

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE
EXPOSURE ON THE HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND COMMUNITY
CONNECTION OF INDIGENOUS COLLEGE STUDENTS IN
OREGON

by

HALEY MAE POTTER

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Family and Human Services
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

May 2025

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Haley Potter for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Family and Human Services to be taken June 2025

Title: The Perceived Impact of Indigenous Language Exposure on the Health, Well-being, and
Community Connection of Indigenous College Students in Oregon

Approved: Karrie Walters Ph.D.
Primary Thesis Advisor

Indigenous people and their communities have faced ongoing discrimination and oppression since the beginning of European colonization. From forced removal to harmful cultural assimilation, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people have lost their languages, cultures, traditions, and identities. This number continues to grow as more and more Indigenous languages become endangered and eventually dormant as a result of this historical oppression that unfortunately continues to this day. The effects of European colonization on the Indigenous population impact all domains of life. More specifically, Indigenous people face great disparities in healthcare. They have poorer health outcomes as they are reluctant to seek care as a result of racial discrimination in and outside of the healthcare setting. They also have lower life expectancies and higher rates of suicide and mental health disorders. However, current practices and interventions lack information surrounding healing and trauma-informed care that support Indigenous wisdom, needs, and identity.

Languages have a strong connection to culture and identity as they allow you to foster connections and solidarity with those around you. Indigenous languages enable you to express yourself and talk about the world in ways that are not possible in another language such as English because the words of expression do not exist. This holds particular importance for

Indigenous communities whose specific beliefs and traditions cannot be fully explained or understood in another language. This is because the significance behind words in Indigenous languages have complex and intricate meanings that are not easily translatable. Through my research, I will explore the perceived impact and importance of Indigenous language use on the well-being of Indigenous students and their communities. I will also explore how Indigenous languages impact perceived connection to community, any obstacles found in connecting to language and community, and how that impacts well-being as a result.

Acknowledgements

This research would not be possible without the support and contributions of my community. Thank you to my primary thesis advisor, Dr. Karrie Walters for your enthusiastic support, patience, understanding, and guidance throughout this whole journey. I had no idea what my research could look like before our first meeting, but with your guidance you helped me build important life-long skills that enable me to feel well prepared leaving undergrad and entering my first year of graduate school. Thank you to my Clark Honors College representative, Dr. Daphne Gallagher, for your thoughtful and supportive discussions, feedback, and advice. Thank you for also helping me build a schedule and plan for executing this project, I would have been a mess without you. Thank you to my third committee member, Jorney Baldwin for your endless support, love, and thoughtful insights with my project. I truly believe you helped me make this project so much better!

I also want to thank Dr. Zach Farley for your never-ending willingness to support me. Our many conversations about research, data analysis, presentations, graduate school, and letters of recommendation have helped me in countless ways. Thank you to my college of education advisor, Emma Bjorngard Basayne for always being a welcoming, loving, and supportive space and for pushing me to get involved with our Indigenous community here; you've immensely impacted my life in more ways than one. Thank you to Norma Trefren and Madison Jones for your willingness to share my survey so often, and for your warm and uplifting support, love, and advice. Thank you to Katie Staton, for letting me post my survey around the Many Nations Longhouse and for letting me defend my thesis in the way that felt right for me, in a sacred space surrounded by community and love. Thank you to Gabriela Pérez Báez for all your thoughtful and engaging teaching in Linguistics 297, Winter 2024. I took that class to begin exploring

topics for my thesis, which was originally about bilingualism and cognition. However, during the last week of this course, we discussed research by Dr. Douglas H. Whalen on the health effects of Indigenous language use. Since I was on my own cultural reconnection journey at the time, this topic highly interested me and was the source of inspiration for my research. Thank you once again Gabriela, for your support and interest in my project during its beginning stages, helping me access insightful literature, and helping me explore what my research could be. Without you, I might not have been here doing this important work, fostering meaningful connections with my community, and reconnecting with my culture through it all.

I want to give a special thank you to my parents, my boyfriend, and my friends for your continuous support, encouragement, and reassurance during this process, and for believing in me when times were stressful and I felt discouraged. I also want to thank my peers and all the Clark Honors College students and faculty who expressed support and interest in my project! Lastly, I want to give a big thank you to the entire community and all the students who participated, shared, and supported my research. Chi miigwetch (big thank you)!

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	11
Chapter 2: The Role of Language in Indigenous Health and Well-Being	13
Understanding Indigenous Definitions of Health and Well-being	13
Connection to Culture and Community	14
Connection to Individual Health and Well-being	15
Language Revitalization and Well-being	16
The Role of Language in Indigenous Health and Well-Being	16
Chapter 3: Methods	18
Considerations	18
Recruitment	19
Participant population	19
Participant privacy	19
Recruitment methods	20
Consent procedures	20
Survey Construction	21
Questions and Purpose	21
Background Information and History of Cultural Experiences	22
Perceived Impact of Exposure on Well-being	23
Perceived Impact of Exposure on Community Connection	24
Obstacles in Connecting to Language and Community	26
Chapter 4: Results	29
Summary	29
Background Information and History of Cultural Experiences	29
Perceived Impact of Exposure on Well-being	34
Perceived Impact of Exposure on Community Connection	42
Obstacles in Connecting to Language and Community	48
Chapter 5: Discussion	56
Summary	56
<i>What are Indigenous college students' perspectives on how exposure and interaction with Indigenous languages impact their individual well-being?</i>	56
<i>How have Indigenous college students found that language use impacts their connection to their community?</i>	57

<i>What are the obstacles that individuals have found in connecting to their language and their community? And how have those obstacles impacted their well-being?</i>	59
Limitations	60
Implications for Future Use	60
Call to Action	61
Chapter 6: Conclusion	63
Appendix A	65
IRB Exempt Determination Approval	65
Appendix B	67
Survey Flyer	67
Appendix C	68
Survey Outreach Speech	68
Appendix D	69
Survey	69
References	93

List of Figures

Figure 1: Context for Learning	32
Figure 2: Attendance of Cultural Events	34
Figure 3: Emotions when Using, Interacting, or Being Exposed to a Native/Indigenous Language.	36
Figure 4: Impact of Language Interactions in the Moment vs the Rest of the Day	37
Figure 5: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Well-being	38
Figure 6: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Sense of Well-Being	39
Figure 7: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Sense of Community	39
Figure 8: Participant Rankings of Four Key Factors Affecting Sense of Community	40
Figure 8 depicts participant rankings of four important factors that affect sense of community among Indigenous college students.	40
Figure 9: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Sense of Cultural Identity	40
Figure 9 illustrates how four different factors are perceived to increase or strengthen Indigenous college students' connection to cultural identity.	40
Figure 10: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Sense of Cultural Identity	41
Figure 11: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Connection to Others When Building Relationships	41
Figure 11 illustrates how four different factors are perceived to increase or strengthen Indigenous college students' connection to others when building relationships.	41
Figure 12: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Connection to Others When Building Relationships	42
Figure 13: Distribution of Cultural Activity or Event Participation in the Last Year	43
Figure 14: Activities Contributing to Feelings of Involvement and Connection to Community	44
Figure 15: Ways that Indigenous Language Helps Build Relationships	45
Figure 16: Ways that Indigenous Language Connects Participants to Cultural Identity	46
Figure 17: Ways that Indigenous Languages Foster, Strengthen, or Revitalize Intergenerational Connections	47
Figure 17 illustrates in what ways using an Indigenous language helps Indigenous college students foster, strengthen, or revitalize intergenerational connections.	47
Figure 18: Most to Least Disruptive Barriers in Accessing Language	49
Figure 19: Most to Least Disruptive Barriers in Connecting to Community	50
Figure 20: Perspectives of Different Factors Being Barriers in Accessing Language	51
Figure 20 illustrates how Indigenous college students perceive eight different factors as being barriers to accessing Indigenous language(s).	51

Figure 21: Perspectives of Different Factors Being Barriers in Accessing Language & Community	52
Figure 22: Perceived Inconveniences of Barriers to Connecting with Native/Indigenous Language and Community	53
Figure 23: Participant Emotions When Faced with an Obstacle or Barrier	53
Figure 24: Ranking of Most to Least Helpful Coping Strategies	55
Figure 25: Language Impacts Community, Identity, and Relationships	58

List of Tables

Table 1: Sociodemographic Data	30
Table 2: Exposure to Indigenous Languages	31
Table 3: Identification with their Native/Indigenous Language	31
Table 4: Language Proficiency	33
Table 5: Identification with Culture	34

Chapter 1: Introduction

Individual and community well-being is complex across all populations, but the well-being of Indigenous people and their communities is especially complex as factors such as colonization, assimilation, forced removal, loss of land, and resulting intergenerational trauma perpetuate the historical and ongoing systems of oppression and discrimination within our society. As time goes on, there has been a rise in understanding of the importance of culturally competent knowledge and sensitive services and care that adequately support and promote the well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities. One aspect of Indigenous culture, language, has shown to be especially impactful in fostering community and individual well-being as it provides a strong sense of identity and solidarity, thus nurturing Indigenous well-being. Additionally, Indigenous languages promote connections to culture, traditional knowledge, and spirituality, all of which aid in improving the health and well-being of Indigenous individuals. The purpose of this study is to examine the significance that language holds in Indigenous cultures and how it may foster community ties and promote Indigenous well-being both communally and individually.

Indigenous college students represent a particularly important group to study within the context of Indigenous language and well-being. Navigating higher education institutions, which are often grounded in Western epistemologies, ideologies, and cultural norms, presents unique challenges for Indigenous students. These students may experience cultural dissonance, imposter syndrome, isolation, and lack of representation, which can negatively impact their academic success and well-being. Nonetheless, college years are a formative life stage during which students experience identity development, exploration of new experiences and interests, and increasing autonomy. For Indigenous students, this stage can also be an opportunity for cultural

reconnection through language revitalization efforts and community involvement. Studying the experiences of Indigenous college students can help us understand how language acts as a source of strength, connection, and cultural pride, especially in spaces where Indigenous identity isn't always represented, seen, or supported. Their stories can show how language helps shape personal identity while also building stronger community ties, which makes them an important group to learn from when thinking about the role of language in Indigenous well-being within today's modern society.

Chapter 2: The Role of Language in Indigenous Health and Well-Being

Understanding Indigenous Definitions of Health and Well-being

Indigenous definitions of health and well-being vary significantly from those in the Western perspective; however, they may vary across tribes as well. Indigenous definitions of health often focus on the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the community as a whole because of their strong values of community, family, and solidarity (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organization, n.d., as cited in Sivak et al., 2019). In 2023, Tsuji et al. found that Fort Albany First Nation Elders' perspectives of wellbeing are comprised of physical (health), mental (Indigenous identity, happiness), spiritual wellbeing (balance of the four components, such as body, mind, spirit, and emotions; and harmonious relationships), social wellbeing (family), and cultural wellbeing ('going out' on the land). Similarly, they found wellbeing being described as having different scales: individual, community, nation, and world, and that all types of wellbeing are linked to the state of the land. By balancing these different dimensions, a harmonious way of "living well," or the "good life" is achieved.

Across tribes, there is a generally accepted notion of the medicine wheel, which considers physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects that constitute Indigenous health, healing, and well-being (Whalen et al., 2022; Olko et al., 2022). Aspects of the medicine wheel, such as spirituality, are crucial to Indigenous culture, heritage, and language, with some individuals believing that "language breathes life" and connects you to your identity, spirit and ancestors, family and community, and land (Sivak et al., 2019). Indigenous languages are complex and hold profound connotations that enable us to express spiritual and emotional experiences and understand the deeper meanings of life (Kawagley, 2011, as cited in Gonzalez, 2021). With all that said, Indigenous languages are an immensely impactful factor in the flourishing of

Indigenous life, tradition, healing, health, and well-being because of the experiential and culturally significant meanings they communicate and through which Indigenous people view themselves and the world.

Connection to Culture and Community

Indigenous languages are not only tools for communication but also unlock cultural knowledge, values, and identities (Jacob et al., 2019). Within Indigenous communities, language is crucial for understanding your culture and identity. Language enables individuals to transmit, maintain, and revive culture (Whalen et al., 2016). Furthermore, language and cultural participation are closely connected factors that are influential in improving health and well-being (Gonzalez et al., 2017). In their 2017 study, Gonzalez et al. found that culture, spiritual activities, and considering spiritual values as important was associated with greater Indigenous language proficiency. They also concluded that participating in spiritual activities conducted in the language can lead to greater language acquisition, and/or an increased interest in learning the language. Thus, illuminating that culture and language are interconnected and cannot exist without the other.

Additionally, Indigenous Elders are important for transmitting cultural teachings and fostering identity development and communal well-being. In their 2022 study on four Indigenous Nahua communities in Mexico, Olko et al. claim that Indigenous language use strengthens the bonds between individuals and their communities and found that positive emotions resulting from language use increase community well-being. Additionally, in their 2021 Community-based Participatory Research Project of five Anishinaabe tribes, Gonzalez et al. found that language use in the home is positively associated with more frequent spiritual connectedness, resulting in a positive association with positive mental health. They also conclude that both

language and spirituality revitalization efforts are important for rectifying historical trauma, healing communities, and improving community well-being.

Connection to Individual Health and Well-being

Research suggests that Indigenous language use is also connected to individual health and well-being through fostering positive emotions, a sense of belonging, membership, empowerment, and identity development and pride (Sivak et al., 2019; Whalen et al., 2016; Jacob et al., 2019). In their 2019 study of Barngarla community perspectives on the well-being impacts of dormant language reclamation, Sivak et al. claim that language is the most important part of cultural identity, and found that language reclamation and use strengthened identity, sense of belonging and pride, and fosters empowerment. Additionally, in their large analysis of existing research from 2016, Whalen et al. concluded that language use is efficacious in establishing membership and inclusion within Indigenous communities. All of these factors that stem from language use in some form result in a positive impact on the health and well-being of Indigenous individuals.

Indigenous languages also connect us to our emotions and bodies through words and expressions that have deeper and more literal meanings as compared to English (Edygarova, 2024). In her 2024 PEN/Opp article, Svetlana Edygarova explains that her Indigenous language, Udmurt, helps her reflect, identify, notice, and understand emotional reactions in her body much easier than in English. For example, the literal translation for “she’s angry” is “she has a bad/dirty head.” Other Udmurt dialects use different expressions of emotions that maintain this connection between emotions and health/well-being. The southern dialect of the Udmurt language translates “I am angry” to “her green is going out” which Edygarova explains is likely related to bile and the gallbladder. In all, our Indigenous ancestors, elders and communities, and

their languages have profound understandings of our emotions, how they impact our health and well-being, and how to heal from those experiences which shows the importance of this intimate connection and the significance of transmitting this knowledge across generation.

Language Revitalization and Well-being

Throughout the historical mistreatment of Indigenous tribes and communities, language loss has been a devastating and significant occurrence resulting in poorer health outcomes for Native populations. However, practices such as language revitalization and maintenance can greatly improve conditions of health and well-being including but not limited to suicide, obesity, diabetes, and can even be extended to educational performance (Whalen et al., 2022). As previously discussed, language is deeply connected to Indigenous culture and spirituality. It allows us to establish membership, inclusion, and solidarity with communities and not only is effective in transmitting, maintaining, and reviving culture, as previously mentioned, but it also helps with identity formation (Whalen et al., 2016). In their 2019 study of a two-week-long summer institute that introduced educators to the importance of Indigenous language education, Jacob et al. found that language maintenance and revitalization efforts such as language programs improve healthy identity development and community well-being by promoting healthy and thriving Indigenous communities. Language revitalization efforts also increased feelings of connectedness to ancestors, as well as feelings of resilience, optimism, self-confidence, and community empowerment (Sivak et al., 2019).

The Role of Language in Indigenous Health and Well-Being

The well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities is deeply intertwined with language, culture, community, land, and spirituality. Factors such as colonization, forced removal, assimilation, loss of land, and loss of language have perpetuated the historical and

ongoing oppression and discrimination that have profoundly impacted the health of Indigenous people in negative ways. The significance of language is central to Indigenous well-being and the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of their communities which fosters a sense of belonging, solidarity, and connection to past and present, ancestors, and land. Practices such as language revitalization, that promote the revival and widespread use of Indigenous languages can improve Indigenous health outcomes and overall well-being. It is important to recognize the complexities of Indigenous health and well-being for creating and providing culturally sensitive services and care that are tailored to Indigenous beliefs and well-being.

Research Questions

The primary research questions fueling this research are:

1. What are Indigenous college students' perspectives on how exposure and interaction with Indigenous languages impact their individual well-being?
2. How have Indigenous college students found that language use impacts their connection to their community?
3. What are the obstacles that individuals have found in connecting to their language and their community? And how have those obstacles impacted their well-being?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this research study is that Indigenous college students' perspectives will be that exposure and interaction with Indigenous languages improves their well-being and connection to their surrounding Indigenous community. Additionally, it is hypothesized that college students will perceive possible obstacles preventing their connection to language and community as having negative effects on their well-being.

Chapter 3: Methods

Considerations

In our growing society, Indigenous lifeways have been widely misunderstood and underrepresented. With the growing modernization of the world, especially in the United States, there is not enough information surrounding the well-being of Native and Indigenous youth who are forced to navigate a modern world that aligns less and less with their beliefs and traditional ways of living and understanding the world. To better understand and represent this reality, I set out to conduct an anonymous mixed methods survey via Qualtrics, a secure online platform. The objective of the survey was to obtain quantitative and qualitative data on the perceived impact that Indigenous language use or exposure has on college student well-being, as well as how language use impacts connection to community. Additionally, the survey was intended to gather data on obstacles preventing connection to language and community, and how these obstacles impact well-being.

Given the complex nature of my research topic, a mixed methods approach is used to gather data that will ethically and holistically answer and address my research questions. It was important that I conducted mixed methods research that includes the voices, perspectives, and experiences of the surrounding Indigenous community, honoring the extensive amount of Indigenous knowledge and resilience preserved across generations. I chose to conduct a survey rather than interviews because of the accessibility it provides to college students, while still ensuring their voices are being heard through the use of qualitative questions and responses.

As this research involves human subjects, approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was necessary. However, the nature of this research qualified for exemption from

Continuing Review as it does not request personal information that makes participants easily identifiable.

Recruitment

Participant population

The survey was designed for Indigenous college students in Oregon above the age of 18 years old during the 2024-2025 academic year. The college student population was chosen as it is accessible and it's important to understand the position Indigenous youth and adolescents are put in. Self-report data from this population is necessary to better understand and represent the realities and importance of Indigenous languages in well-being and connection within the community.

No restrictions were placed on the gender, tribal origin, or Indigenous language proficiency of participants. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, Native/Indigenous identifying, and residents of Oregon. English language literacy was required as translated materials were not able to be provided. No participant screening was conducted, beyond self-report in the background/demographics section of the survey.

The target number of responses was 40, in hopes to obtain varying degrees of experiences, perspectives, and opinions across Indigenous identities.

Participant privacy

As previously mentioned, the survey was made anonymous to protect participant privacy and encourage honest responses. Survey questions did not request any identifiable information such as their name, specific tribal affiliation, hometown, or similar demographics. However, participants were made aware through the informed consent form that privacy and confidentiality

cannot be fully guaranteed. If a participant happened to include any personal identifiable information in the qualitative free-response text boxes of the survey, that confidential information was deleted and excluded from any data analysis. Survey results were collected on Qualtrics and only shared with my Primary Thesis Advisor. The function that records participant IP addresses was also disabled to ensure anonymity.

Recruitment methods

Once the research study received IRB approval (Appendix A), I conducted outreach with the Northwest Indigenous Language Institute, Pacific University's Indigenous Student Alliance, University of Oregon's Native American Student Union, and Lane Community College's Native American Student Association. I connected with Indigenous UO professors, and staff in the Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence as well to request help in spreading my survey flyer. Contacts were made via email using a variation of a letter (Appendix C) which included an introduction of myself, the purpose of my research, participant requirements, and the flyer for my survey (Appendix B). The recipients agreed to share my flyer and outreach letter with their email list serves at their discretion, including neighboring universities and Indigenous programs like UO's Sapsik'wala Grow Your Own (GYO) Future Teachers Program. I also shared the flyer on my social media accounts, asked friends to share as well, and posted flyers around campus.

Consent procedures

Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, participants were not asked to sign an Informed Consent Form. Instead, the form was embedded at the beginning of the survey, as a necessary component to move forward (see Appendix D). Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and the only other option is to exit the page and not click through to the end of the survey. They then had to answer yes to "Do you agree to participate in this study?"

A no response disqualified individuals from participating, and redirected them to the end page of the survey.

Survey Construction

The three main constructs for my survey were perceived individual well-being, perceived connection to community, and perceived impact of obstacles preventing connection to language and community. Survey questions were grouped under each of these thematic categories, and each question was developed to elicit qualitative data about the given theme (see Appendix D for full survey).

To build the questions in the survey, I created a list of the different types of information I would expect to see from responses that would answer my research questions. I also utilized a variety of sources to help formulate survey questions and response options.

Before answering questions within the three main themes, participants were presented with a series of demographic and background questions (these will be explained in more specificity below). These questions served as a basis for segmenting participants during data analysis to reveal differences in responses among participants of different ages, gender identities, areas of tribal origin, Indigenous language proficiency, and strength of cultural identification.

Questions and Purpose

This section serves as an in depth explanation for the themes and questions of the survey; for the exact order and wording of the survey please see Appendix D. Differently formatted survey questions, such as the 5-point Likert scale were utilized to operationalize the participants' answers to quantitative questions. The quantitative data from the survey serves as the main source for assessing and evaluating and is analyzed statistically. The qualitative data is used to further support what was found in the qualitative survey results and is analyzed thematically to

understand the nuanced impacts of Indigenous language use on well-being and community connection. Many questions included a five-point Likert scale, drop down menu, select all list, and optional free-response comment boxes were provided often for possible elaboration and support in understanding Indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Background Information and History of Cultural Experiences

First, participants were asked three demographic questions about their gender identity, area of tribal origin, and age. In the first question, a list of gender identities was provided, as well as the option to select other and answer in a free-response text box. For the second question, varying areas of tribal origin across the world were included and participants had the option to select all, including the option to select other and answer in the text box. When answering for their age, participants had a drop-down menu of age ranges to select from.

Participants were then asked about their experiences and interactions with Native/Indigenous language(s) and culture. A five-point Likert scale was used for questions about the frequency of exposure to the participants' Native language in the home and frequency of interaction with other Native or Indigenous languages. Participants were also asked about their earliest exposure to a Native language, how strongly their family identifies with their language, and how strongly the participants identify with it. Questions regarding the context in which they learned the language, for how long, and their perceived proficiency were then asked. Lastly, amount of participation in cultural events before age 18 was asked, as well as how strongly both the participant and their family identify with their Indigenous culture. These questions served as a basis for understanding the participant's position and experiences with Indigenous language and culture.

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Well-being

This section sought to answer questions related to participants' current exposure and interactions with Indigenous language and culture, and their perception of how it impacts their well-being. We first asked about their current perceived level of cultural and community involvement and provided a free-response text box for them to share examples. We then asked about current frequency of exposure to a Native/Indigenous language and provided another option to elaborate.

Next, I was interested in seeing how participants felt when using, interacting with, or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language. Participants had the option to select all from a lists of emotions, including "other" with a free-response text box to ensure any emotions I may have missed are reflected. After this, a free-response text box appeared asking participants to explain why they think they feel these emotions because of use, interaction, or exposure. I also asked participants how they felt interactions with an Indigenous language impacts their mood in the moment vs for the rest of the day and provided a free-response text box for them to reflect on how they think exposure to an Indigenous language plays a role in their well-being.

Next, I asked participants to rank how much different factors have improved their sense of well-being. Factors included: "Connection to my Native/Indigenous language," "Connection to another Native/Indigenous language," "Relationships with others who share my cultural identity," "Connection to a Native/Indigenous community," and "Connection to my cultural identity." Participants were provided a five-point Likert scale to rate each of these factors, and were then asked in a separate question, to rank those factors from most beneficial to least beneficial for their well-being.

The next question followed the same format but instead asked how each of the factors increased or strengthened their sense of community. The factors participants were asked to rate and then rank from most beneficial to least beneficial for their sense of well-being were the same except the “connection to a Native/Indigenous community” factor was excluded as these questions were asking how the other factors impacted their connection to community.

Next, we asked participants to rate how these factors increase or strengthen their connection to their cultural identity and then asked them to rank those factors from most beneficial to least beneficial for their sense of cultural identity. This question followed the same format as the previous questions, but excluded the “connection to my cultural identity” factor.

Lastly, we asked participants once again to rate how each of these factors increase or strength their connection to others, specifically on building relationships, and then rank them from most beneficial to least beneficial for their connection to others. The same format was followed, with the “Relationships with others who share my cultural identity” factor being excluded for these questions.

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Community Connection

The next set of questions sought specifically to explore how participants perceive interactions and exposure to Indigenous languages impact their community connection. It began by asking participants to select all cultural activities or events they have done with their community in the past year. Activities or events for participants to choose from were advocacy work, social groups, holiday traditions/activities, powwows, traditional sustenance activities (e.g., hunting, gathering, fishing), consuming wild meat, Indigenous crafting, and traditional ceremonies (e.g., sweat lodges, smudging, prayers, rituals); the option to select none and other were also provided. We then asked which of those activities makes participants feel most

involved and connected to their community, and asked them to briefly explain why in a free-response text box.

The majority of the rest of the questions in this section ask participants to rate, on a five-point Likert scale, how much they agree or disagree with the given statement. The first statement was “using a Native/Indigenous language strengthens my sense of belonging to community,” and participants had a text box to provide an example if they’d like. The following two statements were “using a Native/Indigenous language has helped me build better relationships in the community,” and “building relationships has been helpful in building community.” This was followed by a question asking participants to select all the ways using an Indigenous language has helped them build relationships. Response options were: creating a collective identity, accessing and sharing stories and knowledge, connecting to traditions and spiritual practices, connecting with Indigenous students and faculty, and connecting with elders using the language. The next two statements were “using a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened my sense of cultural identity,” and “my sense of cultural identity has strengthened my feelings of connection to the community.” We then asked participants to select all the ways using an Indigenous language has connected them to their cultural identity; response options were: creating a collective identity, accessing and sharing stories and knowledge, connecting to traditions and spiritual practices, intergenerational connections, resistance to assimilation, expression through language, sense of community, and connection to beings (land, plants, animals, spirit, etc.) through language. We also provided a free-response text box for them to explain in what ways their connection to the community has changed because of their sense of cultural identity. The following three statements were “building relationships has helped strengthened my sense of cultural identity and connection to the community,” “using, interacting, and/or being exposed to

a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened intergenerational connections or relations,” and “Intergenerational connections or relations have strengthened my feelings of connection to the community.” Next, we asked participants to select all the ways using an Indigenous language has fostered, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections/relationships. Response options were: talking with elders, learning from elders, sharing stories with elders, and I don't have many opportunities for intergenerational connections. We also provided another free-response text box for participants to reflect on how increased, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections may have changed their sense of connection to the community, if applicable. The last two statements of this section were “using, interacting, and/or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened my feelings of collective identity and solidarity,” and “feelings of collective identity and solidarity have strengthened my connection to the community” with the option, in a separate text box, to reflect on how they feel exposure to Native/Indigenous languages play a role in connecting to the community.

Obstacles in Connecting to Language and Community

The last set of questions explored obstacles preventing the connection, exposure, and use of the participants' Native/Indigenous language as well as obstacles preventing community connection. We also asked about the perceived level of impact that obstacles have on their well-being. The first question asks participants to rate, on a five-point Likert scale, how true this statement feels: “There are many barriers to me accessing my Native/Indigenous language.” We then asked them to rank the following barriers from most to least disruptive in accessing their Native/Indigenous language: lack of accessible language education, geographic isolation of communities, social stigma, Intergenerational language loss, cultural disconnect, lack of revitalization efforts, anxiety-related fears of fluency and tokenism, and the option to select

other with a text box. The next statement for participants to rate was “there are many barriers preventing connection to my community.” This was followed by asking participants to rank barriers from most to least disruptive in connecting to community. Response options were similar but slightly different from the previous question. Barriers for participants to rank were: geographic isolation of communities, social stigma, Intergenerational language loss, language gap/barriers, cultural disconnect, anxiety-related fears of fluency and tokenism, racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color), and once again, other, with the option to elaborate in a text box. We also asked participants to use the subsequent free-response text box to explain or provide examples of how much of a burden these barriers have been in connecting to their Native/Indigenous language vs community.

The next two questions asked them to rate, on a five-point Likert scale how much each of the previously listed factors have been barriers in accessing their specific Native/Indigenous language, as well as in accessing any Native/Indigenous language and/or connection to community. We also asked participants to rate how much of an inconvenience they perceive obstacles to be in connecting to Native/Indigenous languages and/or community. Then, we asked them to select all emotions they experience when faced with an obstacle/barrier, while also recognizing that many of these barriers are ongoing and are not experienced in a single isolated moment. A free-response text box was also provided for them to explain why they think they experience these emotions when faced with barriers.

The last four questions focus on coping strategies/self-care and support systems. We asked participants to rate, on a five-point Likert scale how true this statement feels: I feel confident that I have coping strategies or personal efforts to help me overcome the lasting effects of barriers preventing connection to a Native/Indigenous language and/or community. This was

followed by a question asking them to rank the following coping strategies from most to least helpful: connecting with nature, connecting with a support network, practicing cultural activities, community involvement, language revitalization or advocacy involvement, and lastly, other, with the option to specify. The last two statements for participants to rate were “I feel that I have a strong support network,” and “I feel that barriers I’ve experienced have brought me closer to my support network and/or have helped me build one.” The survey ends with a free-response text box for any additional comments regarding anything in the survey.

Chapter 4: Results

Summary

Between April 17th and May 12th, 2025, 29 people opened the survey. Participants were excluded from the report if they did not answer any questions or stopped participating before completing the survey. After the initial publication of the survey, 3 respondents answered “no” that they are not college students, which made them ineligible to complete the survey and automatically moved them to the end page of the survey. These 3 responses were automatically excluded as they were unable to complete the survey. To elicit more responses, prevent this from reoccurring, and value a wide range of perspectives and experiences, we decided to open the survey to all Indigenous people living in Oregon above the age of 18 on April 30th, 2025. Of the remaining 26 participants, 17 completed the survey and 9 were in progress when the survey closed. These 9 in progress responses were excluded as they didn’t complete the survey. Of the 17 completed surveys, 15 participants were college students in Oregon. Due to the low number of participants that were not students, we decided to maintain the study’s original focus on college student well-being and only analyze the 15 college student responses.

Background Information and History of Cultural Experiences

The results in this section reflect background and demographic information about participants and the history of their experiences and interactions within Native/Indigenous languages and culture to gain a better understanding of their positionalities at the time of the study. The sample included 15 Indigenous college students in Oregon. The largest proportion of participants identified as cis-gender females (47%). Participants’ tribal origins spanned across 10 different areas. The majority of participants were from the Northwest (17%) and the Great Plains

(17%), and three participants selected more than one tribal origin. Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 22 (67%). See Table 1 for full descriptives of the sample.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Data

Variable	N	%
Gender Identity		
Cis-gender female	7	47
Cis-gender male	3	20
Two-spirit	3	20
Agender, gender non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid	2	12
Tribal origin		
The Northwest	3	17
The Great Plains	3	17
The Southeast	3	17
The Plateau	2	11
California	2	11
The Northeast	2	11
Oceania	1	6
The Southwest	1	6
Other: "Midwest/Canada"	1	6
Age		
18-22	10	67
23-27	2	13
28-32	2	13
33-40	1	7

The majority of participants never heard their Native/Indigenous language spoken in the home (53%), followed by 33% hearing it sometimes. The majority of participants interact with another Indigenous language sometimes (60%), while 27% interact with another Indigenous language about half the time. When asked about earliest exposure to a Native/Indigenous language, 53% of participants said their earliest exposure was in early childhood (0-5) while 27% was during their teenage years (13-18). See Table 2 for full descriptives of the sample.

Table 2: Exposure to Indigenous Languages

Variable	Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Language spoken in home	53%	33%	7%	7%
Interaction with another language	13%	60%	27%	0%
Variable	Early childhood (0-5)	Middle childhood/youth (6-12)	Teenage (13-18)	Adult (19+)
Earliest exposure	53%	7%	27%	13%

When asked how strongly their family identifies with their Native/Indigenous language, 29% of participants said their family had no connection at all to the language, followed by 21% that said their family had minimal exposure or recognition (e.g., a few words or phrases known). When asked how they identify with their Native/Indigenous language, 33% of participants said they had minimal exposure or recognition (e.g., a few words or phrases known) and another 33% had moderate understanding and occasional use in conversation. See Table 3 for full descriptives of the sample.

Table 3: Identification with their Native/Indigenous Language

Variable	No connection	Minimal exposure or recognition	Some knowledge (knowing traditional songs or phrases)	Moderate understanding & occasional use in conversation	Fluent or proficient
Family identification with their language	29%	21%	21%	21%	7%
Participant identification with their language	0%	33%	25%	33%	8%

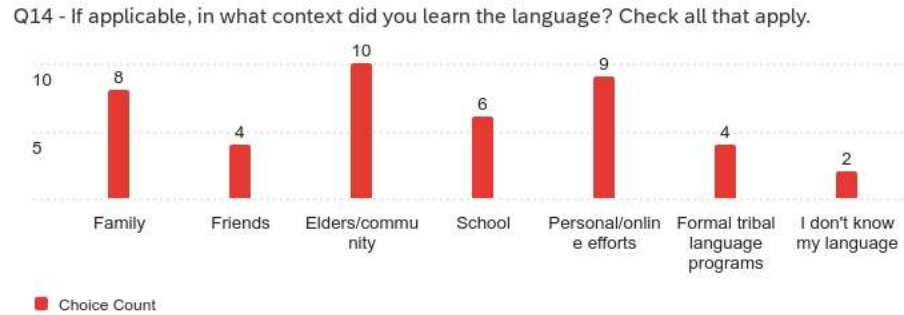


Figure 1: Context for Learning

Figure 1 depicts the context in which participants learned their Indigenous language (i.e. whether it be from family, elders, formal language programs, personal efforts, etc.).

When asked in what context the participant learned their Indigenous language, most participants said they learned from elders and the community (23%), from personal and online efforts (21%), and from family (19%). See Figure 1 for full distribution of results. The following question asked participants to share their experience learning their Native/Indigenous language in a free-response text box. One participant said:

“I went to a Native Montessori preschool where I was exposed to my language daily. I also would call my kuno when I was very young and he taught me my introduction early in my life to prepare me for when he was no longer here anymore.”

While another participant stated:

“My family has always been disconnected from our Native heritage. Due to that, there hasn’t been much effort if any to reconnect or learn our language. I have started to try to learn, but it is so hard being so far away and not being able to have physical resources to help me learn my language.”

Table 4: Language Proficiency

Variables	I haven't	I've been learning gradually or inconsistently	Less than a year	1 to 3 years	4-6 years	7+ years	Most of or entire life
How long they've been learning or speaking	7%	40%	7%	27%	0%	7%	13%
Variables	Not well at all	Slightly well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well		
Perceived level of proficiency	53%	13%	27%	7%	0%		

Most participants (40%) indicated that they have been learning their language gradually or inconsistently, followed by 27% that have been learning for 1 to 3 years. The majority of participants (53%) said their perceived level of Native/Indigenous language proficiency is not well at all, followed by 27% that said its moderately well. Table 4 for full descriptives of the sample.

Q18 - How often did you attend cultural events that connected you to your Native/Indigenous identity before college or the age of 18?

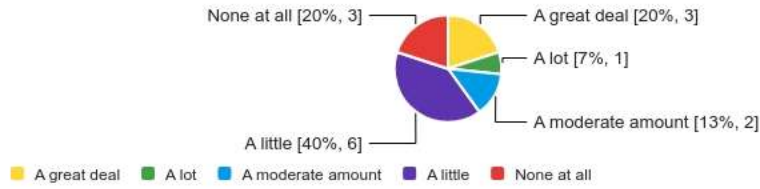


Figure 2: Attendance of Cultural Events

Figure 2 depicts how often participants attended cultural events that connected them to their Indigenous identity before college or the age of 18.

Most participants (40%) indicated that they attended a little number of cultural events before college or the age of 18; See figure 2 for full distribution of results. When asked how strongly their family identifies with their culture, 27% of participants said their family identifies a little with their culture, another 27% said their family identifies a moderate amount, and another 27% said their family identifies a great deal. When asked how they themselves identify with their culture, the majority said they identify a great deal (47%) followed by a lot (33%). See Table 5 for full descriptives of the sample.

Table 5: Identification with Culture

Variable	None	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Family identification with culture	7%	27%	27%	13%	27%
Participant identification with culture	0%	7%	13%	33%	47%

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Well-being

This section aimed to explore participants' current engagement with Indigenous language and culture, as well as their perceptions of its influence on their overall well-being. Most

participants indicated their **current** perceived level of Indigenous cultural and community involvement is a moderate amount (40%), followed by a great deal (27%), a lot (20%), and a little (13%). No respondents said they perceived themselves as having no cultural or community involvement at all. The following question asked them to share examples of their cultural and community involvement in a separate free-response text box. Students said they most often participate in events at the Many Nations Longhouse, attend powwows, get involved in student groups like the Native American Student Union, LCC Native American Student Association, and the Indigenous Women's Wellness Group, and participate in various other ceremonies, events, and groups on and off their reservations and ancestral homelands.

When asked to rate their **current** frequency of exposure to a Native/Indigenous language, 40% said they were exposed most days or daily, followed by 33% a few times a year, 20% every few weeks, and 7% once a week. No respondents answered that they never have exposure to an Indigenous language. In a separate free-response text box, participants were asked to explain what type of exposure they experience to any Native/Indigenous language. Participants noted hearing greetings, goodbyes, and introductions around the Many Nations Longhouse, the community, and on social media. Oftentimes these are in languages from the Pacific Northwest and aren't their own tribal language. One participant said:

"I usually use phrases throughout my day. I speak to my other plateau tribal members but some of them don't know their language past their introduction. So other than that, I speak phrases to my dog."

Another participant noted their language exposure is:

"Greetings/farewells. I'm in the process of creating more opportunities to speak with members of my tribe every Sunday here."

Q26 - Please select all of the following emotions you feel when using, interacting with, or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language. - Selected Choice

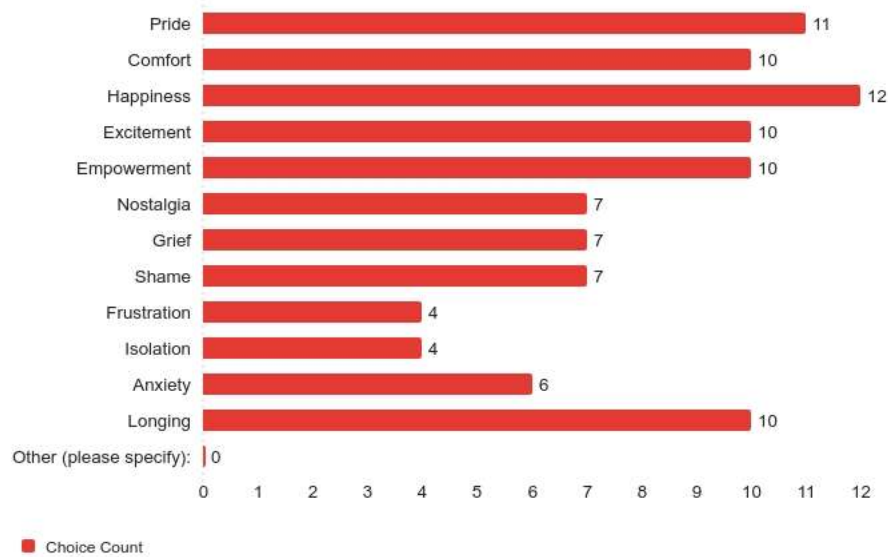


Figure 3: Emotions when Using, Interacting, or Being Exposed to a Native/Indigenous Language.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of feelings across participants when using, interacting, or being exposed to an Indigenous language.

The most common feelings participants identified were happiness, pride, comfort, excitement, empowerment, and longing. In a free response text box, participants were asked to explain why they think they feel these emotions because of using or interacting with a Native/Indigenous language. In their own words participants said:

“I think learning your Indigenous language is full of a vast array of colorful emotions; these emotions being both overwhelmingly positive and negative. Understanding the history of my people, our resistance through colonization, and learning our ancient beliefs is extremely fulfilling and cannot compare to someone learning a language which isn't theirs on something like Duolingo.”

“I feel positive emotions because I am proud of my culture. I feel grief because of the destruction of my language, and isolation because I’m not as fluent as others. I was moved off the rez as a kid which limited my exposure to language. I feel Other.”

“Sometimes I feel like an imposter, other times I feel like I am doing the work that will benefit my future.”

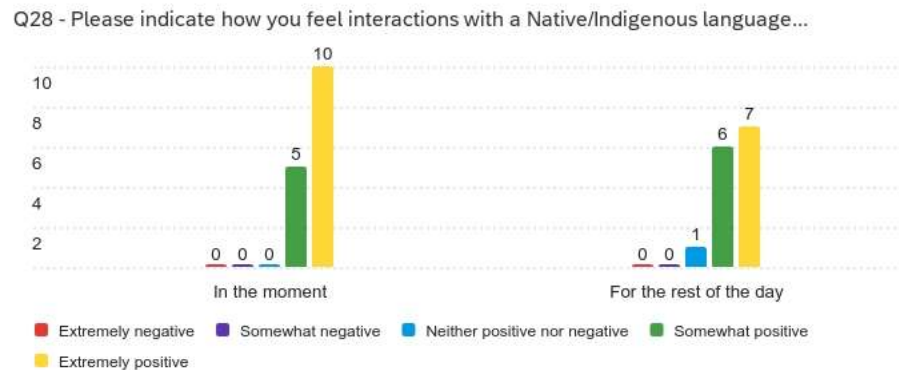


Figure 4: Impact of Language Interactions in the Moment vs the Rest of the Day

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of results for how Indigenous language interactions impacts college students in the moment vs for the rest of the day.

The majority of respondents (67%) indicated that interactions with an Indigenous language impact them extremely positively in the moment ($M=4.67$). Most participants (50%) said that interactions with an Indigenous language impact them extremely positively for the rest of the day ($M=4.43$), with one participant answering that interactions neither positively nor negatively impact them for the rest of the day. The following question asked participants to reflect on how they feel exposure to a Native/Indigenous language plays a role in their well-being. The following statements reflect their thoughts:

“Language is medicine! Language is reconnection!”

“Hearing others speak their languages lets me know that not all was lost in colonization and “civilizing” of Indigenous people so it can build back.”

“It makes me really happy. My soul and mind feel like a hug.”

“It helps remind me who I am, my values, what really matters, and that I am never alone.”

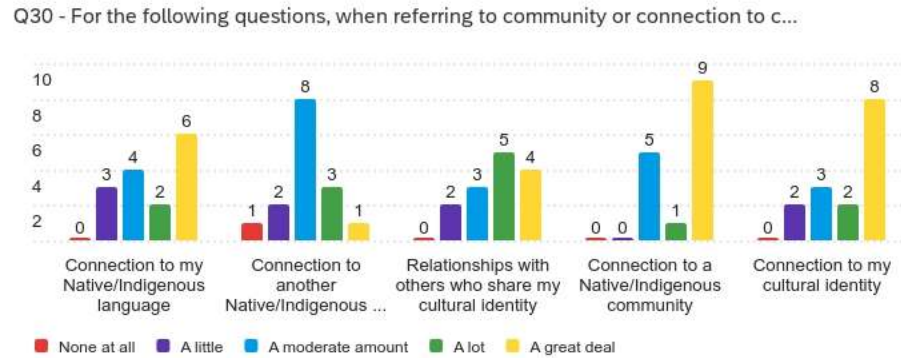


Figure 5: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Well-being

Figure 5 illustrates how five different factors are perceived to impact the well-being of Indigenous college students.

Out of five different factors, connection to a Native/Indigenous community, connection to their cultural identity, and connection to their Native/Indigenous language were most highly rated as impacting their sense of well-being a great deal. See Figure 5 for the distribution of all the ratings. When asked to rank these five factors from 1- most beneficial to 5- least beneficial, participants indicated connection to **another** Native/Indigenous language as being the least beneficial for their sense of well-being, compared to the other factors. Among the most beneficial, participants generally ranked the other factors as being of similar importance as there are many things that can impact your sense of well-being. See Figure 6 for a full distribution of the rankings.

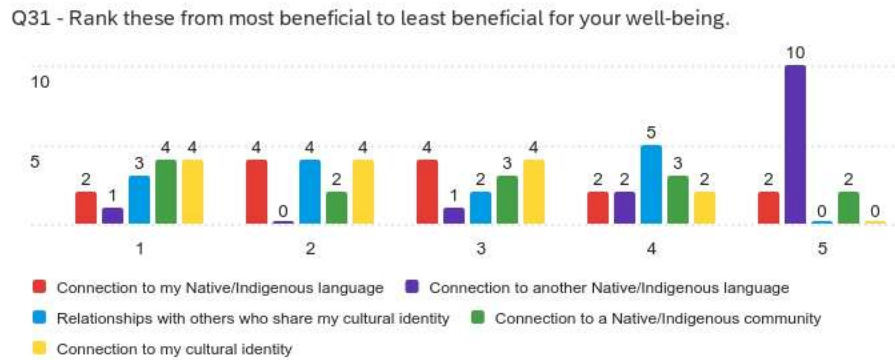


Figure 6: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Sense of Well-Being

Figure 6 depicts participant rankings of five important factors that affect sense of well-being.

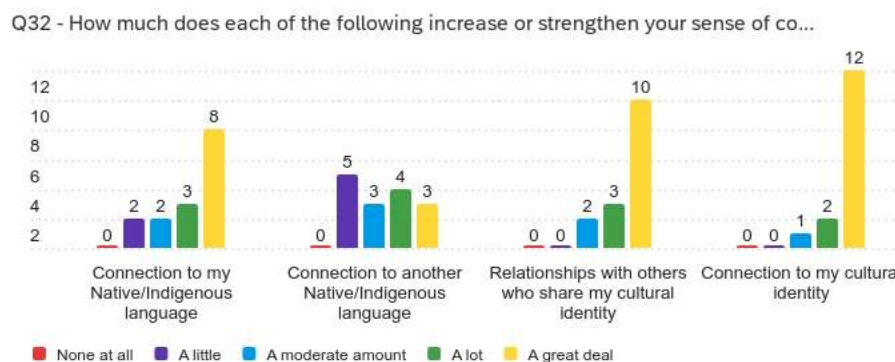


Figure 7: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Sense of Community

Figure 7 illustrates how four different factors are perceived to increase or strengthen Indigenous college students' sense of community.

Out of four different factors, connection to their cultural identity, relationships with others who share their cultural identity, and connection to their Native/Indigenous language were most highly rated as increasing or strengthening their sense of community a great deal. See Figure 7 for the distribution of all the ratings. When asked to rank these five factors from 1- most beneficial to 4- least beneficial, participants indicated connection to **another** Native/Indigenous language as being the least beneficial for their sense of community. Generally, among the most

beneficial were connection to their cultural identity and relationships with others who share their cultural identity. See Figure 8 for a full distribution of the rankings.

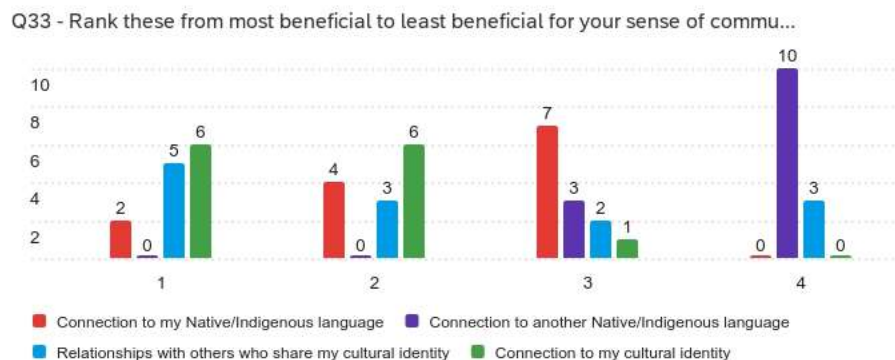


Figure 8: Participant Rankings of Four Key Factors Affecting Sense of Community

Figure 8 depicts participant rankings of four important factors that affect sense of community among Indigenous college students.

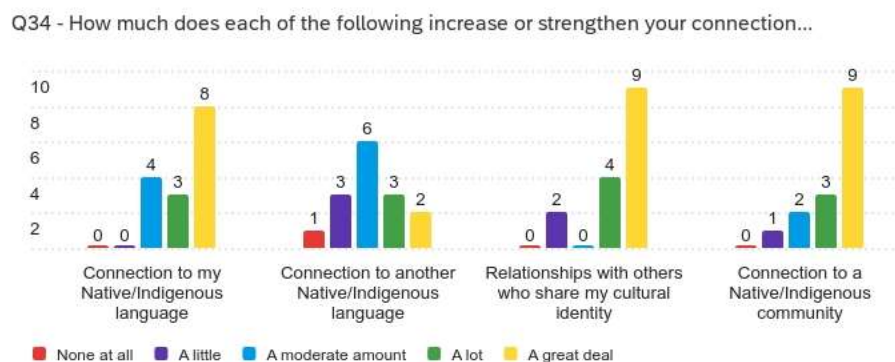


Figure 9: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Sense of Cultural Identity

Figure 9 illustrates how four different factors are perceived to increase or strengthen Indigenous college students' connection to cultural identity.

Out of four different factors, connection to a Native/Indigenous community, relationships with others who share their cultural identity, and connection to their Native/Indigenous language were most highly rated as increasing or strengthening their sense of cultural identity. See Figure 9 for the distribution of all the ratings. When asked to rank these five factors from 1- most beneficial to 4- least beneficial for their sense of cultural identity, participants indicated connection to

another Native/Indigenous language as being the least beneficial for their sense of cultural identity. The factors participants generally ranked as most beneficial were relationships with others who share their cultural identity, and connection to their Native/Indigenous language. See Figure 10 for a full distribution of the rankings.

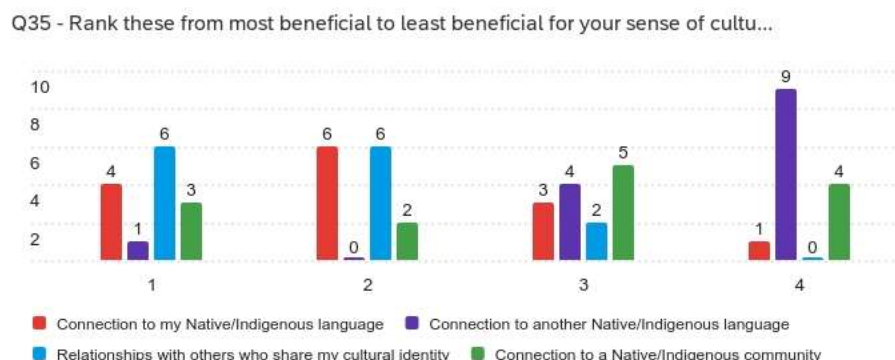


Figure 10: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Sense of Cultural Identity

Figure 10 depicts participant rankings of four important factors that affect sense of cultural identity among Indigenous college students.

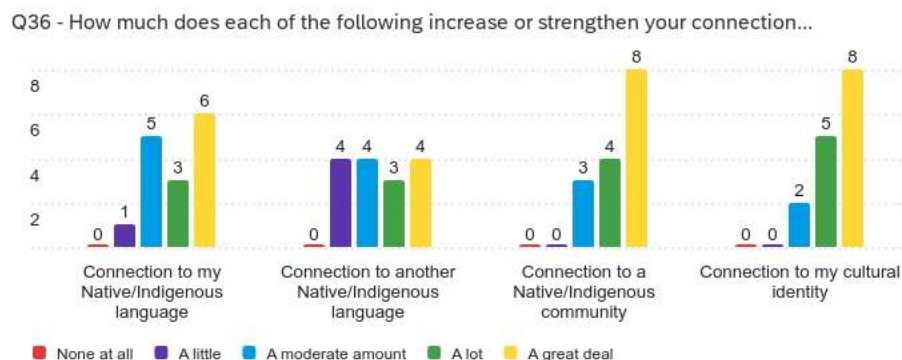


Figure 11: Perspectives of Different Factors Impacting Connection to Others When Building Relationships

Figure 11 illustrates how four different factors are perceived to increase or strengthen Indigenous college students' connection to others when building relationships.

Out of four different factors, Participants indicated that connection to their cultural identity and connection to a Native/Indigenous community help increase or strengthen their connection to

others when building relationships. See Figure 11 for the distribution of all the ratings. When asked to rank these five factors from 1- most beneficial to 4- least beneficial, participants indicated connection to another Native/Indigenous language as being the least beneficial for increasing or strengthening their connection to others when building relationships. The factors generally ranked as most beneficial were connection to their cultural identity and connection to a Native/Indigenous community. See Figure 12 for a full distribution of the rankings.

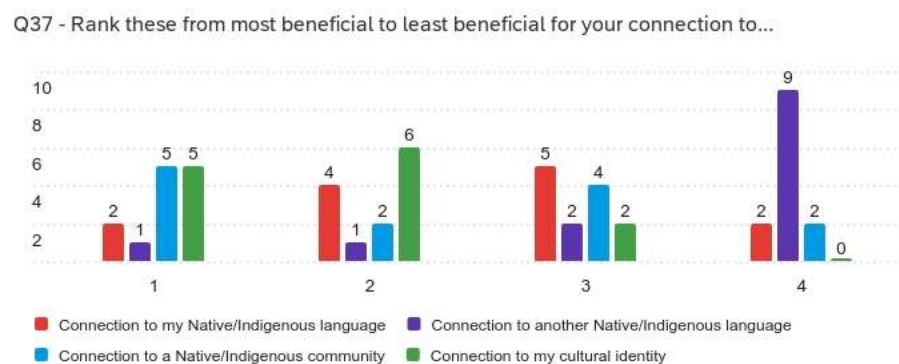


Figure 12: Participant Rankings of Five Key Factors Affecting Connection to Others When Building Relationships

Figure 12 depicts participant rankings of four important factors that affect Indigenous college students' connection to others when building relationships.

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Community Connection

This section specifically aimed to investigate participants' perceptions of how interactions with and exposure to Indigenous languages affect their sense of connection to the community. All respondents indicated they have participated in some sort of cultural activity or event with their community in the past year. The most common were Indigenous crafting, traditional ceremonies (e.g., sweat lodges, smudging, prayers, rituals), and powwows. See Figure 13 for a full distribution of cultural events and activities.

Q39 - Please select all of the following activities or events you have done in the past year with your community. - Selected Choice

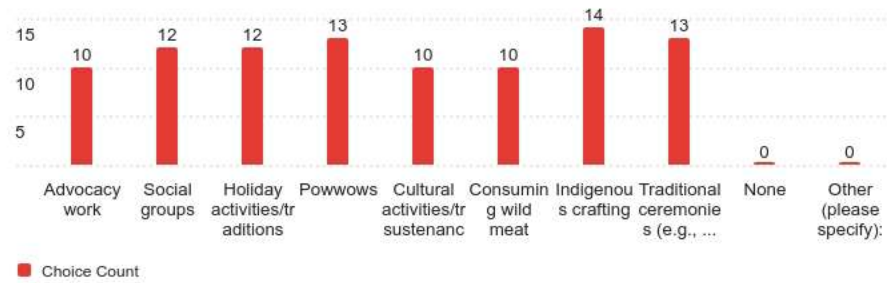


Figure 13: Distribution of Cultural Activity or Event Participation in the Last Year

Figure 13 depicts the distribution of cultural activity or event participation in the last year among Indigenous college students.

When asked which of these previously listed activities makes them feel most involved and connected to their community, there was a range of responses. However, cultural activities/traditional sustenance (e.g., hunting, gathering, fishing) was most highly rated with 27% of participants selecting that option. See Figure 14 for a full distribution of results.

Q40 - Which of these previously listed activities makes you feel most involved and connected to your community?

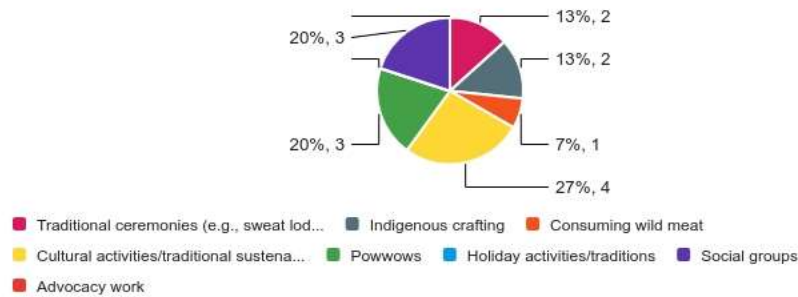


Figure 14: Activities Contributing to Feelings of Involvement and Connection to Community

Figure 14 illustrates which activities make Indigenous college students feel most involved and connected to their community.

The following question asked participants to use the text box to explain why their chosen activity makes them feel most involved and/or connected to community. These were some of their responses:

“Every year I used to engage in our seasonal rounds to gather first foods, I felt connected to my ancestors, elders, family, and tribal community. Now I can only go back for one round whether it be digging roots, fishing, or picking berries.”

“Living off of the land makes me feel connected”

“Everyone gets to bring their craft with them and share it with the community. We share prayers and dances and medicine. I always leave a powwow feeling spiritually uplifted and inspired.”

The following questions asked participants to rate how much they agree or disagree to a statement based on how true it feels. Most participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that speaking their Indigenous language strengthens their sense of belonging to community, with 86% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree. Similarly, 80% of participants also either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that using their Indigenous language has helped them build

better relationships in the community. Additionally, 93% of participants either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that building relationships has been helpful in building community. When asked to select the ways that using a Native/Indigenous language has helped them build relationships, results were generally balanced. Though, the most selected factor for helping to build relationships was accessing and sharing stories and knowledge. See Figure 15 for a distribution of these results.

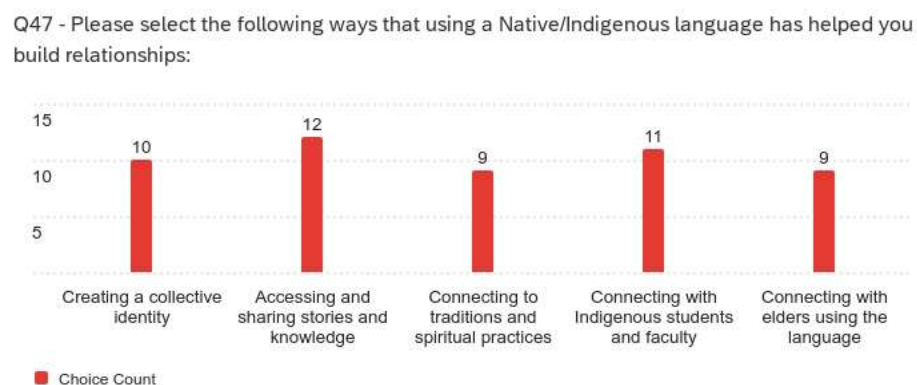


Figure 15: Ways that Indigenous Language Helps Build Relationships

Figure 15 depicts in what ways using an Indigenous language helps Indigenous college students build relationships.

Most participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that speaking their Indigenous language strengthens their sense of cultural identity, with 93% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree. The majority of participants (94%) also either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that their sense of cultural identity has strengthened their feelings of connection to the community. When asked to select all the ways using a Native/Indigenous language has connected them to their cultural identity, results were mixed again. However, the highest rated were resistance to assimilation and connection to beings (land, plants, animals, spirit, etc.) through language, with all but one participant selecting these as connecting them to their cultural identity. See Figure 16 for a distribution of these results.

Q50 - Please check all of the following ways in which using a Native/Indigenous language has connected you to your cultural identity.

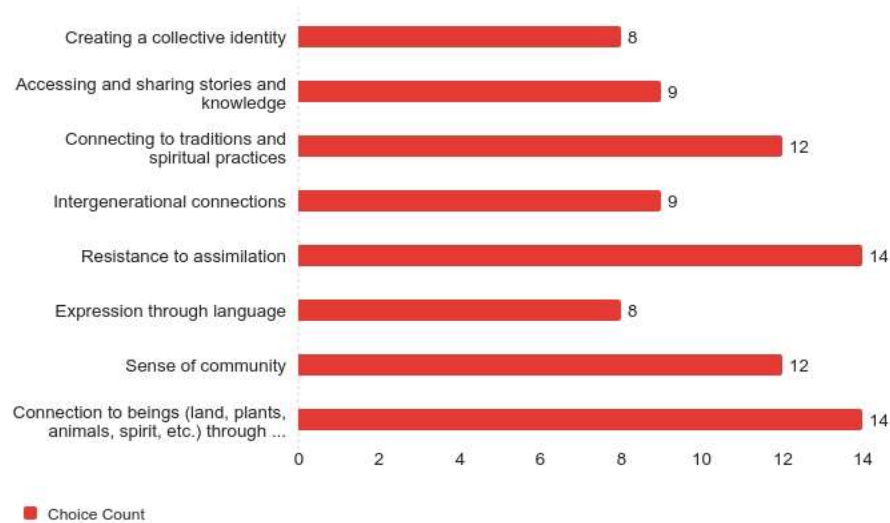


Figure 16: Ways that Indigenous Language Connects Participants to Cultural Identity

Figure 16 depicts in what ways using an Indigenous language helps Indigenous college students connect to their cultural identity.

When asked to use the text box to explain in what ways their connection to the community has changed because of their sense of cultural identity, one participant said:

“It makes me feel that I am more connected to my people and allows for me to feel more confident when attending cultural events.”

While another said:

“I have interacted with not only my tribe but those whose land I am residing on and my friends’ familial connections.”

Most participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that building relationships has helped strengthened their sense of cultural identity and connection to the community, with 93.33% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree. The majority of participants (80%) also either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that using, interacting, and/or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened intergenerational connections or relations.

Furthermore, 86% either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that Intergenerational connections or relations have strengthened their feelings of connection to the community. When asked to select all the ways using a Native/Indigenous language has fostered, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections/relationships, the most selected option was learning from elders. See Figure 17 for a distribution of these responses.

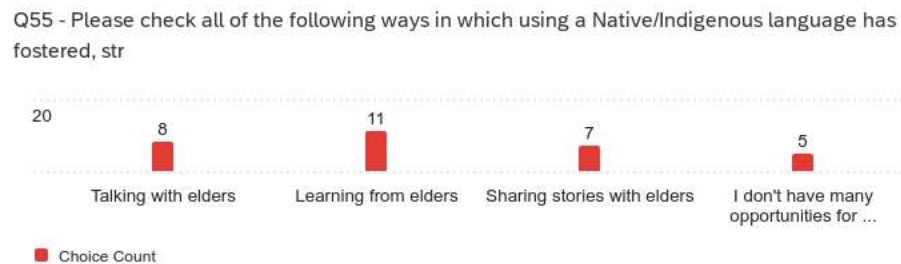


Figure 17: Ways that Indigenous Languages Foster, Strengthen, or Revitalize Intergenerational Connections

Figure 17 illustrates in what ways using an Indigenous language helps Indigenous college students foster, strengthen, or revitalize intergenerational connections.

The subsequent question asked participants to use the text box to reflect on how increased, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections may have changed their sense of connection to the community, if applicable. One participant said:

“Being reminded that I am Native American and that I belong by close friends in Native communities or Elders has helped me fully grow into my identity in a steadfast way.”

While another said:

“I don’t have those connections any more since my elders I went to have passed. I miss them and think about them every day. I have dreams where I ask them all the things I’ve been wanting to since they’ve passed.”

All participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that using, interacting, and/or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened their feelings of collective identity. Most participants (87%) either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that feelings of collective identity and solidarity have strengthened their connection to the community. When asked to use the text box to reflect on how they feel exposure to Native/Indigenous languages play a role in connecting to the community, participants said:

“You become more aware of the systems you are participating in and where you can shift your intentions to influence Indigenous futurity positively. We are on Native land! The roots of this land are both in the physical/spiritual realms as well as the people who have stewarded those lands before us. The future lies with us because we currently reside here. Non-Indigenous folks could benefit from this practice too!”

“I think my lack of exposure to my native language/other native languages has affected me to not feel empowered with my own identity and has added to the lack of connections I have.”

“I have learned just how hard it is to take the route of learning your Indigenous language, and I hold a deep respect for all Indigenous peoples no matter what stage of the journey they are on. It is my belief that if we are truly committed to decolonizing our minds then we must switch our languages.”

Obstacles in Connecting to Language and Community

This final section investigated the barriers limiting participants’ use of, exposure to, and connection to their Native/Indigenous language and community. Additionally, participants were asked to evaluate the perceived impact of these barriers on their well-being. This section begins by asking participants to rate how much they agree or disagree based on how true the statement feels. Though results were a bit more mixed, the majority of participants (67%) either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that there are many barriers to accessing their Native/Indigenous language. When asked to rank barriers from most to least disruptive in accessing their

Native/Indigenous language, results were mixed as these factors are all interrelated. However, results show that participants indicated geographic isolation of communities, intergenerational language loss, and lack of accessible language education as the most disruptive in accessing their Native/Indigenous language. See Figure 18 for a full distribution of these rankings.

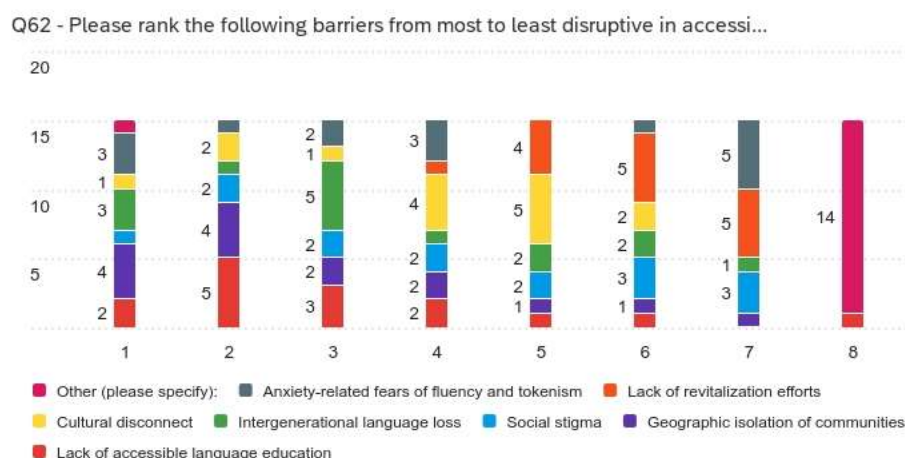


Figure 18: Most to Least Disruptive Barriers in Accessing Language

Figure 18 depicts how Indigenous college students ranked different barriers from most to least disruptive in accessing Indigenous language(s).

Results were mixed when participants were asked to agree or disagree to the statement “there are many barriers preventing connection to my community,” with 47% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree and 46% selecting either somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. When asked to rank barriers from most to least disruptive in connecting to community, participants indicated geographic isolation of communities, racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color), and intergenerational language loss as being the most disruptive. See Figure 19 for a full distribution of these rankings.

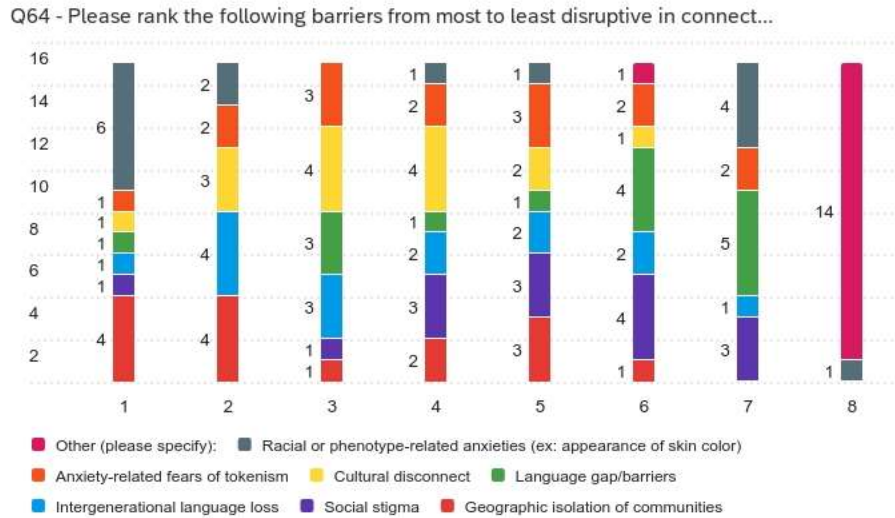


Figure 19: Most to Least Disruptive Barriers in Connecting to Community

Figure 19 depicts how Indigenous college students ranked different barriers from most to least disruptive in connecting to community.

The next question asked participants to use the text box to explain or provide examples of how much of a burden these barriers have been in connecting to their Native/Indigenous language vs community. The following statements reflect their thoughts:

“Bureaucratic issues both on and off the rez for enrollment and elder teaching from geographical displacements”

“I don't know who to turn to for resources for ways to learn my languages because of these barriers.”

“A little burden just from the connection to people from same tribe and the look of my skin.”

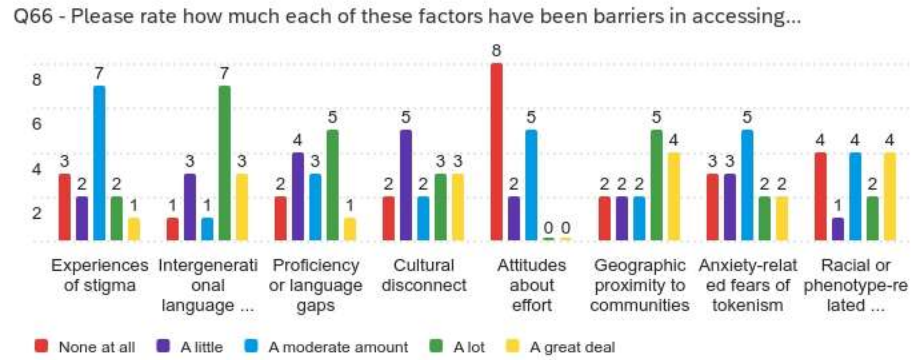


Figure 20: Perspectives of Different Factors Being Barriers in Accessing Language

Figure 20 illustrates how Indigenous college students perceive eight different factors as being barriers to accessing Indigenous language(s).

Out of eight different factors, participants indicated that intergenerational language loss ($M=3.53$), geographic proximity to communities ($M=3.47$), and racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color) ($M=3.07$) are impactful barriers in accessing their Native/Indigenous language. Attitudes about revitalization efforts ($M=1.80$) was the smallest barrier in accessing their language. See Figure 20 for the distribution of all the ratings.

Q67 - Please rate how much each of these factors have been barriers to accessing...

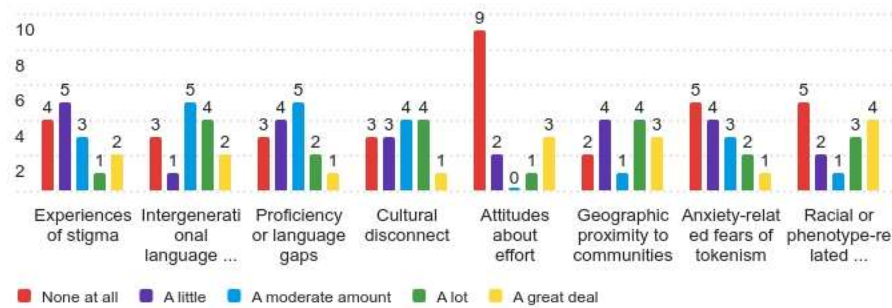


Figure 21: Perspectives of Different Factors Being Barriers in Accessing Language & Community

Figure 21 illustrates how Indigenous college students perceive eight different factors as being barriers to accessing Indigenous languages and/or community.

Out of the same eight factors, participants selected geographic proximity to communities ($M=3.14$), intergenerational language loss ($M=3.07$), and racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color) ($M=2.93$) as being the biggest barriers to accessing a Native/Indigenous language and/or connecting to community. Attitudes about revitalization efforts ($M=2.13$) was the smallest barrier. See Figure 21 for the distribution of all the ratings. When asked how much of an inconvenience participants perceive obstacles to be in connecting to Native/Indigenous languages and/or community, 40% of participants selected a lot, followed by a little (33%). See Figure 22 for a full representation of these results.

Q68 - How much of an inconvenience do you perceive obstacles to be in connecting to Native/Indigenous languages and/or community?

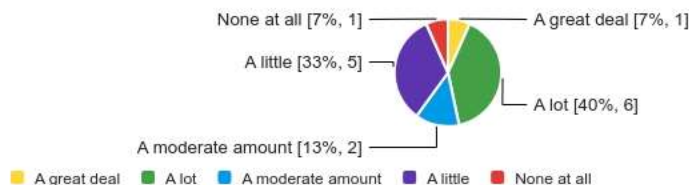


Figure 22: Perceived Inconveniences of Barriers to Connecting with Native/Indigenous Language and Community

Figure 22 depicts how much of an inconvenience Indigenous college students perceive obstacles to be in connecting to Indigenous language(s) and/or community.

Q69 - Please select all of the following emotions you experience when faced with an obstacle/barrier, recognizing that many of these barriers are ongoing and are not experienced in a single isolated moment. - Selected Choice

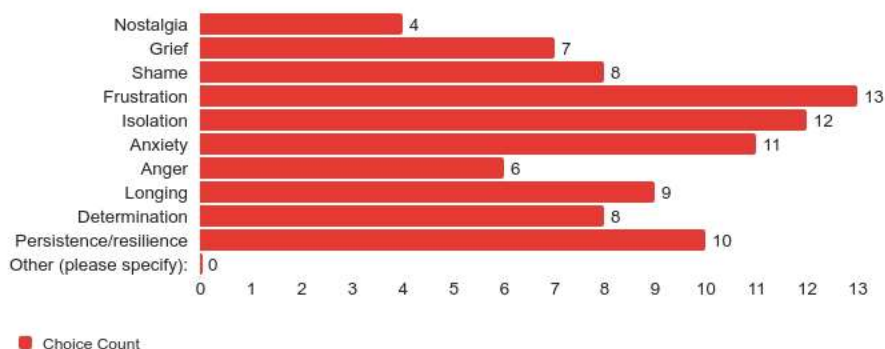


Figure 23: Participant Emotions When Faced with an Obstacle or Barrier

Figure 23 illustrates the distribution of feelings across Indigenous college students when faced with an obstacle or barrier, recognizing that many of these barriers are ongoing and are not experienced in a single isolated moment.

The most common feelings participants selected were frustration, isolation, anxiety, and persistence/resilience. In a free response text box, participants were then asked to explain why they think they feel these emotions when faced with barriers, these are some of their responses:

“I feel grief, shame, and isolation when I am one of the only members of my family that puts in effort towards language revitalization. I feel resilient when I interact with members of my community and watch young people take on language revitalization against assimilation efforts.”

“Because it continues the behaviors of not being recognized, seen, or heard”

“There are various barriers that will cause negative emotions, but not everything in life is easy -- and honestly, I think people in my community need to hear that. We are working to peel back the layers of oppression and shame which were imposed upon our minds, bodies, and spirits for hundreds of years following colonization.”

Most participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they feel confident they have coping strategies or personal efforts to help them overcome the lasting effects of barriers preventing connection to a Native/Indigenous language and/or community, with 60% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree. When asked to rank coping strategies from 1-most to 6-least helpful, participants indicated connecting with nature ($M=2.67$), practicing cultural activities ($M=2.67$), and community involvement ($M=2.73$) as being the most helpful, and language revitalization or advocacy involvement ($M=3.87$) as least helpful. See Figure 24 for a full distribution of these rankings

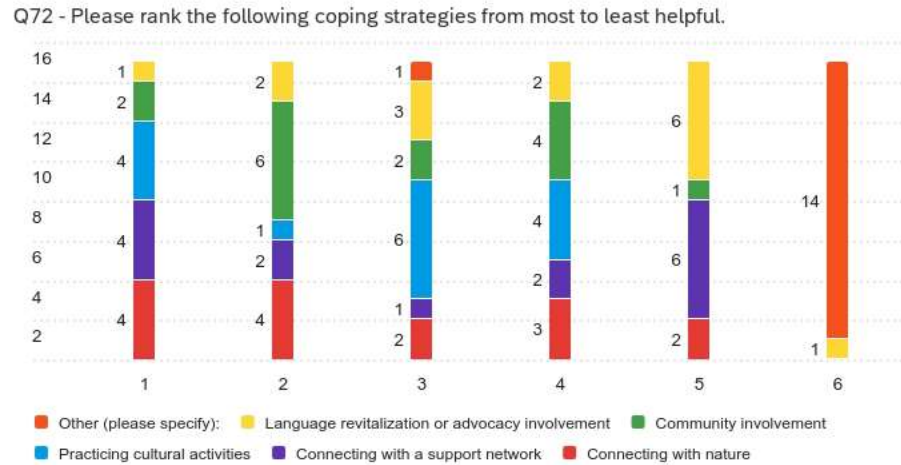


Figure 24: Ranking of Most to Least Helpful Coping Strategies

Figure 24 depicts how Indigenous college students ranked coping strategies from most to least helpful.

The majority of participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they feel they have a strong support network, with 73% selecting either somewhat agree or strongly agree. Most participants (67%) also either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that barriers they've experienced have brought them closer to their support network and/or have helped them build one.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary

This study highlights how Indigenous college students understand and experience the impact of being exposed to and interacting with Indigenous languages, especially when it comes to their well-being and connection to community. The findings show that Indigenous languages are more than just a way to communicate. They're deeply tied to emotions, cultural identity, well-being, and sense of belonging. A significant part of this research is that it centers the voices of Indigenous students and their lived experiences.

This study also adds to growing conversations about the importance of Indigenous languages and why language revitalization matters. It shows that language use is closely connected to healing and well-being, empowerment, and community connections. Ultimately, this study is a reminder that the bigger importance of Indigenous language use and language revitalization is about supporting Indigenous youth and their futures through well-being, identity, and reconnection.

What are Indigenous college students' perspectives on how exposure and interaction with Indigenous languages impact their individual well-being?

Findings suggest a strong emotional response to Indigenous language use and exposure, with participants reporting elevated moods both in the moment ($M=4.67$) and for the rest of the day ($M=4.43$). Participants feel a wide range of emotions when using, interacting with, or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language. Emotions such as happiness, pride, comfort, excitement, empowerment, and longing were commonly associated with language interaction. While language itself was beneficial, participants indicated that connection to their

Native/Indigenous community ($M = 4.07$) was the most impactful factor for well-being, compared to connection to another Indigenous language ($M = 3.07$), which was perceived as least impactful.

These results suggest that while interaction with Indigenous languages boosts individual well-being, the most meaningful impact may come from how language connects participants to a wider community and facilitates deeper community connection. Consistent with existing literature, language can be a powerful factor for cultural transmission and identity affirmation (Whalen et al., 2016). Participants described language exposure as not just a positive experience, but an avenue to reconnecting with community, culture, and collective identity. One possibility is that language actually makes people feel connected to community, showing a possible connection between increased impact on mood and language in relation to the increase in community.

How have Indigenous college students found that language use impacts their connection to their community?

Indigenous college students indicated that speaking and engaging with their Indigenous language strengthens their sense of belonging to community. Language was shown to play a vital role in forming and maintaining relationships within the community, and building these relationships has been helpful in building community. The use of Indigenous languages allows access to traditional knowledge and storytelling, which further deepened intergenerational and community ties. Some may immediately feel a direct connection to community through language, but it also helps others build relationships which impacts their community connection.

The connection between language and identity was particularly notable. Participants reported that Indigenous language interaction strengthened their sense of cultural identity, which

in turn strengthened or reinforced their feelings of connection to the community. Similarly, Language use strengthened feelings of collective identity which also strengthen connection to the community. Lastly, Indigenous language use was shown to also strengthen Intergenerational connections or relations which also, in turn strengthened their feelings of connection to the community.

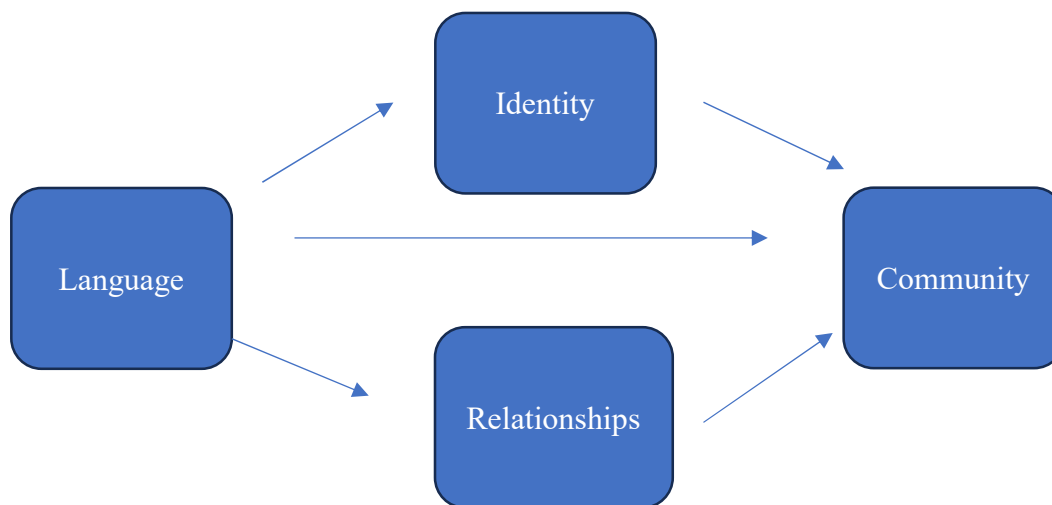


Figure 25: Language Impacts Community, Identity, and Relationships

Figure 25 depicts this relationship between language and community; language, identity, and community; and language, relationships, and community.

The results clearly show that language use is a meaningful and multifaceted contributor to how Indigenous college students connect to their communities which is consistent with existing literature (Olko et al., 2022). Language is a tool for communication, but it also serves as a crucial part of relationship building, cultural identity, and intergenerational connection. These aspects together create and reinforce a strong sense of belonging and connection to community.

These results emphasize that language use isn't a one-dimensional experience. For some Indigenous students, language immediately evokes a sense of community connection, while for others, it works gradually by helping them to build and maintain relationships with others. The

impact on identity, both cultural and collective, is another vital aspect. Feeling connected to your identity through language seems to reinforce feelings of being part of a larger community, showing how deeply interconnected identity and community are. This shows that language plays an important role in actively shaping how Indigenous college students understand and experience their place within their communities.

What are the obstacles that individuals have found in connecting to their language and their community? And how have those obstacles impacted their well-being?

Despite the many positive effects of language interaction, participants also identified similar significant barriers to accessing both language and community connection. Geographic isolation of communities, intergenerational language loss, and lack of accessible language education are significant barriers in accessing Indigenous **languages**. While geographic isolation of communities, racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color), and intergenerational language loss are disruptive barriers in connecting to **community**.

Geographic isolation was a recurring theme, as being physically distant from tribal lands and communities often limits access to engaging with fluent speakers and other opportunities for connection. There is a connection between intergenerational language loss and geographic isolation of communities. Distance contributes to intergenerational language loss, likely because when you're far away you don't have access to learn from those who came before you, thus increasing the difficulty of learning and using Indigenous languages.

Another major barrier was the lack of accessible Indigenous language education which may also impact intergenerational language loss. Without structured resources and opportunities to learn their language, many participants felt disempowered and disconnected by not having accessibility to language that would likely strengthen community connection. Additionally, racial

or phenotype-related anxieties, such as concerns about skin color also hindered community connection for some students. It was noted as a disruptive barrier in accessing community but not accessing language. There are stigmas within the community that may make Indigenous youth navigating society feel unwelcomed. Furthermore, these internalized stigmas create emotional challenges for students, including feelings of isolation, impostor syndrome, and anxiety.

Limitations

Though this research provides valuable insights into the relationship between Indigenous languages and well-being, it is important to address the limitations present within this study to enhance the quality and accuracy of future research. Primarily, the sample population for the study is limited to the Indigenous college student population in and around Eugene, Oregon, which may not fully represent the impacts that language use has on the larger Indigenous population across geographic and tribal contexts. Additionally, the nature of self-report surveys has the potential for response bias and may not fully capture the complexity of participant experience. Participants may be hesitant to reveal their true interaction and knowledge of their Indigenous language as it is often stigmatized if you are not fluent in your language. Lastly, the survey did not ask about whether participants grew up on tribal lands, which may influence access and connection to language and community resources.

Implications for Future Use

While this study contributes to filling the gap in research on the perspectives of the impact of language use on individual and community well-being and the impact it has on community ties of the younger generation of the Indigenous population, there are avenues for future research that should be explored to further our collective understanding of this relationship. Future research should investigate the impact of Indigenous languages on

community and individual well-being across various communities in order to assess similarities and/or differences depending on geographical location, cultural practices and beliefs, and historical factors. Furthermore, exploring the effect of long-term revitalization efforts on the health and well-being of communities greatly impacted by assimilation and language loss may provide deeper insights into the relationship between language, healing, and cultural resilience in this modern society. It may also provide a deeper understanding of the long-term efficacy of language revitalization and maintenance and reveal its importance and relevance for continued use. Moreover, future studies should more specifically investigate the role of intergenerational relationships in language retention and community connection. As participants noted, access to elders and traditional knowledge bearers is crucial. Research that centers these relationships may reveal more understandings through which language supports both individual and community well-being. Addressing limitations and implications enables future researchers to build upon the foundations laid by this study and contribute to holistic and culturally appropriate approaches to research with Indigenous communities.

Call to Action

The findings of this study make clear that Indigenous languages are deeply connected to emotional well-being, cultural identity, and community connection and belonging for Indigenous college students. However, significant barriers, such as geographic isolation, intergenerational language loss, limited access to language education, and internalized stigma, continue to disrupt students' ability to fully engage with their languages and communities. Addressing these challenges requires more than language classes. It calls for systemic support for language revitalization efforts, expanded access to cultural education, and intentional efforts to reconnect students with elders, knowledge holders, and community spaces. Institutions of higher education,

in collaboration with tribal communities, must invest in culturally sustaining practices that uplift Indigenous voices, affirm Indigenous identities, and foster meaningful community connections. By doing so, we not only preserve Indigenous languages, but actively support the health, well-being, and futures of Indigenous students as well.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities must be understood within the context of ongoing historical and systemic injustices, such as colonization, assimilation, forced removal, land loss, and intergenerational trauma, that continue to impact their lives today. These complex challenges are further compounded by the widespread misunderstanding and underrepresentation of Indigenous lifeways in a rapidly modernizing society. Particularly in the United States, Native and Indigenous youth are often forced to navigate a world that increasingly diverges from their traditional beliefs and ways of understanding. Additionally, college students especially are often expected to navigate spaces that do not reflect their cultures, languages, or ways of knowing. In response to this disconnect, this study set out to explore how Indigenous college students experience the impact of Indigenous language use and exposure on their well-being and connection to community.

Through a mixed methods survey, this research found that while interacting with Indigenous language directly boosts mood and well-being, its deeper significance is the way it fosters connection to community. Participants described a range of emotions when exposed to or using their Indigenous language, most of which were overwhelmingly positive. However, they consistently emphasized that what made these experiences most meaningful was how language helped them feel closer to their community, culture, and identity. Language was also shown to play a key role in building and maintaining relationships, which in turn deepens community relations. For many participants, engaging with their language strengthened their sense of cultural identity, reinforced collective identity, and supported intergenerational connection, all of which contributed to feeling a stronger sense of belonging. This study also highlighted significant barriers that prevent Indigenous youth and college students from accessing these

experiences stemming from language and community connection. Geographic isolation, intergenerational language loss, and lack of accessible language education were noted as major obstacles. These barriers not only limit opportunities to learn and engage with Indigenous languages but also disrupt relationships that are essential for cultural and community connection. Additionally, some participants noted the impact of racial or phenotype-based stigma, which made them feel disconnected, isolated, or unwelcome from their communities. These obstacles were associated with decreased mood and well-being, showing the emotional impact of being cut off from language and community.

Together, these findings illuminate the need for holistic approaches to language revitalization such as efforts that don't just teach the language but also intentionally build spaces for connection, relationship building, identity, and community. Our findings show that language revitalization is about preserving culture but should also be about supporting Indigenous youth in their journey to reconnect and reclaim through language. Ultimately, this research begins to bridge the gap in understanding of the crucial role of Indigenous languages in fostering cultural identity, community connection, and holistic well-being.

Appendix A

IRB Exempt Determination Approval



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

January 13, 2025

Haley Potter

hpotter3@uoregon.edu

Dear Haley Potter:

The following research was reviewed and determined to qualify for exemption.

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Study Title:	The Perceived Impact of Indigenous Language Use on the Health, Well-being, and Community Connection of Indigenous College Students
Principal Investigator:	Haley Potter
Parent Study ID:	STUDY00001563
Transaction ID:	STUDY00001563
Funding Source:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• IRB exempt determination form.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Thesis Survey Flyer.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Updated IRB Exempt Category 2.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Updated IRB Informed Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
Approval Date:	12/3/2024
Effective Date:	1/13/2025
Expiration Date:	12/2/2025

For this research, the following determinations have been made:

- This study has been reviewed under the **2018 Common Rule** and determined to qualify for exemption under **Title 45 CFR 46.104(d) ((2)(i) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (non-identifiable))**.

The research is approved to be conducted as described in the approved protocol using the approved materials. Approved materials can be accessed in the protocol workspace in the IRB module of the research administration portal (RAP).

All changes to this research must be assessed to ensure the study continues to qualify for exemption. Research Compliance Services has developed [specific guidance](#) to help you understand when a modification is required before a change can be implemented. It is your

responsibility to ensure modifications are submitted when required and approval secured before implementing changes to the protocol

Continuing Review is not required for this study. **An institutional approval period has been established based on your application materials.** If you anticipate the research will continue beyond the approval period, you must submit a **Continuing Review Application** at least 45 days prior to the expiration date. A closure report must be submitted once human subject research activities are complete. Failure to maintain current approval or properly close the protocol constitutes non-compliance.

With the submission of your request, you agreed to uphold the responsibilities of the Principal Investigator and have agreed to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB module of the RAP.

If you have any questions regarding your protocol or the review process, please contact Research Compliance Services at ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu or (541)346-2510. The University of Oregon and Research Compliance Services appreciate your commitment to the ethical and responsible conduct of research with human subjects.

Please consider completing our [user satisfaction survey](#). It only takes a few minutes, and we would like to hear about your experience working with our office!

Sincerely,

Research Compliance Services *on behalf of the Committee*
for Protection of Human Subjects cc: Karrie Walters|

Appendix B

Survey Flyer

**FAMILY & HUMAN SERVICES x CLARK HONORS
COLLEGE THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT**

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES & COLLEGE STUDENT WELL-BEING

SURVEY



Are you an Indigenous college student in Oregon? Take this anonymous survey about the perceived impact that Indigenous language use has on your well-being, feelings of connection to the community, and if/how obstacles preventing this connection impact your well-being.

SCAN HERE FOR SURVEY!



Participation:
Participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time.

Duration:
15-30 minutes

This will help me with my CHC thesis project and will also add to existing knowledge surrounding the significance of Indigenous languages on health and well-being so that the intricacies of Indigenous ways of life are better understood and represented.

For questions and more information, contact us at:
Haley Potter
503-462-9791
hpotter3@uoregon.edu

THANK YOU!

Appendix C

Survey Outreach Speech

Hello!

I hope this message finds you well. I'm Haley Potter, a senior in University of Oregon's Clark Honors College.

I'm reaching out to see if you all would be able to pass along this survey flyer for my honors thesis! As a graduation requirement for UO's Clark Honors College, I have to conduct a research project, write a thesis, and defend it during my senior year.

I'm hoping to gain insight into how Indigenous college students in Oregon perceive the impact that Native/Indigenous language exposure, interaction, and/or use has on their well-being and connection to the community, no matter their proficiency level!

The survey is completely anonymous, and the only requirements are that the participant is a Native/Indigenous student above the age of 18 attending a university or college in Oregon. Any level of experience or connection to a Native/Indigenous language is welcome, as we are all in a process of reconnecting!

The preferred deadline for the survey is May 1st. If people are looking for more information, they can access the informed consent form before they start the survey, or they can find my contact information at the bottom of the flyer, as well as the informed consent form. Let me know if you have any questions!

Thank you so much,
Haley

Appendix D

Survey



Informed Consent

Boozhoo, aaniin (hello)!

You are being asked to participate in a research study created by Haley Potter and supervised by Dr. Karrie Walters. Below is key information about this research for you to consider when deciding whether or not to participate. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you are entitled to revoke consent at any time and withhold participation.

The purpose of this research is to obtain quantitative and qualitative data on the perceived impact that native/Indigenous language use and exposure has on the individual well-being and feelings of connection to community among Indigenous college students in Oregon. This research also seeks to gather data on obstacles preventing connection to language and community and how these obstacles impact well-being.

Your participation is expected to last 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the amount of detail provided in qualitative free-write answers. You will be asked to answer a mix of quantitative and qualitative survey questions related to your exposure, interaction, and use of a native/Indigenous language, your perception of how it impacts your well-being and feelings of connection with your community, any obstacles preventing connection to language and community, and how you feel those obstacles impact your health and well-being.

This study is **low risk**; however, possible risks or discomfort from your participation include any difficulty discussing sensitive topics or hardships related to Indigenous languages, community connection, and well-being. Once again, participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is not to participate. **If you decide to withdraw once the study has already begun, please exit the page and do not click through the rest of the survey so we can ensure that your data will not be collected.**

Information collected for this research will be used to contribute to the knowledge surrounding Indigenous ways of life and being so they are better understood and represented. Additionally, this research is intended to be presented in a thesis dissertation that Haley Potter will be writing and presenting to the University of Oregon's Clark Honors College department in Spring 2025. We will not ask for or include any

identifiable information attached to the results. In the event that you include any identifying information in the responses, this information will immediately be removed and deleted from any data analysis.

Attached below, you will find a complete downloadable version of the informed consent form. Reference this form for more information, and if you have additional questions, you can find my contact information at the bottom of the form!

[Informed Consent Form](#)

Chi miigwech (thank you so much) for your time and consideration; it is greatly appreciated!

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Yes

No

We require that participants are at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes

No

This survey is no longer limited to Indigenous college students in Oregon! However, I would like to focus on the perspectives of Indigenous college students as much as possible, which is why I have decided to keep this question:

Are you an Indigenous student attending an Oregon university or college? Your answer will not affect your eligibility to participate!

Yes

No

Background Information

This first set of questions are background questions that aim to get a general understanding of you and your history of experiences and interactions within Native/Indigenous languages and culture.

What is your gender identity?

Cisgender male

Cisgender female

Transgender male

Transgender female

Agender, gender non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid

Two-spirit

Prefer not to answer

Other (please specify):

Where do your people/tribe originate from? To ensure anonymity, please do not list the name of your people, but rather the area that they originate from.

The Arctic

The Subarctic

The Northeast

The Southeast

The Great Plains

The Southwest

The Great Basin

California

The Northwest

The Plateau

Oceania

Africa

Asia

South America

Other (please specify):

What age are you?

How often did you hear **your** Native/Indigenous language spoken in the home?

- Never
- Sometimes
- About half the time
- Most of the time
- Always

How often do you interact with another Native/Indigenous language?

(Recognizing not all Indigenous languages are revitalized, yet you can still have a connection with another one.

For example: Chinuk Wawa or Ichishki´in)

- Never
- Sometimes
- About half the time
- Most of the time
- Always

When was your earliest exposure to a Native/Indigenous language?

How strongly does your **family** identify with **your** Native/Indigenous language?

- 1 - No connection at all to the language
- 2 - Minimal exposure or recognition (e.g., a few words or phrases known)
- 3 - Some knowledge, such as knowing traditional songs or phrases
- 4 - Moderate understanding and occasional use in conversation
- 5 - Fluent or proficient in speaking and understanding the language.

How strongly do **you** identify with **your** Native/Indigenous language?

- 1 - No connection at all to the language
- 2 - Minimal exposure or recognition (e.g., a few words or phrases known)
- 3 - Some knowledge, such as knowing traditional songs or phrases
- 4 - Moderate understanding and occasional use in conversation
- 5 - Fluent or proficient in speaking and understanding the language.

If applicable, in what context did you learn the language? Check all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- Elders/community

- School
- Personal/online efforts
- Formal tribal language programs
- I don't know my language

If applicable, please share a bit of your experience learning your Native/Indigenous language. Who in your family, friends, or community taught you? Or what was your experience learning it in school, from personal efforts, or from tribal language programs?

If you haven't learned your Native/Indigenous language, please share why if you feel comfortable!

How long have you been actively learning or speaking a Native/Indigenous language?

Please rate your perceived Native/Indigenous language proficiency. By proficiency, we mean how well you feel you can convey information and communicate in the language.

- Not well at all
- Slightly well
- Moderately well
- Very well
- Extremely well

How often did you attend cultural events that connected you to your Native/Indigenous identity before college or the age of 18?

- None at all

- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

How strongly does your **family** identify with your Native/Indigenous culture?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

How strongly do **you** identify with your Native/Indigenous culture?

- None at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Well-being

The next set of questions will focus on your current exposure and interactions with Indigenous language and culture, and your perception of how it impacts your well-being. All free answer text boxes are optional, but highly encouraged as they enable me to expand and support my analysis!

Please rate your **current** perceived level of Indigenous cultural and community **involvement**.

- None at all
- A little

- A moderate amount
- A lot
- A great deal

Please share any examples of your cultural and community involvement, if you'd like.

Please rate your **current** frequency of exposure to a Native/Indigenous language.

- Never
- A few times a year
- Every few weeks
- Once a week
- Most days or daily

Please explain what type of exposure you experience to any Native/Indigenous language.

Please select all of the following emotions you feel when using, interacting with, or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language.

Pride Comfort Happiness Excitement Empowerment Nostalgia Grief Shame Frustr

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Please explain why you think you feel these emotions as a result of using or interacting with a Native/Indigenous language.

Please indicate how you feel interactions with a Native/Indigenous language impact your mood:

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
In the moment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
For the rest of the day	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use this box to reflect on how you feel exposure to a Native/Indigenous language plays a role in your well-being.

For the following questions, when referring to community or connection to community, we mean in both a broader Native/Indigenous context and a specific tribal context, so not just connecting with your specific tribal community but the larger Indigenous community as well. Similarly, with cultural identity, we are referring to both broader Indigenous cultural identity as well as that of your specific tribal identity.

How much have the following improved your sense of well-being?

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Connection to my Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to another Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationships with others who share my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to a Native/Indigenous community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Rank these from most beneficial to least beneficial for your well-being.

Connection to my Native/Indigenous language

Connection to another Native/Indigenous language

Relationships with others who share my cultural identity

Connection to a Native/Indigenous community

Connection to my cultural identity

How much does each of the following increase or strengthen your sense of community?

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Connection to my Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to another Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationships with others who share my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Rank these from most beneficial to least beneficial for your sense of community.

Connection to my Native/Indigenous language

Connection to another Native/Indigenous language

Relationships with others who share my cultural identity

Connection to my cultural identity

How much does each of the following increase or strengthen your connection to your cultural identity?

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Connection to my Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Connection to another Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationships with others who share my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to a Native/Indigenous community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Rank these from most beneficial to least beneficial for your sense of cultural identity.

Connection to my Native/Indigenous language

Connection to another Native/Indigenous language

Relationships with others who share my cultural identity

Connection to a Native/Indigenous community

How much does each of the following increase or strengthen your connection to others (building relationships)?

This is a bit different than just connection to community as we are asking about building relationships/connections with others.

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Connection to my Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to another Native/Indigenous language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to a Native/Indigenous community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connection to my cultural identity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Rank these from most beneficial to least beneficial for your connection to others.

Connection to my Native/Indigenous language

Connection to another Native/Indigenous language

Connection to a Native/Indigenous community

Connection to my cultural identity

Perceived Impact of Exposure on Community Connection

The next set of questions will explore how you perceive interactions/exposure with a Native/Indigenous language impact your community connection. Once again, all free answer text boxes are optional, but highly encouraged as they enable me to expand and support my analysis!

Please select all of the following activities or events you have done in the past year with your community.

Advocacy work	Social groups	Holiday activities/traditions	Powwows	Cultural activities/traditional sustenance activities (e.g., hunting, gathering, fishing)	Consuming wild meat	Indi cr
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Which of these previously listed activities makes you feel most involved and connected to your community?

Please use this box to briefly explain why your chosen activity makes you feel most involved and/or connected to community.

For the following questions, please rate how much you agree or disagree based on how true the statement feels.

Using a Native/Indigenous language strengthens my sense of belonging to community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please use this box to provide an example if you'd like.

Using a Native/Indigenous language has helped me build better relationships in the community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Building relationships has been helpful in building community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please select the following ways that using a Native/Indigenous language has helped you build relationships:

- Creating a collective identity
- Accessing and sharing stories and knowledge
- Connecting to traditions and spiritual practices
- Connecting with Indigenous students and faculty
- Connecting with elders using the language

Using a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened my sense of cultural identity.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

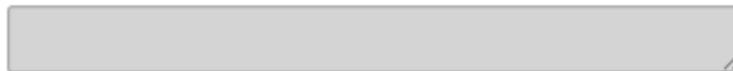
My sense of cultural identity has strengthened my feelings of connection to the community.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

Please check all of the following ways in which using a Native/Indigenous language has connected you to your cultural identity.

Creating a collective identity
Accessing and sharing stories and knowledge
Connecting to traditions and spiritual practices
Intergenerational connections
Resistance to assimilation
Expression through language
Sense of community
Connection to beings (land, plants, animals, spirit, etc.) through language

Please use this box to explain in what ways your connection to the community has changed as a result of your sense of cultural identity.



Building relationships has helped strengthened my sense of cultural identity and connection to the community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Using, interacting, and/or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened intergenerational connections or relations.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Intergenerational connections or relations have strengthened my feelings of connection to the community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please check all of the following ways in which using a Native/Indigenous language has fostered, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections/relationships.

- Talking with elders
- Learning from elders
- Sharing stories with elders
- I don't have many opportunities for intergenerational connections

If applicable, please use this box to reflect on how increased, strengthened, or revitalized intergenerational connections may have

changed your sense of connection to the community.

Using, interacting, and/or being exposed to a Native/Indigenous language has strengthened my feelings of collective identity and solidarity.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Feelings of collective identity and solidarity have strengthened my connection to the community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please use this box to reflect on how you feel exposure to Native/Indigenous languages play a role in connecting to the community.

Obstacles in Connecting to Language and Community

Finally! This last set of questions will explore obstacles preventing the connection, exposure, and use of **your** Native/Indigenous language as well as obstacles preventing community connection. We will also ask

about the perceived level of impact that obstacles have on your well-being. All free answer text boxes are optional, but highly encouraged as they enable me to expand and support my analysis!

Please rate how true this statement feels:

There are many barriers to me accessing my Native/Indigenous language.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please rank the following barriers from most to least disruptive in accessing **your** Native/Indigenous language.

- Lack of accessible language education
- Geographic isolation of communities
- Social stigma
- Intergenerational language loss
- Cultural disconnect
- Lack of revitalization efforts
- Anxiety-related fears of fluency and tokenism

Other (please specify):

Please rate how true this statement feels:

There are many barriers preventing connection to my community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please rank the following barriers from most to least disruptive in connecting to community.

- Geographic isolation of communities
- Social stigma
- Intergenerational language loss
- Language gap/barriers
- Cultural disconnect
- Anxiety-related fears of tokenism
- Racial or phenotype-related anxieties (ex: appearance of skin color)
- Other (please specify):

If you'd like, please use this box to explain or provide examples of how much of a burden these barriers have been in connecting to your Native/Indigenous language vs community.

Please rate how much each of these factors have been barriers in accessing **your** Native/Indigenous language.

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Experiences of stigma	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Intergenerational language loss	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Proficiency or language gaps	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural disconnect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attitudes about revitalization efforts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geographic proximity to communities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anxiety-related fears of tokenism	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Racial or phenotype-related anxieties	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please rank how much each of these factors have been barriers to accessing a **Native/Indigenous language and/or connecting to community**

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Experiences of stigma	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Intergenerational language loss	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Proficiency or language gaps	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural disconnect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attitudes about revitalization efforts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geographic proximity to communities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anxiety-related fears of tokenism	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Racial or phenotype- related anxieties	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How much of an inconvenience do you perceive obstacles to be in connecting to Native/Indigenous languages and/or community?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

Please select all of the following emotions you experience when faced with an obstacle/barrier, recognizing that many of these barriers are ongoing and are not experienced in a single isolated moment.

Nostalgia Grief Shame Frustration Isolation Anxiety Anger Longing Determination

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ (

Please use this box to explain why you think you experience these emotions when faced with barriers.

I feel confident that I have coping strategies or personal efforts to help me overcome the lasting effects of barriers preventing connection to a Native/Indigenous language and/or community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please rank the following coping strategies from most to least helpful.

Connecting with nature

Connecting with a support network

Practicing cultural activities

Community involvement

Language revitalization or advocacy involvement

Other (please specify):

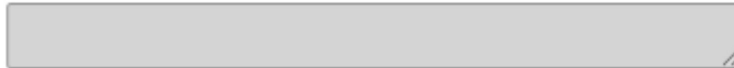
I feel that I have a strong support network.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

I feel that barriers I've experienced have brought me closer to my support network and/or have helped me build one.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Please use this box for additional comments regarding anything covered in this survey. Thank you!



Powered by Qualtrics

References

- Edygarova, S. (2024, April 30). *Reconnecting with emotions and the body through the language of ancestors*. PEN/Opp. https://www.penopp.org/articles/reconnecting-emotions-and-body-through-language-ancestors?language_content_entity=en
- Gonzalez, M. B., Aronson, B. D., Kellar, S., Walls, M. L., & Greenfield, B. L. (2017). Language as a Facilitator of Cultural Connection. *ab-Original : journal of indigenous studies and first nations' and first peoples' culture*, 1(2), 176–194. <https://doi.org/10.5325/aboriginal.1.2.0176>
- Gonzalez, M. B., Sittner, K. J., Saniguq Ullrich, J., & Walls, M. L. (2021). Spiritual connectedness through prayer as a mediator of the relationship between Indigenous language use and positive mental health. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 27(4), 746–757. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000466>
- Jacob, M. M., Sabzalian, L., Johnson, S. R., Jansen, J., & Morse, G. S. N. (2019). "We Need to Make Action NOW, to Help Keep the Language Alive": Navigating Tensions of Engaging Indigenous Educational Values in University Education. *American journal of community psychology*, 64(1-2), 126–136. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12374>
- Olko, J., Lubiewska, K., Maryniak, J., Haimovich, G., de la Cruz, E., Cuahutle Bautista, B., Dexter-Sobkowiak, E., & Iglesias Tepec, H. (2022). The positive relationship between Indigenous language use and community-based well-being in four Nahua ethnic groups in Mexico. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 28(1), 132–143. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000479>
- Sivak, L., Westhead, S., Richards, E., Atkinson, S., Richards, J., Dare, H., Zuckermann, G., Gee, G., Wright, M., Rosen, A., Walsh, M., Brown, N., & Brown, A. (2019). "Language Breathes Life"-Barngarla Community Perspectives on the Wellbeing Impacts of Reclaiming a Dormant Australian Aboriginal Language. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(20), 3918. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16203918>
- Tsuji, S. R. J., Zuk, A. M., Solomon, A., Edwards-Wheesk, R., Ahmed, F., & Tsuji, L. J. S. (2023). What Is Wellbeing, and What Is Important for Wellbeing? Indigenous Voices from across Canada. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(17), 6656. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20176656>
- Whalen, D.H., Lewis, M.E., Gillson, S. et al. (2022) Health effects of Indigenous language use and revitalization: a realist review. *International Journal for Equity in Health* 21, 169. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-022-01782-6>
- Whalen, D. H., Moss M., & Baldwin D. (2016). Healing through language: Positive physical health effects of indigenous language use [version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]. *F1000Research*, 5:852 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8656.1>