations in previous literature (Fillmore, 2000; Hashimoto & Lee, 2011).

Respondents with preschool children were found to have significantly greater need for parental education about multilingualism than respondents with children in primary. A likely explanation is that preschool children, who are in a critical language development stage, have not yet developed a solid C/TC foundation before arriving in the UK (Connaughton-Crean & Ó Duibhir, 2017). Parents are more eager to learn how to support their preschool children's multilingual development. Future research may also investigate further into the other noteworthy but non-statistically significant differences between age groups (Table 1 of Supplementary Materials) with a random sample of a larger scale.

Implications for Support Measures

The present study revealed a strong wish of HK immigrant parents for their children's HLM. To achieve HLM, institutional support is essential (Van de Vijver et al., 2016). Findings suggested that children of different age groups might have different HLM needs. Future policies should prioritise meeting the focus of their respective needs to maximise resource efficiency. Table 2 provides a list of recommendations for support measures involving different stakeholders and target age groups. The author drew from research and discussions with social connections in proposing the execution details. The goal is to provide a contextualised language environment for HK immigrant children to learn and maintain C/TC.

Table 2

Recommended Support Measures

Stakeholder	Target age group(s)	Recommended support measures
The UK Government	General	<p><u>Why:</u> To encourage community actions by HK immigrants.</p> <p><u>What:</u> Provide funding for community projects to promote C/TC development among HK immigrant children in the UK.</p> <p><u>How:</u> Through the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise grant schemes under the HK BN(O) Welcome Programme (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).</p>
	Preschool to primary	<p><u>Why:</u> To support TC literacy development among younger children.</p> <p><u>What:</u> Source and provide age-appropriate TC books in public libraries.</p> <p><u>How:</u> Storybooks and comics are suitable for enhancing children's interest in reading (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011). HK immigrant parents and organisations promoting C/TC development may be consulted in book selection. When cataloguing books, HK immigrants may be recruited to help with TC data entry and sorting. One may start with younger children's books in areas more populated with HK immigrants such as Greater London, Manchester and Birmingham, before extending to other areas. TC electronic books and audiobooks can be included to reach HK immigrants in more remote areas.</p>
	Secondary	<p><u>Why:</u> To support TC literacy maintenance and C/TC qualification obtainment among older children.</p> <p><u>What:</u> Explore the possibility of state schools providing HK immigrant students the options to take Chinese (spoken Cantonese) at GCSE/GCE A level.</p> <p><u>How:</u> Although formal C/TC teaching at school is ideal, it may not be realistic for all schools in view of limited resources and varying demands. Where practicable, establishing a Chinese (spoken Cantonese) class may be considered. HK immigrants who were former Chinese language teachers may be recruited, especially where Qualified Teacher Status may be awarded to</p>

		former HK teachers from 2023 (Department for Education, 2022). Other schools may consider allowing HK immigrant students to take Chinese (spoken Cantonese) as a self-study subject, and providing relevant materials.
HK immigrant community in the UK	General	<p><u>Why:</u> To pool community efforts, expertise, and resources together.</p> <p><u>What and how:</u> HK immigrant parents and professionals (such as educators, child psychologists and community project coordinators) come together to set up formal organisations and/or informal groups to promote C/TC development. They can share educational resources and information about C/TC events online to enhance access (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011).</p>
	Preschool to primary	<p><u>Why:</u> To create a more C/TC language environment for younger children.</p> <p><u>What and how:</u> Community organisations and groups may organise activities in local areas or online for HK immigrant children to learn C/TC. Existing ideas include storytelling and fun-based lessons. Contextualised learning can sustain children's interest and motivation. Organisations may invite professional speakers to share how best to support preschool children's multilingual development.</p>
	Secondary	<p><u>Why:</u> To support TC literacy maintenance among older children.</p> <p><u>What and how:</u> Community organisations and groups may organise activities to encourage the use of TC. Possible ideas may be pairing up children as (digital) TC pen pals or creating an online platform for children to discuss popular topics in TC.</p>

Conclusion

Most participating HK immigrant parents valued C/TC development for their children, mainly to maintain ethnic identity as a Hongkonger, maintain family relationship and express emotions. Limited books, lessons, and language environment were found to be the major obstacles to supporting children's C/TC development. TC books and community gatherings were found needed for contextualised language exposure. C/TC learning support needs might differ depending on age groups. Parents with preschool children expressed significantly greater needs for parental education on multilingualism than those with children in primary. These findings served as empirical references for future research and policy deliberation. Using large-scale random sampling, future research may further investigate support need differences between age groups. Overall, many respondent parents understood that they could only provide the best language environment possible for their children's C/TC development. Ultimately, it is up to the children to decide whether they want to learn, preserve, and transmit the home language. Community efforts have a key role to play in this long new journey.

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Supplementary Materials

Table 1

Non-Statistically Significant Yet Noteworthy Age-Group-Specific Trends

Research question	Option	Trend	Statistical results
Why C/TC learning and maintenance is important	Express emotions more easily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary: Rated somewhat or above by almost all respondents. Preschool and primary: Varied responses, rated somewhat or below by a quarter in each age group. 	$H(2) = 3.680$, $p = .159$ (asym.)
	Provide an opportunity for returning to HK later if the children so wish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary: Highly rated by around half. Primary: Rated fairly or above by around half. Preschool: Approximately 50-50 spread across the whole Likert scale. 	$H(2) = 4.620$, $p = .099$ (asym.)
Obstacles encountered	Limited C/TC language environment outside the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary and secondary: Rated somewhat or above by around half in each age group. Preschool: Rated somewhat or above by around three quarters. 	$H(2) = 3.305$, $p = .192$ (asym.)
Support needed	Provide more TC books for children and young people in public libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary and secondary: Rated somewhat or above by around half in each age group. Preschool: Rated more than fairly or above by around half. 	$H(2) = 2.915$, $p = .233$ (asym.)
	Organise HK community gatherings in local areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary: Rated somewhat or above by around half. Primary: Rated fairly or above by around half. Preschool: Rated more than fairly or above by around half. 	$H(2) = 3.297$, $p = .192$ (asym.)
	Provide Chinese (spoken Cantonese) options at GCSE/GCE A level at school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary: Rated more than fairly or above by around half Preschool and primary: Rated somewhat or above by around half in each age group. 	$H(2) = 5.083$, $p = .079$ (asym.)