

ILOKANO MOTHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES AND MEANING-MAKING IN MULTILINGUAL CHILD-REARING: NEGOTIATING ENGLISH AND ILOKANO IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of Ilokano mothers as they navigate multilingual parenting in the context of their children's early childhood English language learning. Ten purposively selected Ilokano mothers participated in semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method adapted within an interpretive framework. Findings revealed that mothers' language practices were shaped by caregiving responsibilities, family relationships, digital media exposure, schooling experiences, and community interactions. Mothers negotiated English and Ilokano as complementary languages with distinct social and emotional meanings: English was associated with confidence, educational opportunities, social mobility, and imagined futures, while Ilokano was connected to cultural identity, emotional belonging, and intergenerational relationships. The findings further revealed that mothers' language decisions were influenced by their personal histories, social expectations, and aspirations for their children's linguistic futures. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a choice between competing languages, mothers interpreted multilingual practices as a way of supporting children's adaptability, social connection, and cultural continuity. The study contributes to understanding multilingual motherhood by highlighting how language learning in early childhood is a relational and identity-driven process shaped by family practices, cultural negotiation, and everyday experiences. These insights provide implications for educators, families, and policymakers in supporting bilingual development while sustaining heritage languages in multilingual communities.

Keywords: bilingual development, family language practices, mother tongue maintenance, multilingualism, multilingual motherhood

INTRODUCTION

English continues to function as a global lingua franca and remains closely associated with educational attainment, employment opportunities, and social mobility. In the Philippines, where English holds institutional status as an official language and occupies significant roles in education, government, and professional settings, English proficiency is often perceived by families as an important resource for children's future opportunities. As a result, many parents introduce English during early childhood, sometimes before formal schooling, by shaping home environments where children encounter and practice the language. However, in multilingual communities, early English language learning is not only a matter of

acquiring another language, as it also involves negotiating questions of identity, belonging, family relationships, and the continuity of local languages.

Parents, particularly mothers who often serve as primary caregivers, play a central role in shaping children's early linguistic environments. Children's language development is strongly influenced by everyday interactions with caregivers, including the languages used at home, the opportunities provided for language exposure, and parental decisions regarding language learning (Abah et al., 2025; Schalley & Eisenclas, 2022). These decisions are formed through educational considerations and are also shaped by parents' beliefs about opportunity, identity, social inclusion, and

imagined futures (Bilgory-Fazakas & Armon-Lotem, 2025). Thus, family language practices reflect broader social realities in which certain languages become associated with mobility and success, while others remain connected to heritage, emotional connection, and cultural continuity.

The Philippine context provides a significant setting for examining these negotiations due to its complex multilingual landscape. Although the country is home to numerous ethnolinguistic communities, English continues to hold considerable prestige in academic and professional domains. This linguistic hierarchy influences how families evaluate the languages they transmit to children. Recent studies indicate that Filipino parents increasingly incorporate English through schooling, digital media, and everyday interactions because of their aspirations for children's educational advancement and future competitiveness (Barrios, 2025). However, increased English exposure may also influence the use and transmission of regional languages, creating tensions between developing English proficiency and maintaining local linguistic identities.

Within this broader Philippine context, Ilokano-speaking families represent an important sociolinguistic community for understanding multilingual child-rearing practices. Ilokano is one of the major regional languages in the Philippines and functions as a primary language of communication, cultural expression, and family interaction among many communities in Northern Luzon. However, similar to other Philippine regional languages that remain widely spoken, Ilokano faces challenges brought by changing language practices, increasing exposure to English, digital media, and shifting parental preferences among younger generations. Studies have identified generational change, technological influences, and evolving family language practices as factors affecting the continued use of Ilokano among younger speakers (Lachica & Ferrer, n.d.). While these changes do not necessarily indicate complete language loss, they demonstrate the need to examine how families negotiate the competing demands of maintaining Ilokano while preparing children for English-

dominant educational and social environments.

The significance of studying Ilokano mothers specifically lies in the unique position of their families within this multilingual negotiation. Therefore, focusing on Ilokano mothers allows the study to explore how a specific ethnolinguistic community navigates the relationship between a globally dominant language and a heritage language embedded in family identity. Ilokano mothers provide insight into how language choices are experienced within households where English may represent educational opportunity, confidence, and mobility, while Ilokano represents belonging, emotional connection, and intergenerational relationships. Understanding these experiences contributes to broader discussions of multilingual parenting by examining not only what languages children learn, but also why families choose, sustain, or modify their language practices.

Early childhood multilingual development demonstrates that children can acquire multiple languages when they receive meaningful and sustained exposure to each language (Trafton, 2018; Meneses et al., 2024). However, balanced bilingual development depends on the quality, consistency, and social value attached to each language (Nicoladis et al., 2016; Gagarina & Klassert, 2018). In multilingual communities, unequal exposure may result in language dominance shifts toward more socially valued languages such as English. Formal schooling, digital media, and peer interaction may further increase children's exposure to English, affecting the ways regional languages are maintained within families (Meneses et al., 2024). Therefore, examining parental experiences becomes necessary as language maintenance and language shift are heavily shaped by broader policies and also by everyday family decisions.

The relationship between English and local languages reflects competing yet interconnected meanings. English is frequently viewed as an investment in children's future because of its association with academic achievement, employment, and social mobility (Manalastas, 2022; Rao, 2019; Vance, 2024). At the same time, research emphasizes that the mother tongue

plays a crucial role in developing cultural identity, emotional security, and intergenerational communication (Lee et al., 2015; Cheng, 2023; Bélanger, 2023). These perspectives suggest that multilingual parents do not simply choose one language over another; rather, they negotiate language practices according to their children's needs, family relationships, and social realities.

Family Language Policy provides a framework for understanding these negotiations. Spolsky (2012) explains that family language policy consists of language practices, beliefs, and management strategies that influence language transmission within the home. Previous studies emphasize that parental ideologies shape whether children maintain, adapt, or shift between languages (King & Fogle, 2013; Andritsou & Chatzidimou, 2022). However, existing research has placed greater emphasis on language outcomes and parental attitudes, while fewer studies have explored how mothers interpret and make meaning from their own experiences of raising children in multilingual environments.

This study is guided primarily by Darwin and Norton's (2015) Identity and Model of Investment, which explains how language learning is shaped by identity, ideology, and access to social and cultural resources. Through this framework, mothers' decisions regarding English and Ilokano are understood as investments connected to their children's imagined futures, social opportunities, and sense of belonging. Additionally, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory serves as a complementary perspective in understanding the emotional and relational dimensions of mothers' decisions. The concepts of competence, autonomy, and relatedness provide insight into how mothers support children's confidence in using languages, encourage child-responsive language choices, and maintain meaningful relationships through multilingual interaction. Together, these frameworks allow the study to examine language practices as both social investments and relational caregiving processes.

Despite growing research on bilingualism, parental language beliefs, and family language policy, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of Ilokano

mothers raising children within English-oriented environments. Existing studies often examine language proficiency, educational outcomes, or language policy implementation, leaving a gap in understanding how mothers themselves experience the everyday negotiation between English learning and heritage language maintenance. This gap is significant as early childhood English language learning in multilingual communities is not merely a process of acquiring a global language; it is also a process shaped by family identity, cultural continuity, and social belonging.

To address this gap, this phenomenological study explored how Ilokano mothers experience and make meaning of rearing their children in multilingual environments where early childhood English language learning and Ilokano language maintenance intersect.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Ilokano mothers describe their lived experiences in rearing their children in relation to early childhood English language learning?
2. What motivations, reasons, or meanings do Ilokano mothers attribute to these experiences?

METHOD

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Ilokano mothers and the reasons, motivations, or meanings they attribute to rearing their children for early childhood English language learning. Interpretive phenomenology was selected as it emphasizes how individuals construct meanings from their lived experiences within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. This approach allows the researcher to examine how participants interpret their realities, including the values, beliefs, and circumstances that shape their language-related decisions.

The study was conducted in Pasuquin, Ilocos Norte, Philippines, where Ilokano remains the dominant regional language used in many family and community interactions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The participants were ten

Ilokano mothers who served as the primary caregivers of children exposed to English-oriented preschool education. To capture diverse perspectives regarding early childhood English language learning, five participants had children who predominantly used English as a first language, while five had children whose primary language was Ilokano. The sample size was considered appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, which prioritizes rich and contextualized understanding of lived experiences rather than statistical representation.

To be included in the study, participants had to identify as Ilokano, reside in Pasuquin during the conduct of the study, serve as the biological mother and primary caregiver of the child, and have a child aged 3–5 years who was currently enrolled in or had attended an English-oriented preschool within the previous six years. Mothers whose children had diagnosed language or developmental disorders that could substantially affect language acquisition were excluded. Data collection was conducted from October to November 2025.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences and the meanings they attached to rearing their children for early childhood English language learning. Semi-structured interviews allowed consistency across participants while also providing opportunities for follow-up questions, clarification, and deeper exploration of individual experiences. Prior to participation, eligible mothers were informed about the study and provided written informed consent. Interviews were conducted through online video conferencing platforms selected by the participants and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Participants were allowed to respond in Ilokano, Filipino, or English according to their language preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The study received ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Review Board before data collection. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any

time, and the measures implemented to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms and participant codes (e.g., P1–P10) were used in all records and reports to protect participants' identities.

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, which was adapted within an interpretive phenomenological framework. While Colaizzi's procedure is commonly associated with descriptive phenomenology, its systematic process of engaging with significant statements, formulating meanings, and developing thematic structures provided an organized approach for interpreting how participants made sense of their experiences. The analysis aimed to identify common descriptions of motherhood and language practices. At the same time, it also examined the meanings that participants constructed from their experiences within their sociocultural context as Ilokano mothers navigating English and mother tongue use.

The researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts to develop familiarity with the participants' narratives and identified significant statements related to their experiences, motivations, and meanings. These statements were examined through an interpretive lens to formulate meanings that reflected participants' understandings of their language practices. Related meanings were then clustered into themes that represented broader patterns of experience, such as the ways mothers associated English with care, protection, opportunity, and social participation, while interpreting Ilokano as a language connected to belonging, identity, and family relationships. The emerging themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon and refined into thematic structures that represented both the experiences and meaning-making processes of the participants.

To maintain methodological coherence within an interpretive phenomenological orientation, researcher reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process. The researcher continuously reflected on personal assumptions, linguistic background, and potential influences on data interpretation. Reflexive notes were maintained during data analysis to acknowledge the researcher's role in

interpreting participants’ narratives while remaining grounded in their expressed experiences. Rather than attempting to completely remove researcher influence, reflexivity allowed the researcher to critically examine how interpretations were developed within the interaction between participant accounts, contextual meanings, and the researcher’s analytical process.

To enhance trustworthiness, participant validation was conducted by returning interpretations to the respective participants for verification. All participants confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings. The use of reflexive practices, participant validation, and systematic thematic analysis supported the dependability and interpretive depth of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study on the lived experiences of Ilokano mothers and the motivations, reasons, or meanings they attribute to rearing their children in relation to early childhood English language learning.

Lived Experiences of Ilokano Mothers in Rearing Children for Early Childhood English Language Learning

Table 1 presents the themes that emerged from the lived experiences of Ilokano mothers in rearing their children for early childhood English language learning.

Four themes emerged from the participants’ accounts: integration of digital media for language exposure, living between languages in daily mother-child interaction, intentional choices to channel care and confidence, and sharing child-rearing with Ilokano-speaking grandparents.

Table 1. Summary of Themes on the Lived Experiences of Ilokano Mothers

Themes	Descriptions
Integration of digital media for language exposure	Participants integrated digital media into caregiving routines, unintentionally increasing children’s exposure to English.
Living between languages in daily mother-child interaction	Participants used English and Ilokano flexibly according to context, need, and children’s language preferences.
Intentional choices to channel care and confidence	Participants made language-related decisions to support children’s learning, confidence, and social preparedness.
Sharing child-rearing with Ilokano-speaking grandparents	Participants relied on grandparents as co-caregivers who sustained Ilokano use and reinforced emotional and cultural connections.

Integration of digital media for language exposure

Digital media emerged as an ordinary yet influential component of mothers’ caregiving practices. Participants frequently relied on mobile phones, YouTube, cartoons, and other English-language media while attending to work and household responsibilities. Through these routines, children were exposed to English even when language learning was not the mothers’ primary intention.

One participant explained:

“He picked it (English) up from the shows he was watching...” (P3)

Similarly, another participant shared:

“So that I can work... I let them use a cellphone... I still choose what they watch.” (P4)

For several mothers, digital media also became a response to children’s limited social interaction. Participants recalled that some children spent substantial time watching videos because they had few opportunities to interact with peers.

Consequently, English exposure occurred through everyday media consumption, positioning digital media as an informal language-learning environment.

Living between languages in daily mother-child interaction

Participants described moving fluidly between English and Ilokano in their daily interactions with their children. Translation, code-switching, and language mixing were commonly used to facilitate understanding and maintain communication.

One mother shared:

“Sometimes I need to translate... He understood Ilokano, but he would answer in English.” (P1)

Another participant explained:

“We mix Ilokano and English... It’s okay if it’s English, and it’s okay if it’s Ilokano.” (P6)

Language choice often depended on context. English was associated with schooling and learning, while Ilokano was linked to family interaction, discipline, and emotional expression. As one participant reflected, “I want her to speak English for learning, but Ilokano for connection” (P8). These experiences demonstrate how mothers negotiated multilingual communication by adapting to their children’s needs while maintaining both languages within family life.

Intentional choices to channel care and confidence

Mothers described making deliberate language-related decisions that they believed would benefit their children’s future learning, confidence, and social participation. These decisions included using English at home, reading English books, exposing children to English-speaking peers, and enrolling them in English-oriented preschools.

One participant recalled:

“I remember feeling shy speaking English... As a mom, I don’t want my child to experience that.” (P8)

Similarly, another participant stated:

“I trained him to speak early... I’ve been reading him English books since he was a baby.” (P7)

Many mothers linked these practices to their own experiences of difficulty with English and expressed a desire to provide opportunities they felt they had lacked. At the same time, their decisions were influenced by practical considerations such as school reputation, accessibility, and children’s comfort within learning environments. Rather than pursuing English proficiency alone, mothers emphasized comprehension, confidence, and social adjustment as important outcomes of their language choices.

Sharing child-rearing with Ilokano-speaking grandparents

Participants frequently shared caregiving responsibilities with grandparents, particularly when balancing employment and household obligations. Because grandparents predominantly used Ilokano, they played a significant role in sustaining the children’s exposure to the mother tongue.

As one participant explained:

“She spends more time with her grandparents... That’s why she’s more fluent in Ilokano.” (P9)

Another participant noted that adults in the household primarily communicated in Ilokano (P6), creating an environment where children naturally encountered the language in daily interactions.

These experiences suggest that grandparents functioned not only as caregivers but also as important agents of language maintenance. Through routine interaction, they reinforced cultural continuity, family relationships, and the continued use of Ilokano alongside English.

Across the four themes, mothers described early childhood English language learning as embedded in everyday caregiving rather than formal instruction alone. Their experiences reflect findings on simultaneous bilingual development, where children acquire multiple languages through sustained exposure across home, media, and social environments (Meneses et al., 2024;

Trafton, 2018). The integration of digital media, flexible multilingual interaction, intentional language decisions, and grandparent involvement demonstrates how language learning is negotiated within family life.

These findings support Family Language Policy perspectives (Spolsky, 2012; King & Fogle, 2013), highlighting mothers’ active role in managing English and Ilokano according to family needs and aspirations. They also align with Darvin and Norton’s (2015) Identity and Model of Investment, as mothers viewed English as an investment in

future opportunities while maintaining Ilokano as a resource for identity and belonging. Likewise, the findings resonate with Ryan and Deci’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory, as mothers’ practices supported children’s competence through English exposure, relatedness through Ilokano-mediated family relationships, and autonomy through flexible language use. Overall, early childhood English language learning emerged as a relational and multilingual process shaped by caregiving, social realities, and family language practices.

Reasons, Motivations, or Meanings Ilokano Mothers Attribute to their Lived Experiences of Rearing Children for Early Childhood English Language Learning

Table 2 presents the summary of themes that emerged from the participants’ accounts regarding the reasons, motivations, or meanings they attribute to their lived experiences of rearing their children for early childhood English language learning.

As shown in Table 2, four dominant themes emerged from the participants’ first-

hand accounts, reflecting the reasons, motivations, or meanings they attribute to their lived experiences of rearing their children for early childhood English language learning. These themes are English as a form of care and protection, reworking personal histories through motherhood, negotiation of aspiration, anxiety, and social expectations in motherhood, and multilingualism as relational continuity within the family.

Table 2. Summary of the Themes that Emerged in the Participants’ Reasons, Motivations, or Meanings

Themes	Descriptions
English as a form of care and protection	Participants view English as a means of safeguarding their children’s academic readiness, confidence, and social inclusion.
Reworking personal histories through motherhood	Participants’ own experiences with language shape how they guide their children’s early childhood English language learning.
Negotiation of aspiration, anxiety, and social expectations in motherhood	Participants balance hopes for success with concerns about social pressure, cultural loss, and emotional well-being.
Multilingualism as relational continuity within the family	Participants interpret multilingual language use as a practical strategy for navigating family relations.

English as a form of care and protection
This theme captures how Ilokano mothers make sense of their lived experiences in rearing their children for early childhood English language learning by interpreting English as a form of care and protection. In reflecting on their everyday experiences, mothers attribute meaning to English as a language that could shield their children from

embarrassment, insecurity, and social exclusion as they enter wider social spaces.
Participants associated English with confidence and perceived intelligence, which are qualities they believe will help their children feel secure and accepted. Participants expressed:

“It’s nice to hear kids speaking English in malls... they sound smart.” (P7)

“It [introduction of English] started because I wanted her to be confident when she goes to school. Also, I work part-time online, and I see that most customers, especially my contacts from Manila and other more progressive places, their way of speaking English is so natural. So I felt like, if my daughter learns early, she’ll have an advantage.” (P8)

Participant 7’s account reveals how public encounters shape mothers’ understanding of language as a marker of competence and social value. Similarly, Participant 8 interpreted her observations in professional and urban settings as evidence that English serves as an advantage in contemporary society. Such experiences led mothers to view early childhood English language learning as a means of preparing their children for future academic, social, and professional environments.

Participants also associated English proficiency with avoiding linguistic stigma and negative judgments. Participant 1 shared:

“You know when Filipinos say Carabao English, but we have to be respectful also... As early as their age, they need to know the proper pronunciation; the right, proper English—how to say it and everything, like grammar.” (P1)

The meanings mothers attribute to their child-rearing practices therefore reveal an awareness of linguistic stigma and social evaluation. Supporting early childhood English language learning becomes a way of protecting children from ridicule, insecurity, or perceptions of inadequacy. In this sense, English is not simply viewed as an academic skill, but as a resource that promotes confidence, social inclusion, and future preparedness.

Reworking personal histories through motherhood

This theme captures how Ilokano mothers interpret their present child-rearing practices through the lens of their own experiences with

language. In reflecting on their children’s early language learning, mothers frequently drew upon memories of limited English exposure, difficulty, or delayed encounters with the language during their own childhood and educational experiences.

Participants narrated:

“I developed myself in that [English] language because I grew up in an Ilokano community and worked in a Tagalog language-speaking language, so my... my English is really not that-- I cannot-- I don't use it every day, every time, every hour inside the house. So, our home is an Ilokano, typical Ilokano-speaking home. We use(d) it only in school; in English language subjects or in writing... but in the real employment world, I don't really use that every day. But then when I went outside, so it was a challenge for me because it was hard for me before. [That's] maybe one of the reasons why I wanted my children to be well-versed with the English language...and be comfortable...” (P1)

“I only recall using it when I was in high school and college. But in our time, it really was pure Ilokano. We would only use the English language when we’d read, make essays. There’s no— not like today that there must be English [inaudible].” (P2)

“For me, I liked it [English] because I see how— take me for example, I’m weak. I’m not fluent [in English]. But now, they really need English proficiency. So, my children learning it early is a big thing for me because it is the school’s main language.” (P4)

“It’s really Ilokano... English was seldom used by our teachers...” (P5)

Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 described growing up in predominantly Ilokano-speaking environments where opportunities to develop English proficiency were limited. These experiences shaped how they understood their responsibilities as mothers. For them, supporting their children’s early childhood English language learning became a way of addressing the difficulties they themselves encountered and preventing their children from experiencing similar feelings of hesitation, inadequacy, or disadvantage.

Mothers also connected English to experiences of mobility and overseas employment. Participants recalled:

“It maybe [became] normal to me because of my first-born because we were in another country and I also used to speak like that [English] for ten years... It was just really me and my husband [who influenced children’s language use] because he is overseas.” (P1)

“I used to work abroad for almost five years and they speak English there... English helped me explore opportunities abroad—opportunities I could not have experienced if I did not know how to speak English.” (P10)

For these mothers, English became associated with adaptability, independence, and access to opportunities. Their own experiences of struggle, adjustment, and growth were carried into motherhood, leading them to interpret early childhood English language learning as a means of providing their children with opportunities they themselves wished they had received earlier.

Negotiation of aspiration, anxiety, and social expectations in motherhood

This theme captures how Ilokano mothers make sense of their experiences of rearing children for early childhood English language learning while navigating aspirations for

success, concerns about cultural continuity, and pressures from social environments.

Participants reflected on moments when their children struggled to communicate with Ilokano-speaking relatives:

“You should not let go of the Ilokano language... you’ll be the one suffering because your child doesn’t have socialization.” (P2)

“There was a time when my child did not understand what her grandmother was saying. That’s why I felt sad...” (P8)

“Do not neglect your native language. English can be learned anywhere... but Ilokano... it can only be learned [at home].” (P10)

These experiences prompted mothers to reconsider the balance between English and Ilokano. Moments of misunderstanding with grandparents became emotionally significant and reshaped how mothers understood their role in supporting both languages.

Participants also reflected on the social consequences of English dominance:

“It seemed like he was discriminated against... because other children would not play with you if you are English-speaking.” (P2)

“Of course, as a parent, I felt guilty because I never thought that being fluent in English could make him feel out of place in his own hometown...” (P10)

These accounts reveal mothers’ concerns that English proficiency alone does not guarantee social belonging. Instead, language is understood as a means of building relationships, community participation, and emotional connection.

Participants likewise described social expectations emerging from schools, peers, and neighborhoods:

“In this English school... the teacher and the students there, even the parents are also well-versed with that language...” (P1)

“Of course they would spend the day there, purely speaking in English because they really do not speak Ilokano.” (P4)

“Most of the children in our neighborhood are English speakers.” (P5)

“There’s also a bit of pressure... I also want my child to keep up.” (P8)

These reflections demonstrate that mothers continuously negotiate aspirations for English proficiency alongside anxieties regarding cultural belonging, social inclusion, and family relationships. Their meanings attached to child-rearing reveal an ongoing effort to help children acquire English without losing connection to their local community and cultural roots.

Multilingualism as relational continuity within the family

This theme shows how Ilokano mothers make sense of multilingualism as a way of sustaining family relationships, emotional expression, and social functioning. For participants, the use of both English and Ilokano was not viewed as competing practices but as complementary resources that support communication across different contexts.

Participants shared:

“While they’re young, they must know how to socialize, so when it comes to language, it must be balanced.” (P2)

“English is important, yes, but Ilokano grounds us...” (P8)

“That’s why she’s close to her grandparents... it’s as if Ilokano acts like a bridge.” (P9)

These accounts illustrate how mothers understand Ilokano as a language of family connection and belonging. Through Ilokano, children are able to communicate with grandparents and relatives, thereby maintaining intergenerational relationships and cultural continuity.

Participants also expressed pride when children demonstrated multilingual competence:

“...I’m so proud that my son comfortably shared his thoughts...” (P1)

“Because when we saw how they were playing and exchanging stories in English...” (P5)

“I saw how social she was even if they only seldom use Ilokano.” (P9)

The accounts of Participants 1, 5, and 9 show that mothers interpret children’s ability to communicate across different linguistic contexts as evidence of confidence, adaptability, and social competence. Their pride stems not only from English proficiency but also from their children’s ability to connect with different people and navigate various social environments.

This theme demonstrates that mothers interpret multilingualism as a practical and relational strategy that supports communication, belonging, and family continuity. Through the use of both English and Ilokano, they seek to raise children who can participate meaningfully in multiple social and cultural worlds.

Across the themes exploring the reasons, motivations, or meanings Ilokano mothers attribute to their lived experiences of rearing their children for early childhood English language learning, mothers described English and Ilokano as languages embedded in social, emotional, and relational contexts. Their reflections reveal how they navigate aspirations for English proficiency, anxieties about social and cultural belonging, and strategies for maintaining multilingual competence, consistent with studies on early bilingual development and simultaneous multilingualism (Trafton, 2018; Meneses et al., 2024; Nicoladis et al., 2016).

The mothers’ negotiation of English proficiency and social pressures corroborates findings that children’s language exposure is increasingly shaped by formal schooling, digital media, and peer interactions (Meneses et al., 2024; Barrios, 2025). Their efforts to support early childhood English language learning reflect parental perceptions of English as a resource for educational and

social advantage (Vance, 2024; Manalastas, 2022; Rao, 2019; Mahboob et al., 2013), while also navigating the potential social and emotional consequences when children struggle to connect with Ilokano-speaking relatives or peers (Trilestari et al., 2024). This aligns with Goldstein's (2025) argument that balanced proficiency depends not only on exposure to English but also on meaningful interaction in both languages.

The mothers' emphasis on the continued use of Ilokano highlights its role in sustaining emotional bonds, cultural identity, and intergenerational continuity (Lee et al., 2015; Cheng, 2023; Belanger, 2023; Cabansag, 2016; Aeni & Limbong, 2023). Their reflections resonate with research on language shift, showing that while technological and societal factors may threaten the use of mother tongue languages (Lachica & Ferrer, n.d.), mothers actively maintain Ilokano as a bridge for family cohesion (Mojarro, n.d.). Their multilingual practices reflect translanguaging and adaptive strategies consistent with Gagarina and Klassert (2018) and Andritsou and Chatzidimou (2022), supporting Family Language Policy perspectives (Spolsky, 2012; King & Fogle, 2013).

These findings also align strongly with Darvin and Norton's (2015) Identity and Model of Investment, as mothers' meanings attached to their child-rearing practices are shaped by ideology, memory, social pressures, and imagined futures. English becomes a resource through which mothers seek to secure opportunities and social mobility for their children, while Ilokano remains central to identity, belonging, and emotional continuity. Likewise, the findings resonate with Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, as mothers support children's relatedness through family and cultural connection, competence through language development and educational preparation, and autonomy through flexible and child-responsive language practices.

Overall, Ilokano mothers interpret early childhood English language learning as a negotiated, relational, and identity-linked process. Their meanings reveal that language learning extends beyond academic achievement and reflects broader concerns about care, protection, belonging, opportunity, and family continuity. Through

their everyday practices, mothers seek to raise children who are capable of navigating multiple linguistic, social, and cultural worlds while remaining connected to their familial and cultural root.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that rearing children for early childhood English language learning among Ilokano mothers is not merely a process of introducing children to a global language but a deeply relational, negotiated, and identity-driven practice embedded within everyday family life. The findings demonstrate that children's English language learning emerges through caregiving practices, family interactions, digital media exposure, schooling experiences, and community influences rather than through formal instruction alone. Within Ilokano families, English and Ilokano coexist as complementary languages that carry different social and emotional meanings: English is associated with educational opportunity, confidence, social participation, and imagined futures, while Ilokano remains connected to emotional security, cultural identity, and intergenerational relationships.

This study further concludes that Ilokano mothers' language practices are shaped by their personal histories, social realities, and aspirations for their children. Their decisions regarding English and Ilokano reflect continuous meaning-making as they navigate the tension between preparing children for English-oriented environments and sustaining their connection to family and heritage. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a choice between competing languages, mothers interpret multilingual practices as a way of supporting children's adaptability, belonging, and relationships across different linguistic spaces. Their experiences reveal that language choices are influenced not only by educational goals but also by care, responsibility, cultural continuity, and the desire to provide children with meaningful opportunities.

By examining the lived experiences and interpretive meanings constructed by Ilokano mothers, this study contributes to broader understandings of multilingual parenting and early childhood language development in the Philippine context. It highlights that language

learning among children in multilingual families is a socially situated process shaped by identity, family relationships, and cultural negotiation. Recognizing these experiences is essential for educators, policymakers, and

families in developing approaches that support English language development while sustaining local languages as important resources for belonging, heritage, and intergenerational connection.

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