

# The Effect of Bilingual Practices on Foreign Language Learning Experiences of International Students in Higher Education

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the impactful bilingual practices of an instructor teaching a foreign language course (Malay) and their profound effect on the language learning experiences of participants (N > 63) from diverse countries beyond the Southeast Asian region. We gathered valuable insights through comprehensive participant observations and in-depth interviews with the instructor. After five weeks, we administered a questionnaire to evaluate the foreign language learning experiences of international students. Our findings reveal that the instructor implements her bilingual practices into three pivotal themes: the nature of these practices (what), descriptions of their intended purposes (why), and the underlying reasons for their implementation (how). The instructor embraced a flexible bilingual model, employing effective techniques such as code-switching, contextual and linguistic support, personalised adaptations of bilingual practices, and role modelling. The responses from participants indicate remarkable satisfaction with their language learning experiences, averaging an impressive score of 3.85. Moreover, their average exam score of 0.193 corresponds to a large Eta-squared effect size of 19%. This evidence underscores the significant impact of the instructor's bilingual practices on enhancing participants' foreign language learning experiences, resulting in meaningful variability in their academic performance. We assert that this research is a pioneer within the context of higher education in Malaysia, as it comprehensively explores international students' language learning experiences from a truly global perspective. A comparative study of non-Asian and Asian students in the Malay Course could provide valuable insights into language learning experiences across cultures.

**Index Terms**—bilingual practices, foreign language learning experiences, international students, Malay Course, higher education

## I. INTRODUCTION

A bilingual speaker skillfully uses different languages for specific contexts, adapting their proficiency to communicate effectively (Weir, 2000). Mackey (2000) notes that bilingualism is a relative and subjective concept, while Grosjean (1985) states that achieving native-like proficiency in both languages, or true bilingualism, is rare. Maftoon and Shakibafar (2011) redefine bilingualism as the dynamic alternation between languages by an individual, offering a broader understanding of language use in diverse classroom practices.

Implementing bilingual practices is essential for teaching Malay as a foreign language to international students in Malaysia. By combining Malay and English, these practices create a dynamic classroom environment that enhances communication and knowledge acquisition, enriching the educational experience. Bilingual teaching can potentially increase students' motivation, but its effectiveness relies on the teacher's commitment. However, the connection between the bilingual model and foreign language self-motivation among international students remains poorly understood (Baharudin & Sadik, 2016). Addressing this gap could improve teaching methods and learning outcomes.

In Malaysia, all public universities require international undergraduate students to take a mandatory Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course, which includes various assessments like reading comprehension, role-playing, essays, and a final exam (MyCLASS System UNIMAS, 2023). Over the past decade, universities have established International Student Offices to support students with matters related to immigration, visas, accommodation, and campus life. With governmental initiatives like EduCity Iskandar and Kuala Lumpur Education City, Malaysia aims to become a leading global education hub. Currently, international students comprise approximately 10% of the total student population, with 167,000 students from 179 countries expected to enrol by the end of 2024 (Edu Reviews, 2020; Kosmo, 2024).

Malay is the national language of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Singapore. In the context of Southeast Asia's economic globalisation, mastering Malay is crucial for individuals and society. Taiwan's New Southbound Policy actively promotes skilled speakers of Southeast Asian languages, particularly Malay, to strengthen economic ties, investment, tourism, cultural exchanges, and regional talent development (Chou, 2021). In Malaysia, Malay unites the nation and supports the bilingual proficiency of the English-speaking population, making it an attractive hub for international scholars and academic collaboration. As a Commonwealth nation, Malaysia emphasises English in higher education, providing a high-quality, globally integrated education.

Teaching Malay to foreign speakers presents significant challenges, as many students may be unfamiliar with the language's existence and may struggle due to their native languages and English (Tuah, 2018). "Teaching Malay to foreign speakers is more challenging than teaching native or second language speakers in Malaysia. Teachers need to understand the differences between Malay and their students' native languages and cultural backgrounds" (Sariyan, 2014, as cited in Tuah, 2018, p. 8). Despite the increasing number of international students in Malaysian higher education, research on empowering bilingual instructors to enhance classroom language practices is lacking.

This study examines the effect of bilingual practices on the foreign language learning experiences of international students in higher education. The quality of learning experiences is a key predictor of outcomes and influences motivation (Dörnyei, 2019). We conducted observations and interviews with an experienced Malay language instructor using a bilingual model from Palviainen et al. (2018) to assess her awareness of thematic content. Additionally, we surveyed over 63 international students from 17 countries using a questionnaire adapted from Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self-System model. We aim to identify the relationship between students' learning experiences and their exam grades in Malay. Findings will highlight how the instructor's bilingual practices impact the learning outcomes of international students. Two research questions are stated as follows:

1. How can an instructor effectively navigate bilingual practices while teaching Malay to international students?
2. How do the instructor's bilingual practices affect the language learning experiences for international students?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Malay to international students requires a dynamic bilingual approach that integrates Malay and English throughout the learning process. Menken and García (2010) highlight the crucial role of teachers in shaping these experiences. However, no research has examined the link between teachers' bilingual practices and student achievement in the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course. While several studies have focused on bilingual practices in foreign language classrooms for international students at Malaysian public universities, including contributions from Chye et al. (2010), Abu Bakar (2013), Nasir and Hamzah (2014), Zakaria and Abdullah (2014), Tuah (2018), and Jupiter et al. (2021), the specific relationship remains unexplored.

In summary, teachers play a crucial role in the learning experiences of international students, who primarily use Malay in the classroom and English outside (Chye et al., 2010). A lack of support, ineffective training, and an unsupportive environment hinder their conversation in Malay (Abu Bakar, 2013). Notably, 43% of students are motivated to learn Malay due to innovative teaching strategies (Nasir & Hamzah, 2014; Chou, 2021). Early instruction often relied on English-Malay translation, highlighting the need for improved bilingual training (Zakaria & Abdullah, 2014). Many students struggle with Malay spelling and pronunciation due to the influence of English sentence structure (Tuah, 2018). Students note that Malaysian educators tend to focus on practical activities over theoretical approaches, which are more typical in their home countries (Jupiter et al., 2021). Chinese students face challenges in achieving proficiency in Malay due to the dominance of their native language and limited practice (Li et al., 2022). Bilingual teaching methods have proven more effective, fostering greater interaction than monolingual approaches (Han & Park, 2017).

The Language Learning Experience refers to "the perceived quality of the learner's engagement with various aspects of the learning process" (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 20). Accordingly, Taguchi et al. (2009) found that attitudes toward learning English have a minor impact on the study efforts of Chinese learners compared to those in Japan and Iran. Following Dörnyei and Taguchi's guidelines, Papi and Teimouri (2012) studied Iranian English learners. They noted that university students improved their attitudes toward English culture by interacting with English speakers and engaging in high-level academic environments.

A study by Subekti (2018) involving 56 undergraduate students in Indonesia found that 41.4% strongly agreed that learning English is exciting, while only 19.6% appreciated their English teacher's fun class. Subekti suggested that there is no significant relationship between language learning experience and achievement. In another study by Darling and Chanyoo (2018) with 330 Thai university students, participants' perceptions of teachers varied: Polly felt positively influenced, Julia preferred native English-speaking teachers, and Tara favoured Thai teachers. Students with prior exposure to English-speaking environments found class activities highly motivational.

A study by Sahin (2020) involving 274 Turkish students at Mersin University found that they had positive experiences with learning the English language. Most participants enjoyed learning English ( $M = 2.24$ ) and appreciated the classroom atmosphere ( $M = 2.67$ ), often losing track of time ( $M = 2.79$ ). However, they were less enthusiastic about English lessons ( $M = 3.01$ ) and showed little interest in more classes ( $M = 3.25$ ). These findings are consistent with Alshahrani's (2016) research on 400 male Saudi English majors.

Sandu and Oxbrow (2021) studied 79 second-year Spanish speakers learning English at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. They found that the language learning experience is the best predictor of students' English learning effort. They suggested linking vocabulary with engaging cultural content to boost interest and improve achievement. Course and Saka (2021) analysed L2 motivational self-systems among 668 university students in Turkey, finding that students' intended effort in learning correlates strongly with their attitudes toward English. The study highlights the interaction between intended learning effort and overall experience, emphasising the impact of classroom practices and teachers on initial language learner motivation. A study by de Oliveira and Gubitosi (2022) examined the motivations of heritage and non-heritage Portuguese students at two universities in Rhode Island. Results showed that non-heritage learners are motivated by job prospects, a genuine love for the language and greater sensitivity and awareness of it, which aids their second-language learning. Sadoughi et al. (2023) surveyed 384 English language learners in Iran and found that a positive language learning experience enhanced the link between positive thinking patterns and academic engagement. Similarly, Jiang et al. (2024) studied 486 high school learners in China, suggesting that a growth mindset has a positive influence on teaching practices in foreign language classrooms.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants

From 2018 to 2025, the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course was taught by a single instructor, ensuring a consistent learning experience for international students. We used purposive sampling to effectively target our research sample, which consisted of 63 students from countries outside Southeast Asia. To eliminate extraneous variables, participants were intentionally selected from outside the Southeast Asian region, allowing us to gather meaningful data. To enhance the credibility of our research questionnaire, we conducted a pilot study with 11 international students to evaluate its internal consistency. Additionally, 63 international students signed consent forms to participate, as detailed in Table 1, which lists their citizenship, entry category, and number of entries to the university.

TABLE 1  
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

No.	Citizen	Exchange Student	Direct Intake	Intensive Language Program	Entry Count
1	Japan	9	3		12
2	South Korea	2	3		5
3	Bangladesh		14		14
4	Burundi			2	2
5	Pakistan		2		2
6	China	1	8	1	10
7	Egypt		2		2
8	Nepal		2		2
9	Sudan		1	2	3
10	India		2		2
11	Ghana		1		1
12	Nigeria		2		2
13	Yemen		1		1
14	Iraq		2		2
15	Syria		1		1
16	Somalia		1		1
17	Maldives		1		1
	Total	12	46	5	63

#### B. Instruments

##### (a). An Observation Work Sheet

Palviainen et al. (2016) state that teachers evolved their initial bilingual education models from strict language separation to more flexible practices. Their study identified five key themes: (1) flexible use of both languages, (2) responsible code-switching, (3) contextual and linguistic supports, (4) adjustments for individual children, and (5) role modelling. We adapted these practices for the Malaysian context. These themes guide our examination of a public university instructor's bilingual practices in Malaysia, which developed over time. The sheet serves as an observation guide, allowing for new insights as we proceed.

##### (b). The Questionnaire

This study examines the Language Learning Experience, a key element of the L2 Motivational Self-System model introduced by Dörnyei (2005). Dörnyei (2019) notes that in various studies, this component has been labelled differently, such as "Attitudes to L2 Learning" (You & Dörnyei, 2016), "Attitudes to Learning English" (Taguchi et al., 2009), and "L2 Learning Experience" (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). Despite the varied terminology, the assessment items

remain similar (Dörnyei, 2019). Here, we use “Foreign Language Learning Experience” (FLLE) to emphasise the challenges students faced learning Malay, which was entirely new to them before arriving in Malaysia.

Empirical findings using the L2 Motivational Self-System model show that the Language Learning Experience strongly predicts Intended Learning Effort and L2 achievement. For instance, You and Dörnyei (2016) found a link between Chinese students’ motivation to invest in language learning and their evaluation of the learning process. We have adapted the L2 Motivational Self-System Questionnaire from Taguchi et al. (2009) and Papi and Teimouri (2012) to align with the unique context of Malaysia’s higher education, ensuring its relevance to our study (see Table 2). We conducted a Cronbach’s alpha test in SPSS version 29 using 13 items, yielding an alpha of 0.775, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency within the acceptable range of 0.7 to 1.0.

TABLE 2  
THE VERSION OF THE ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE

	Items	Taguchi et al. (2009)	Papi and Teimouri (2012)
1	I like the atmosphere of my Malay classes.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
2	I find learning Malay interesting.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
3	I always look forward to Malay classes.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
4	I enjoy learning Malay.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
5	I would like to have more Malay lessons at the university.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
6	I think time passes faster while studying Malay.	Attitudes to learning English	English learning experience
7	If my lecturer gives an optional assignment in Malay, I would volunteer to do it.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
8	I want to spend lots of time studying Malay.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
9	I want to study Malay even if I am not required to do so.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
10	I want to concentrate on studying Malay more than any other topic.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
11	If a Malay course were offered in the future, I would like to take it.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
12	I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning Malay.	Criterion measures	Intended effort
13	Compared to my classmates, I think I study Malay relatively hard.	Criterion measures	–

### C. Procedures

Participant observation was conducted for two hours weekly over five weeks in the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course during the second semester of 2023/2024. The focus was on the instructor’s bilingual practices in teaching and communication with students, documented on an observation sheet. After the observation, we interviewed the instructor to gain deeper insights into the ‘Why’ question. This information will help us understand the instructor’s reasons for using specific practices.

With the instructor’s permission, we surveyed 63 international students during a study week in the 15th week of the 2023/2024 second semester, before their final exams. This timing allowed students to focus better on the questionnaire, minimising interruptions during their intensive lecture activities. Consequently, we gathered accurate information.

### D. Data Analysis

After each observation session, we categorised the data into five areas: (1) flexible language use, (2) responsible code-switching, (3) contextual and linguistic support, (4) individual student adjustments, and (5) role modelling. Next, we present the instructor’s reflection on bilingual practices in a table detailing thematic categories (What?), instructor practices (How?), and reasons for these practices (Why?).

The survey employed a five-point nominal scale for responses, ranging from “Disagree” (1 point) to “Strongly Agree” (5 points). To capture the nuances of student opinions, we analysed each item’s responses using a five-point Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Unsure), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly Agree).

We categorised each item’s mean (M) into distinct intervals to illustrate the depth of students’ experiences in learning the Malay language. The intervals are as follows:

- A mean of 1.00–2.00 reflects a low Malay language learning experience and indicates significant challenges that the instructor must address.
- A mean of 2.01–3.00 signifies a moderate learning experience, suggesting room for improvement and enhancement.
- A mean of 3.01–4.00 shows a high Malay language learning experience, demonstrating positive engagement and understanding.
- A mean of 4.01–5.00 represents a very high Malay language learning experience, showcasing exceptional confidence and proficiency in the language.

We evaluate students’ exam grades in the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course through a six-level Likert scale, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their performance.

- Score range above 80: Interval scale 6

- Score range 70-79: Interval scale 5
- Score range 60-69: Interval scale 4
- Score range 50-59: Interval scale 3
- Score range 40-49: Interval scale 2
- Score range 39 and below: Interval scale 1

This adjustment helps assess the effect of the instructor's bilingual practices on the foreign language learning experiences among international students.

Teachers' bilingual practices are vital in shaping the experiences and language achievement of international students in learning Malay. A growth mindset in language learning has practical implications. To support this, we conducted a One-Way ANOVA test using SPSS version 29 to calculate Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ), which measures the relationship between Foreign Language Learning Experiences (FLLE) and Exam Grades (EG). Here, FLLE is a nominal variable, and EG is an interval variable. According to Norouzian and Plonsky (2017) and Grande (2019), Eta-squared indicates effect size, revealing how much variability in exam grades can be attributed to language learning experiences. The interpretation guide for the variable values is as follows:

Small effect ( $\eta^2 < 0.01$ ): The independent variable (s) account for a minimal amount of the variability in the dependent variable.

Medium effect ( $0.01 \leq \eta^2 < 0.06$ ): The independent variable (s) explain a moderate amount of the variability in the dependent variable.

Large effect ( $\eta^2 \geq 0.14$ ): The independent variable (s) explain a substantial portion of the variability in the dependent variable.

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### A. Instructor's Bilingual Practices

The Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course instructor demonstrates flexible bilingual practices by skillfully navigating between Malay and English, engaging in responsible code-switching, and providing essential language support. She tailors her approach to meet the individual needs of each student, serving as an inspiring role model and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

##### (a). Flexible Use of Two Languages

The instructor has evolved her teaching from a strict bilingual education model to a more flexible one, drawing on her experience with international students in Malay courses. Initially focused on helping students familiarise themselves with the Malay language, she found traditional single-language approaches ineffective for fostering deep understanding. Instead, she alternates between Malay and English during lessons. She believes that both her attitude and that of the students must shift, emphasising the importance of a positive attitude toward the Malay language and culture. Most of her students enjoy learning Malay and maintain a positive disposition. During the interview, the instructor explained the flexible use of two languages in the following excerpt:

“Using a bilingual approach, either Malay-English or vice versa, during the teaching and learning process is beneficial for explaining and guiding international students. This approach also facilitates easy retention of everyday Malay vocabulary. Additionally, I incorporate this bilingual approach in role-playing activities within the classroom.”

##### (b). Responsible Code-Switching

Code-switching refers to the ability to use multiple languages simultaneously or alternately. The instructor managed language use effectively during the lecture, showcasing responsible code-switching. Teachers often avoid direct translation, a practice called “co-linguaging” (García, 2009, p. 302). Lewis et al. (2012) suggest that relying on translation can make foreign language learners passive, causing them to wait for the teacher instead of actively engaging in the learning process. The instructor in this study abandoned direct translation after having a similar experience. In the following excerpt, she explains her approach:

“Using code-switching while teaching has been essential, and I have consistently applied it throughout my teaching of the Malay language course at this university. I used Malay and English to explain the learning modules and example sentences to international students. Additionally, I introduced them to the skills needed for using standard Malay”.

##### (c). Contextual and Linguistic Supports

Contextual and linguistic support is helpful in bilingual education as it enhances student comprehension. “In Malay language instruction, I tailor support structures to align with students' ability levels, using strategies like body language, contextual vocabulary, verbal instructions, and word repetition.” These techniques, as noted by Van der Walt et al. (2001, p. 299), “provide meaningful instructional support”.

##### (d). Adjustments to Individual Students

The instructor understands that tailoring bilingual practice to individual students is essential for their success. She believes there's no one-size-fits-all approach. She must be flexible and creative. For instance, one student may struggle

with grammatical differences between Malay and English, and she addresses this by explaining the nuances. She empowers her students to bridge language gaps and enriches their learning experiences.

(e). *Role-Modelling*

Baker (2009) highlights teachers as crucial role models in bilingual education, emphasising their engagement with both languages. In this study, the instructor, fluent in Malay and English, empowered her students by encouraging them to use both languages during lessons. In an interview about her role as a model for students, the instructor shared her approach:

“In our role-playing activities and presentations, students are challenged to use the Malay language exclusively, fostering immersion and fluency. However, I recognise that language acquisition can be daunting, so I offer them the flexibility to use English when unfamiliar vocabulary arises. Explaining these concepts through a bilingual approach empowers students to grasp new words swiftly and effectively, enhancing their learning experience and confidence in using Malay”.

Table 3 outlines the instructor’s bilingual practices across thematic categories (What?), descriptions of these practices (How?), and the reasons for their use (Why?). The instructor adapted her language use to address her students’ diverse backgrounds, employing code-switching between Malay and English to improve comprehension among international students. This flexible strategy enhances understanding of Malay and promotes inclusivity in the learning environment.

TABLE 3  
DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE FOR BILINGUAL PRACTICES OBSERVED

No.	What?	How?	Why?
1.	Flexible use of two languages	The teaching and learning process will incorporate both Malay and English. The instructor used both languages consistently throughout the lecture session. It is essential to embrace English, as international students are from diverse backgrounds.	English is an international language that most international students understand, while Malay is often foreign to them. Promoting a positive attitude towards the Malay language and maximising learning opportunities is crucial.
2.	Responsible code-switching a. Avoidance of direct translation b. Languages used for different communicative purposes	Utilise two languages to convey meanings without direct translation. Capture and hold student attention by alternating between English and Malay. Present abstract topics and specific instructions in English while introducing concrete and familiar concepts in Malay.	Avoid passively waiting for English translations by students. Maximising learning during lectures. Increasing sensitivity to the reception of new information. Enhancing two-way communication and presentations during lectures.
3.	Contextual and linguistic supports	Utilising body language, verbal cues, word repetition, and intentional speech. Gradually refining the intricate structure of the Malay language.	Address student issues in learning the Malay language effectively. Enhance students’ understanding of Malay phrases. Highlight key aspects of Malay vocabulary, semantics, and syntax.
4.	Adjustments to individual students	Assess each student’s proficiency and development in the Malay language. Tailor language to fit various contexts. Provide students with appropriate Malay language input.	Uniform solutions are ineffective; customisation is essential for success.
5.	Role-modelling	Actively engage both languages and inspire the students to do the same. Offer students the flexibility to use English when unfamiliar vocabulary arises in Malay.	As a bilingual mediator representing the local community and culture. As a fluent speaker of both Malay and English, the instructor offers valuable language expertise that international students can depend on with confidence.

B. *Participants’ Foreign Language Learning Experiences*

Table 4 presents the students’ responses regarding their experiences in learning Malay, which were notably positive. Six items reflect a very high FLLE, showcasing exceptional confidence and proficiency. Most participants found learning Malay interesting (M = 4.71), they liked the atmosphere of the Malay classes (M = 4.57), and they wanted to concentrate on studying Malay more than any other topic (M = 4.46). Items 3 and 4, where they always look forward to Malay classes and enjoy learning Malay, shared a mean score of 4.27. Item 5, which states that they would like to have more Malay lessons at the university (M = 4.21), also represents a high score, but it is lower than the scores for the other items.

TABLE 4  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Items	Foreign Language Learning Experiences (FLLE)	N	Sum	Mean (M)	Std.Deviation	Level
1	I like the atmosphere of my Malay classes.	63	288	4.57	.797	Very high
2	I find learning Malay interesting.	63	297	4.71	.991	Very high
3	I always look forward to Malay classes.	63	269	4.27	1.153	Very high
4	I enjoy learning Malay.	63	269	4.27	1.322	Very high
5	I would like to have more Malay lessons at the university.	63	265	4.21	1.109	Very high
6	I think time passes faster while studying Malay.	63	168	2.67	1.459	Moderate
7	If my lecturer gives an optional assignment in Malay, I would volunteer to do it.	63	206	3.27	1.081	High
8	I want to spend a lot of time studying Malay.	63	178	2.83	1.651	Moderate
9	I want to study Malay even if I am not required to do so.	63	230	3.65	1.393	High
10	I want to concentrate on studying Malay more than any other topic.	63	281	4.46	1.366	Very high
11	If a Malay course were offered in the future, I would like to take it.	63	230	3.65	1.526	High
12	I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning Malay.	63	230	3.65	1.526	High
13	Compared to my classmates, I think I study Malay relatively hard.	63	239	3.79	1.439	High
Overall Mean				3.85		High

Five items scored a high FLLE, demonstrating positive engagement and understanding. One notable item is item 13; compared to my classmates, I study Malay relatively hard (M = 3.79). Three other items share a mean score of 3.65: item 9, “I want to study Malay even if I am not required to do so”, item 11, “If a Malay course were offered in the future, I would like to take it”, and item 12, “I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning Malay.” Two items indicate a moderate learning experience, suggesting room for improvement and enhancement. “I want to spend a lot of time studying Malay” (M = 2.83), and “I think time passes faster while studying Malay” (M = 2.67).

Table 5 illustrates the effect size of students’ exam grades (EG) attributed to their FLLE. Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) quantifies the strength of the relationship between FLLE and international students’ EG. It indicates how much variability in EG can be attributed to their FLLE. The results in Table 5 indicate varying effect sizes for the FLLE items, which correspond to different percentages of EG. Notably, large effect sizes are observed for Item 4, “I enjoy learning Malay”, at 15%, and Item 8, “I want to spend a lot of time studying Malay”, at 17%. Thus, the FLLE accounts for a significant portion of the variability in EG.

Most items related to the FLLE show medium effect sizes, specifically items 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12, with effect sizes ranging from 6% to 12%. Notably, item 7, which states, “If my lecturer gives an optional assignment in Malay, I will volunteer to do it”, demonstrates the highest effect size in this group at 12%. The FLLE accounts for moderate variability in EG. The other five items yield eta-squared values between 3% and 5%, interpreted as small effect sizes. The items with the smallest effect size, 3%, are item 3, “I always look forward to Malay classes”, and item 13, “Compared to my classmates, I think I study Malay relatively hard”.

TABLE 5  
ETA-SQUARED INTERPRETATION

Items	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ )	Eta-squared Interpretation
	Foreign Language Learning Experiences (FLLE)	Exam Grades (EG)	Point Estimate	Percentage of variance
1	I like the atmosphere of my Malay classes.	1	.051	5%
2	I find learning Malay interesting.	2	.057	5%
3	I always look forward to Malay classes.	3	.032	3%
4	I enjoy learning Malay.	4	.155	15%
5	I would like to have more Malay lessons at the university.	5	.096	9%
6	I think time passes faster while studying Malay.	6	.090	9%
7	If my lecturer gives an optional assignment in Malay, I would volunteer to do it.	7	.129	12%
8	I want to spend a lot of time studying Malay.	8	.172	17%
9	I want to study Malay even if I am not required to do so.	9	.066	6%
10	I want to concentrate on studying Malay more than any other topic.	10	.053	5%
11	If a Malay course were offered in the future, I would like to take it.	11	.086	8%
12	I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning Malay.	12	.089	8%
13	Compared to my classmates, I think I study Malay relatively hard.	13	.036	3%
Average EG			.193	

## V. DISCUSSION

The instructor in this study opted for a flexible language use model over a language separation model, influenced by the diverse backgrounds of the international students. According to Alshehri (2022), prior language learning experiences are crucial for motivation; however, the participants in the Malay Course lacked this background. Research has shown similarities in bilingual practices across various contexts (Abu Bakar, 2013; Nasir & Hamzah, 2014; Chou, 2021; Palviainen et al., 2016; Han & Park, 2017). The instructor's experience with bilingual methods effectively helps explain concepts to international students.

In contrast to Zakaria and Abdullah (2014), who found that the initial stages of language instruction heavily depended on translating from English to Malay, the instructor in this study deliberately avoided direct translation methods. This approach was rooted in her observation that students tended to wait passively for English translations. Learners' attitudes toward foreign language learning are crucial (Taguchi et al., 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2012). Tuah (2018) also highlights the detrimental effects of direct translation on international students' mastery of the Malay language, specifically in the critical areas of phonology and syntax.

We used the five bilingual thematic categories from Palviainen et al. (2016) to address the first research question: "How can an instructor effectively navigate bilingual practices while teaching Malay to international students?". These categories include flexible language use, responsible code-switching, contextual support, individual adjustments, and role modelling. This approach helps students recall everyday Malay vocabulary and enhances their language skills through role-playing and code-switching between Malay and English. Code-switching is now an advanced linguistic skill demonstrating a speaker's sensitivity to language structure (Kramsch, 2014; Shin, 2018).

In the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course, contextual and linguistic support involves strategies like body language, contextual vocabulary, verbal instructions, and word repetition. The instructor tailors bilingual practices to individual student needs, emphasising that no one method suits all learners. Teaching a multilingual group demands flexibility and creativity. During role-playing and presentations, the instructor facilitates and encourages students to use English to clarify unfamiliar Malay vocabulary, providing meanings in both languages. These values are often subconscious, shaped by personal experiences and past learning, and deeply affected by contextual factors.

We gathered insights into WH questions related to the instructor's bilingual practices, primarily through detailed observations during tutorial activities, which resonates with the findings of Jupiter et al. (2021). The rationale for the bilingual practices by the instructor arises from three main themes: the nature of these practices (what), descriptions of their purposes (why), and the reasons the instructor implements them (how). Critical reflection and examination of instructors' practices are essential for professional development (Song, 2015; Tuah, 2018). The approach encourages teachers to reflect on their practices and consider their language use from different perspectives (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Previous research has consistently highlighted similar findings (Alshahrani, 2016; Sahin, 2020; Course & Saka, 2021; Sandu & Oxbrow, 2021; Sadoughi et al., 2023). Participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences learning Malay as a foreign language, as their expectations were met and exceeded.

In an academic setting, students' success in the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course, taught as a foreign language, is fundamentally linked to their performance on the exam. Consequently, the second research question, "How do the instructor's bilingual practices affect the language learning experiences for international students?" underscores EG's crucial role in shaping students' motivation, thereby establishing proficiency in the Malay language as an essential goal. The overall mean score for FLLE is an impressive 3.85, demonstrating high engagement and understanding among students learning Malay. Notably, no items fell within the low range of 1.00 to 2.00, underscoring the absence of significant challenges typically associated with low language acquisition. The score contradicts Subekti's 2018 study, which found no significant link between foreign language learning and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the average EG for international students is 0.193, yielding a substantial Eta-squared effect size of 19%. This finding reveals that FLLE has a significant influence on exam performance, accounting for considerable variability in grades. The Eta-squared value reinforces the assertion that the selected FLLE items have an impact on the academic success of international students.

This current study presents a range of significant implications that deserve attention. The instructor implemented a flexible bilingual approach to teaching. This method aligns with the objectives of teaching and learning Malay as a foreign language, meeting the specific programs designed for international students at most public universities in Malaysia. We view this research as pioneering, as it explores students' language learning experiences from a global perspective. The trend of learning Malay as a foreign language marks a significant development in Asian languages, which have predominantly focused on English. Language serves as a gateway to understanding the culture of its speakers, and through this process, international students also gain insights into Malay culture, which may differ from their own.

Dörnyei (2019) notes that the third primary dimension of the L2 Motivational Self-System, known as the L2 Learning Experience, has not received significant attention in research over the past decade, partly due to the focus on more generalised motives. Some previous studies have examined the reciprocal influence between various factors or have measured it as a subgroup (e.g., Taguchi et al., 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2012). In specific learner populations, the

components have shown inconsistent correlations with L2 achievement (Moskovsky et al., 2016), and there has been a failure to consider relational and biographical influences (Henry & Liu, 2023).

Through a mixed methods approach, we critically examined the vital role of a teacher in implementing bilingual pedagogy at a public university, thereby filling an essential gap in the limited data surrounding effective teaching practices in higher education. This paper highlights the significant challenges educators face when teaching international students using a bilingual framework. As Baker (2009) compellingly highlights, we cannot underestimate the complexities of a teacher's role. He asserts that "teachers need to be positive about students' languages and backgrounds, responsive to students' language needs, and celebrate students' linguistic and cultural diversity" (p. 114). The teacher's role underscores the necessity of embracing linguistic diversity as a cornerstone of effective teaching.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the effect of bilingual practices on the foreign language learning experiences of international students at the university is remarkably positive. With an exceptional average score of 3.85 out of 4.00, students demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the Malay language. The impressive success rates in the course offered as a foreign language are strongly correlated with students' exam grades. The relationship yields a substantial Eta-squared of 19%, indicating a large effect size. Such findings underscore the significant effect of bilingual practices on foreign language learning experiences of international students in higher education, highlighting their educational journey.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size at our study site was limited, as only one instructor teaches the university's Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course. Like other participant observation studies, we collect data from several teaching sessions and the group's activities inside the lecture hall. To enhance future research, we strongly recommend that researchers explore universities with at least two instructors for similar courses. This approach would allow for valuable qualitative comparisons of bilingual practices, providing deeper insights into teaching methodologies. The findings from our quantitative data fall short of generalising to the broader population of international students enrolled in the same course at other universities, given that our participants were solely students from outside Southeast Asia. A comparative study of non-Asian and Asian students in the Communicative Malay Language Proficiency Course could provide valuable insights into language learning experiences across cultures.

Although research has examined bilingual practices in schools (e.g., Palviainen et al., 2016), few studies have investigated foreign language learning experiences at the university level (Garcia & Wei, 2014). The third primary dimension of the L2 Motivational Self-System—Language Learning Experience—deserves far more attention in academic research. We propose a targeted study that delves exclusively into this dimension to address this oversight. By concentrating on the Language Learning Experience, the research will provide invaluable insights into its significance and impact, enriching our understanding of effective language education at the university level.

When international students dedicate themselves to mastering the Malay language, they not only enhance their academic performance but also unlock new opportunities for growth. Learning foreign languages offers significant benefits that go beyond just meeting graduation requirements. Speaking multiple languages is valuable in an increasingly competitive global job market. Multilingualism significantly boosts the employability of international students, positioning them favourably in the job markets of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia. Embracing the Malay language can be a game-changer for their careers, making them standout candidates in diverse and dynamic workplaces.

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