



Article

Factors Influencing Malay Language Learning among Malaysian Chinese Independent Secondary School Students

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A B S T R A C T

The Malaysian Chinese Independent Secondary Schools (MCISS) strive to develop students proficient in three languages: Chinese, English, and Malay. Despite the national status of the Malay language, learners in these schools consistently demonstrate low proficiency in it. A key reason for this shortfall is the students' limited interest in learning the language. This study explores the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon, including students' attitudes toward the language, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition. Employing a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 4,602 Senior II MCISS students through convenience sampling. Pearson correlation analysis indicated positive relationships between language learning interest and variables such as language attitude, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement, and National Education Policy and UEC recognition. Multiple regression analysis revealed that motivation, attitude, classroom learning, family engagement, the National Education Policy, and UEC recognition collectively accounted for 32.2% of the variance in students' interest in learning Malay. The study's implications extend to policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers, suggesting the integration of culturally relevant and engaging teaching strategies, stronger home-school partnerships, and policy adjustments to strengthen Malay language learning motivation among MCISS students.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, cultural exchange, and national unity. In Malaysia, the Malay language functions as both the official and national language, serving as a key medium to bridge interaction among its ethnically diverse population (Chew, 2020). Proficiency in the Malay language is therefore not only an academic requirement but also a critical skill for social integration, economic participation, and civic engagement (Othman, Ahmad, & Esa, 2022).

The Malaysian Chinese Independent Secondary Schools (MCISS) form an alternative education system established in 1954 by the

United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) to safeguard and advance Chinese-medium education (MCISS, 2021). Within this framework, Chinese is the primary language of instruction, while Malay is taught as a compulsory subject under a multilingual education policy (Tannenbaum, Michalovich, & Shonamy, 2020). However, the limited use of Malay beyond the classroom in predominantly monolingual environments may reduce opportunities for authentic language practice, influencing students' interest, motivation, and overall proficiency (Mahamod, et al., 2016).

In a multilingual nation where language competence is linked to academic success, career

opportunities, and social cohesion, understanding the factors affecting Malay language learning in MCISS is both relevant and necessary. Insights from such research can enhance language acquisition, ultimately supporting Malaysia's broader goals of unity and intercultural understanding (Chew, 2020).

For decades, Dong Zong and individual MCISS institutions have strived to nurture students with strong trilingual proficiency in Chinese, English, and Malay. Despite considerable initiatives by MCISS administrators and Dong Zong to enhance Malay language instruction, students' mastery of the language continues to fall short (Ibrahim, 2021; Wang, et al., 2018). According to the results released by Dong Zong in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) year 2021, 414 (6.1%) candidates failed, and 4,229 (61.88%) out of 6,834 candidates gained grades C+, C, D, and E in the Malay language. This indicated that the achievement of the MCISS in the Malay Language is low on average.

Research by scholars like Mohd Isa (2014) also confirms that Malay language achievement among these students is generally unsatisfactory. Their study evident problems in mastering the Malay language in students' speech, particularly through frequent grammatical errors especially prefix and suffix. Furthermore, the teaching techniques employed by teachers indicate that students also face challenges in writing. This situation arises because some students perceive the Malay language as not particularly important, considering its use relevant only for casual communication in informal settings. They also regard Malay as a language that does not need to be mastered in daily life. Consequently, they believe that lacking proficiency in the language will not cause any significant problems. Furthermore, there is a view that mastering Malay language skills is necessary solely for the purpose of passing examination.

One of the core reasons for this underachievement is the students' limited interest in learning Malay. This lack of enthusiasm stems from multiple intertwined factors. This study explores these contributing dimensions and proposes strategies to overcome the learning barriers. These factors include student-specific elements (such as attitude and motivation) (Gardner, 1985), school-related aspects (e.g., pedagogical approaches and

school environment), sociocultural influences (e.g., the impact of L1, community norms, religion) (Alrabai, 2016), and family support (Lu, 2021). National frameworks — such as language and education policies—may also affect student learning outcomes (Hunt, 2015).

The study focuses on MCISS students' persistent struggle in acquiring proficiency in the Malay language, with specific emphasis on learning interest. Despite efforts by Dong Zong and MCISS institutions to promote trilingual proficiency, students exhibit low performance in Malay language assessments, reflecting a lack of interest and motivation toward learning the language. Factors contributing to this include negative attitudes, limited family support, challenges in teaching techniques, and overarching influences of language policies. This study aims to investigate these factors to enhance students' interest and success in mastering the Malay language.

Language attitudes are evaluative reactions—encompassing beliefs, emotions, and behavioral intentions—toward language varieties and their speakers (Dragojevic, 2016). These attitudes manifest as positive, negative, or neutral assessments. Students' attitudes significantly influence their willingness to learn new languages (Alshihry, 2023; Baharum, et al., 2024; Orfan, 2020; Xin & Yap, 2025; Yuan et al., 2023). For example, Yuan et al. (2023) found a strong correlation between learners' positive attitudes and their preference for English-medium instruction due to both instrumental and integrative motivation. In addition, they indicated that the socialising effects of English-medium instruction strengthened the students' positive attitudes. Similarly, Alshihry (2023) observed that youth today tend to view globally dominant languages more favorably.

Students at MCISS are often perceived as having negative attitudes toward the Malay language (eNanyang, 10 January 2023; eNanyang, 19 September 2022). Similar findings were reported by Konaen, Abd Rahman, and Roslan (2019), who observed that FELDA students displayed disinterest and a lack of motivation in learning their language. In contrast, studies by Mahad, Magesvaran, and Hamzah (2021) and Ujai and Wan Mohamad (2017) reported opposite results, indicating that the studied students exhibited positive attitudes toward learning Malay. There is only one research

has been done on the MCISS's students' attitudes, which is Zubir et al. (2018), who found that all respondents in the Junior Satu Loyalty class in a MCISS have a positive attitude toward learning the Malay language.

According to Gardner (1985), motivation is a goal-oriented construct that involves not only the effort to learn but also a strong desire and a positive disposition toward the target language. Guerin et al. (2011) further describe motivation as the psychological process that gives behavior purpose and direction, driving actions ranging from satisfying basic needs to acquiring knowledge. Scholars and educators alike recognize motivation as a crucial component that shapes how effectively and enjoyably a language is learned (Dewaele & Meftah, 2024). It is widely accepted in the literature that motivation significantly influences both the rate and the success of second or foreign language acquisition (Azar & Tanggaraju, 2020; Curle et al., 2024).

Most theoretical perspectives agree that without motivation, other elements of language acquisition may fall short (Dörnyei, 1998; Wang & Liu, 2024;). In the Malaysian context, several studies have shown that students are generally motivated to learn the Malay language in classroom settings (Ganesan & Wan Muhammad, 2021; Rahmad & Mahamod, 2021; Ujai & Wan Mohamad, 2017). However, Zubir, Kamaruddin, and Sha'ri (2018) found that the motivation of MCISS students was low, as evidenced by their lack of interest in reading books in the Malay language. This contrast suggests a gap in understanding the factors contributing to the comparatively low motivation levels among MCISS students, despite evidence of generally positive motivation trends in other Malaysian student populations.

Instructional methods refer to the structured strategies, techniques, and procedures that educators employ to facilitate student learning. They represent the practical application of pedagogical principles, encompassing how content is delivered, how learners are engaged, and how understanding is assessed (Killen, 2023). Research by Oga-Baldwin and Nakata (2017) emphasized that learner engagement during class activities is a key variable in the long-term development of language skills. Enjoyable and interactive instruction tends to increase students' interest in the

subject. Findings from Mohd Salleh and Othman's (2024) study revealed the importance of teachers' good use of verbal and non-verbal language in influencing student motivation to learn the Malay Language. Yamirudeng and Osman (2019); Yamirudeng and Osman (2018); Abdul Radzak and Mohamed Noh (2016) found that the students in their study favoured the teaching and learning conducted by their Malay language teachers, thus motivating them to learn and master the language.

Conversely, when teachers adopt rigid or authoritarian teaching styles, it can adversely impact learners' drive and interest. Pedagogical strategies that are overly teacher-centered often discourage active participation and diminish students' enthusiasm (Abbas, Ehsan, & ul Haq, 2023). Gan et al. (2021) also highlighted the indirect effects of instructor feedback on students' satisfaction and exam performance. Although students may enter the classroom with a high level of enthusiasm, frequent exposure to traditional assessment formats—such as constant questioning, test-taking, and performance evaluations—can result in academic stress. This may explain the lack of enthusiasm observed among many MCISS learners during Malay language classes. For this reason, this study seeks to examine how Senior II students perceive the teaching and learning of Malay in their classrooms.

Another factor influencing students' difficulties in acquiring the Malay language is family engagement. According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016), family engagement refers to the intentional and systematic involvement of families in activities and programs that support children's development, learning, and well-being. When parents provide a supportive learning environment—such as engaging in reading activities, discussing school matters, and maintaining high academic expectations—students are more likely to perform well (Turhan, 2022). Choi et al. (2024) further emphasized that emotional support and access to learning resources from parents contribute to more robust motivational profiles in learners. In contrast, findings from Kolancali et al. (2021) showed that parents from underprivileged backgrounds are less involved in language and literacy activities and tend to use their mother tongue, such as Turkish, in family interactions, which limits exposure to the national language.

Nevertheless, some studies indicate that parents are not always actively involved in supporting their children's efforts to learn the Malay language (Ansit et al., 2024; Ismail & Zakaria, 2019). A lack of learning resources and limited Malay-language materials at home often correlates with decreased learner motivation. This underscores the significance of parental support in language learning. Consequently, this study aims to investigate how family engagement influence Malay language learning interest among Senior II MCISS students.

Language policy can be understood as the collectively determined decisions regarding the choice and use of specific language forms or varieties within a community, together with the ideologies that underpin such choices. It is reflected both in daily communicative practices and in official measures such as laws, regulations, and institutional directives (Shohamy, 2006). In the education sector, language policy usually regulates the allocation of instructional time across languages and determines whether subjects are taught in one or multiple languages (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). While certain bilingual education models are intended to shift learners toward monolingual proficiency as they advance through the school system, others aim to maintain and strengthen bilingual or multilingual abilities, as demonstrated in Malaysian Chinese Independent Secondary Schools (MCISS) (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2018).

Under Malaysia's National Education Policy, MCISS are classified as private institutions because they do not fully comply with the Education Act 1996 or the government's prescribed language policies (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). These schools primarily adopt Chinese as the language of instruction, diverging from the state requirement that prioritizes Malay. As a result, many of their students sit for the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), a qualification that has yet to gain official government approval. For more than a decade, Dong Zong has actively campaigned for UEC recognition, asserting that it would provide MCISS graduates with equal standing to those from public schools in terms of credentials and opportunities.

Nevertheless, the UEC remains unrecognized mainly because it does not fulfill key conditions, particularly the requirement for students to pass Malay Language and History in the Malaysian

Certificate of Education (MCE). These two subjects are seen as fundamental to strengthening patriotism and national identity (Halid, 2022). Furthermore, not all MCISS include the MCE in their curriculum, creating further misalignment with the Ministry's expectations. The heavy reliance of the UEC on the Taiwanese educational framework has also generated criticism for its possible effects on social cohesion (Khalid, 2022; Siti Hafidah, 2021). As Imran and Natsir (2024) caution, language policies that promote exclusivity may intensify divisions in education and society, thus warranting deeper examination of their influence on students' language acquisition.

Despite the intensity of these policy debates, little empirical evidence exists on how the National Education Policy and the unresolved status of UEC recognition affect MCISS students' interest and proficiency in learning Malay. This lack of research underscores the need for systematic studies on how language policy outcomes shape educational experiences and linguistic integration within Malaysia's multilingual context.

Most existing studies on challenges in learning the Malay language have concentrated on students in government primary and secondary schools. While such research offers important insights, it does not adequately capture the situation of Malaysian Chinese Independent Secondary Schools (MCISS), which follow an alternative curriculum outside the national education system. Learners in these schools encounter distinct linguistic, cultural, and motivational contexts, as opportunities to use Malay are limited both in classroom settings and in daily life. The lack of focused research on MCISS students has resulted in an incomplete picture of the factors influencing their interest in learning Malay. These factors may include learner attitudes, motivation, teaching strategies, learning strategies, family engagement, as well as broader policy issues such as the National Education Policy and the recognition status of the UEC. Addressing this gap is crucial to developing more effective approaches that can promote interest in Malay language learning across diverse educational settings.

From the aims of study, the research objectives are:

1. To find out the levels of students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement,

National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests.

2. To examine the relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests.
3. To investigate the factors (language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement, and the National Education Policy, and UEC recognition) that influence the learning interests of students in the Malay language.

From the research objectives, two null hypotheses have been developed.

H₀₁: There are no significant relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy, and UEC recognition, and learning interests.

H₀₂: Students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy, and UEC recognition are not predictors of students' learning interests in the Malay Language.

METHODS

Samples

The population in the study is 12,723 senior II students throughout the country (Dong Zong Information and Archives Bureau, 2021). The researcher selected the Senior II students by using a purposive sampling method. Those who fulfilled the four criteria were required to answer the questionnaire. The criteria were that they must be Malaysian citizens, Chinese ethnic, Senior II students in MCISS, and have sat for Malay language in both the Malaysia Certificate of Education examination (MCE) and Unified Examination of Certificate (UEC). The researcher managed to collect 4,602 respondents or 36.17% of the population in the study, which exceeds the G-power and sample size set by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), and the relevant informed consent was obtained from those respondents.

Instrument

The instrument of study is a questionnaire that

is divided into two parts: part I and part II which is subdivided into six subsections. Part I of the instrument focused on respondents' demographic background and included five items: gender, father's educational level, mother's educational level, household monthly income, and interest in learning Malay. Part II consisted of items adapted from previously validated scales. Subsections A and B drew upon Gardner's (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), with modifications made to suit the objectives of this study. Examples of items measuring language attitudes include "I feel comfortable when I have to speak Malay" and "Studying Malay is important because it helps me interact more easily with Malay speakers." Sample items for motivation include "I really enjoy learning Malay every day" and "If I had the choice, I would spend most of my time learning Malay."

Subsection C consisted of 10 items on instructional methods adapted from Mohamed Zohomi and Mahamod (2023), such as "My teacher uses a variety of teaching strategies in teaching Malay" and "The teacher frequently integrates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) during Malay lessons." In Subsection D, 10 items related to learning strategies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing were adapted from Mahamod, Ab. Ghani, and Wan Mohammad (2016). Sample items include "I like to speak in Malay with my classmates" and "I enjoy reading Malay books."

For family engagement (Subsection E), 12 items were adapted from Palaniappen (2009) to assess parental involvement, for example, "My parents buy Malay reference materials for me" and "My parents reward me when I achieve good results in Malay." Finally, 10 items addressing the National Education Policy and UEC recognition (Subsection G) were adapted from Muslim and Samian (2012), such as "The National Education Policy that designates Malay as the medium of instruction in schools is a fair policy" and "It is important for the Malaysian government to recognize the UEC." All the subsections applied five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 indicating the disagreement to agreement.

The instrument of the study has been reviewed by three education experts from Dong Zong who gave some insights and comments on the items and scale. To gain the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test has been carried out at an MCISS in Kuala Lumpur among 50 senior II students.

Analysis showed the Alpha Cronbach value at 0.921, indicating the instrument is reliable and can be used in the real study.

Research Procedure

With the cooperation of Dong Zong, the researcher collected the data from 63 MCISS across the country ranged from July to September 2023 which were the second terms of the MCISS' schooling session. No summative assessment was carried out during the period. The researcher distributed the questionnaire via Google Forms to all Senior II students through the school administrators. Before answering the questionnaire, they need to submit their consent letter and meet four criteria. This will disqualify those were not citizens and not sat for MCE and UEC. Figure 1 below reveals the research process.

A total of 4,834 responses were collected for this study. Following data cleaning, cases with

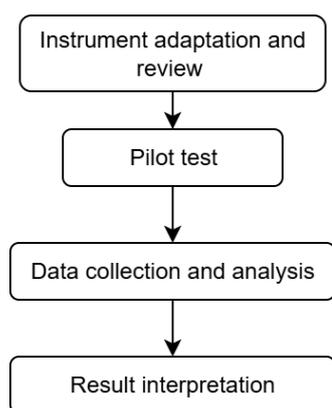


Figure 1: Research Process

missing or incomplete responses were removed. Data normality was then assessed using skewness and kurtosis values generated through SPSS. The results indicated the skewness of 0.537 and a kurtosis of 1.68, demonstrating that the data were normally distributed. Outliers were also identified and removed ($N = 20$), resulting in a final dataset suitable for further analysis. The final sample size is 4,602 students or 36.17% of the population in the study, which exceeds the G-power and sample size set by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), and the relevant informed consent was obtained from those respondents.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyses the data by using the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were utilised to profile respondents' demographics and levels of

the variables, while inferential analyses addressed two research questions. Normality testing confirmed the data met parametric assumptions. Pearson's correlation was applied to explore associations between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies, family involvement, the National Education Policy with UEC recognition, and learning interest. This analysis measured the strength and direction of relationships but did not infer causality. Multiple regression was subsequently conducted to identify predictors of MCISS students' interest in learning Malay, modelling the combined influence of several independent variables on a single dependent variable.

Profile of Respondents

The survey involved a total of 4,602 respondents. The number of females (2544, 55.3%) was higher than that of males (2058, 44.7%). In terms of educational levels, majority student fathers (1,646人, 35.8%) received higher secondary with MCE or O level qualification, followed by lower secondary with SRP in national secondary schools or Junior UEC in MCISS (617, 13.4%), while Diploma or Higher Senior of Education (HSC) or Senior UEC holders were 617 fathers (13.4%); those graduated with Bachelor's degree were 588 fathers (12.8%), but there were 95 students (2.1%) did not provide their fathers' educational levels.

On the other hand, nearly half of the student's mothers (2016, 43.8%) are holders of the secondary school levels with MCE, followed by SRP or Junior UEC qualification (632, 13.7%), next was HSC or senior UEC or diploma holders (804, 17.5%); the number of graduates was 613 (13.3%), but 61 students (1.3%) did not provide their mother's academic qualifications.

In terms of family income, more than half (2,513, 54.6%) of the parents of the students have a monthly income ranging from RM5,001 to RM7,500; followed by families with an income of RM2,500 to RM5,000; on the contrary, the lowest income is less than RM2,500 (95 families, 2.1%). When asked about their learning interest in the Malay language, the majority (1,889, 41%) of students were uncertain about their interest, 1,329 (28.9%) students are not interested, and only 81 students (1.8%) are very interested.

RESULT

Table 1. Demography of Respondents

| Demography (n=4,602) | Descriptive | F | % |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|------|
| Gender | Males | 2058 | 44.7 |
| | Females | 2544 | 55.3 |
| Educational level of fathers | Primary Schools | 598 | 13.0 |
| | SRP/Junior UEC | 836 | 18.2 |
| | MCE | 1646 | 35.8 |
| | HSC | 617 | 13.4 |
| | Senior UEC/ Diploma | | |
| | Bachelor's degree | 588 | 12.8 |
| | Master degree | 198 | 4.3 |
| | Doctorate | 25 | 0.4 |
| | No answer | 95 | 2.1 |
| | Educational level of mothers | Primary Schools | 332 |
| SRP/Junior UEC | | 632 | 13.7 |
| MCE | | 2016 | 43.8 |
| HSC Senior UEC/ Diploma | | 804 | 17.5 |
| Bachelor's degree | | 613 | 13.3 |
| Master degree | | 134 | 2.9 |
| Doctorate | | 10 | 0.2 |
| No answer | | 61 | 1.3 |
| Household monthly income | < RM2,500 | 95 | 2.1 |
| | RM2,500 – RM5,000 | 801 | 17.4 |
| | RM5,001 – RM7,500 | 2513 | 54.6 |
| | RM7,501 – RM10,000 | 680 | 14.8 |
| | > RM10,000 | 513 | 11.1 |
| Learning interest | Very uninterested | 330 | 7.2 |
| | Uninterested | 1329 | 28.9 |
| | Uncertain | 1889 | 41.0 |
| | Interested | 973 | 21.1 |
| | Very interested | 81 | 1.8 |

Table 2 shows that two items recorded the highest mean scores, namely national education policies and UEC recognition ($M = 3.700$, $SD = 0.468$) and teachers' instructional methods ($M = 3.546$, $SD = 0.536$). These findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions of these aspects. The remaining five items were rated at a moderate level, ranked as follows: motivation ($M = 3.368$, $SD = 0.562$), learning strategies ($M = 3.097$, $SD = 0.330$), family engagement ($M = 2.879$, $SD = 0.394$), learning interest in Malay ($M = 2.814$, $SD = 0.904$), and language attitude ($M = 2.779$, $SD = 0.401$). Overall, Malay language learning among MCISS students was assessed at a moderate level ($M = 3.172$, $SD = 0.514$). However, the comparatively low score for language attitude suggests an area that requires particular attention.

RQ1: Are there any relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests?

Through the analysis of Pearson correlation, Table 3 showed that students' language attitude, motivation, teachers' instructional methods, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition have relationships with students' learning interest in the Malay language. There are weak positive relationships between variables, but r value in the range of 4 to 6 represents a medium positive relationship between the two variables, that is, relationships between students' motivation to learn Malay language and their language attitude ($r =$

Table 2. Levels of students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional method, learning strategies, family engagement, national educational policy, and learning interests

| Variables | M | SD | Levels |
|---|-------|-------|--------|
| Language attitude | 2.799 | .401 | Medium |
| Motivation | 3.368 | .562 | Medium |
| Instructional method | 3.546 | .536 | High |
| Learning strategies | 3.097 | .330 | Medium |
| Family engagement | 2.879 | .394 | Medium |
| National Education Policy & UEC recognition | 3.700 | .468 | High |
| Learning interest | 2.814 | .904 | Medium |
| Average Score | 3.172 | 0.514 | Medium |

Table 3. Relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests

| | n=4602 | Language attitude | Intrinsic Motivation | Teachers' Teaching | Learning strategies | Family engagement | NEP & UEC recognition | Learning Interest |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Language attitude | Pearson-r Sig. | 1 | | | | | | |
| Motivation | Pearson-r Sig. | .555 .000** | 1 | | | | | |
| Teachers' teaching | Pearson-r Sig. | .328 .000** | .422 .000** | 1 | | | | |
| Learning strategies | Pearson-r Sig. | .468 .000** | .412 .000** | .389 .000** | 1 | | | |
| Family engagement | Pearson-r Sig. | .345 .000** | .234 .000** | .236 .000** | .433 .000** | 1 | | |
| National Education policy & UEC recognition | Pearson-r Sig. | .201 .000** | .306 .000** | .303 .000** | .306 .000** | .169 .000** | 1 | |
| Learning interest | Pearson-r Sig. | .457 .000** | .516 .000** | .203 .000** | .186 .000** | .086 .000** | .117 .000** | 1 |

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

.555, $p = 0.000$), teacher's teaching and students' motivation to learn Malay language ($r = .422$, $p = 0.000$), students' learning strategies and their language attitude ($r = .468$, $p = 0.000$), students' learning strategies and their motivation to learn Malay language ($r = .412$, $p = 0.000$), the family engagement and students' learning strategies ($r = .433$, $p = 0.000$), students' learning interest in the Malay language and language attitude ($r = .457$, $p = 0.000$), motivations and learning interest in the Malay language ($r = .516$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H_0 reads as "There are no significant relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests" is rejected.

RQ2: Do students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition predict the learning

interests of students in the Malay Language?

Several key assumptions guided the use of multiple linear regression analysis in this study. First, a linear relationship was assumed to exist between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Second, each regression model involved a single dependent variable. Accordingly, the research hypotheses were organized into five models, with learning interest as the dependent variable while language attitude, motivation, instructional method, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition serving as the independent variables. Third, the assumption of normally distributed residuals was examined using normal P-P plots of standardized residuals. As shown in Figure 2, the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Finally, the assumption of no multicollinearity among independent variables was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

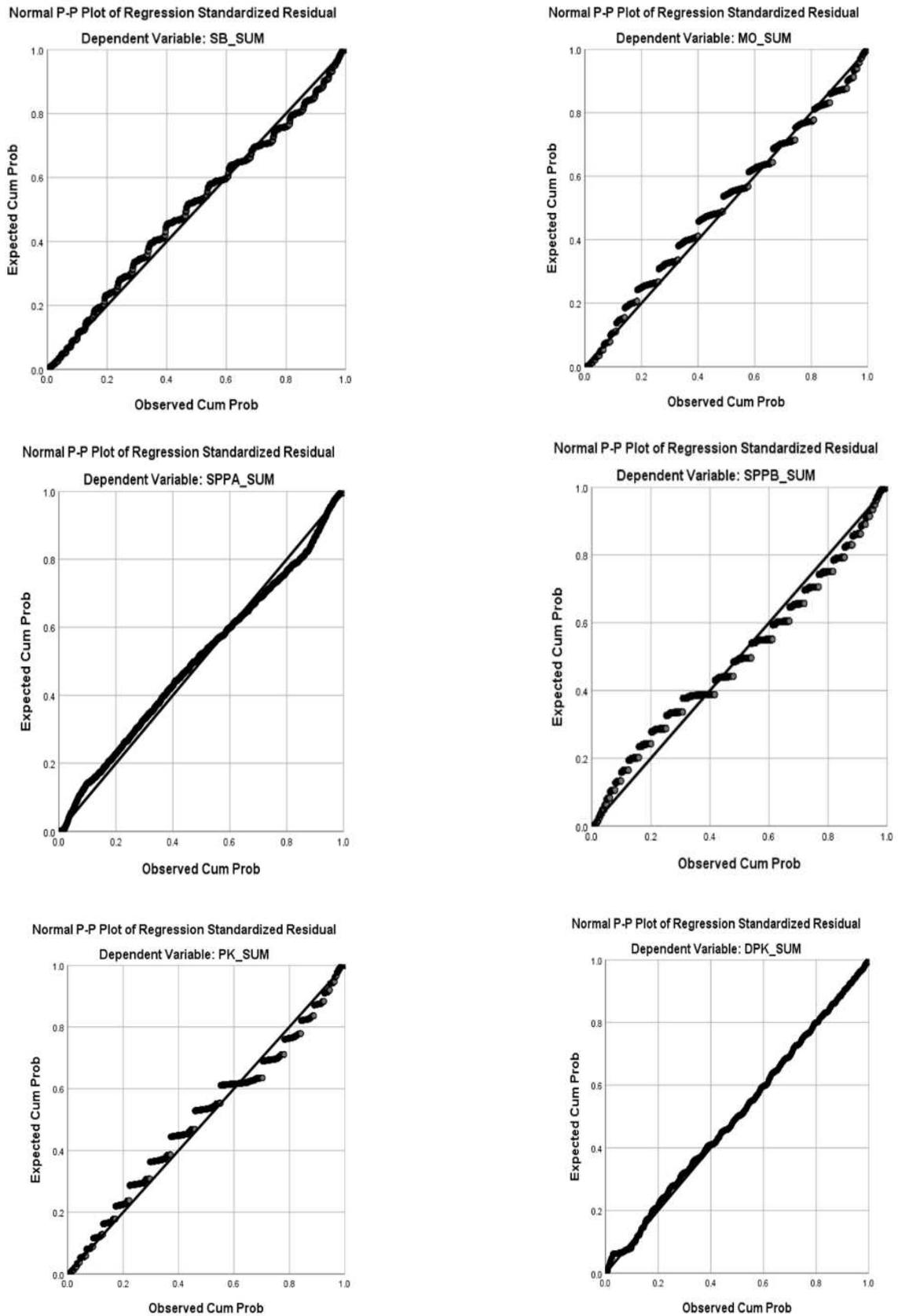


Figure 2. Normal P–P plots of regression standardized residuals

Notes. SB_SUM – language attitude, MO_SUM – motivation, SPPA_SUM – instructional method, SPPB_SUM – learning strategies, PK_SUM – family engagement, DPK_SUM – National Education Policy & UEC recognition

Table 4. Regression Models for Predictors

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | SE | R Square Change | F Change | Sig. F Change |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|--------|-----------------|----------|---------------|
| 1. Motivation | .516 ^a | .266 | .266 | .77725 | .266 | 1669.556 | 0.000** |
| 2. Motivation and language attitude | .555 ^b | .308 | .308 | .75475 | .042 | 279.277 | 0.000** |
| 3. Motivation, language attitude, and learning strategies | .564 ^c | .318 | .318 | .74954 | .010 | 65.225 | 0.000** |
| 4. Motivation, language attitude, learning strategies, and family engagement | .568 ^d | .322 | .322 | .74725 | .004 | 29.167 | 0.000** |
| 5. Motivation, language attitude, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy & UEC recognition | .568 ^e | .323 | .322 | .74686 | .001 | 5.852 | 0.016* |

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

The researchers applied stepwise linear regression to evaluate whether students' language attitudes, motivation to learn Malay, teachers' teaching, students' learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition predicted their learning interest in the Malay language. Table 4 shows the model summary of students' learning interest in the Malay language. Around 32.2% of the total variance of students' learning interest in the Malay language is explained by the factors of students' language attitude, motivation to learn the Malay language, teacher's teaching, student's learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition ($R^2 = 0.322$, $F(5,4596)=5.852$, $p<.05$].

In Table 4, the F value of model 1 is 1669.556, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ (sig. = 0.000), which means that there is a significant relationship between students' learning motivation and their learning interest in the Malay language, while the model 2 indicated the F value is 279.277, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ (sig. = 0.000), which means that there is a significant relationship between students' motivation, language attitude and their learning interest in the Malay language. Next, the F value of model 3 is 65.225, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ (sig. = 0.000), which means that there are significant relationships between students' motivation, language attitude, and learning strategies in classrooms and their learning interest in the Malay language. The F value of model 4 is 29.167, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ (sig. = 0.000),

which means that students' motivation, language attitude, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, and learning interest in the Malay language revealed significant relationships. Finally, the F value of Model 5 is 5.852, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ (sig. = 0.000), which means that students' motivation, language attitude, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition showed significant relationships with their learning interest in the Malay language.

Table 5 estimates the measure of each variable's contribution to the model from the Beta values of each independent variable. Larger values indicate that a unit change in the independent variable has a greater effect on the dependent variable. Overall, the Beta values of students' motivation was the highest among all the models at 0.516 (Model 1), 0.379 (Model 2), 0.404 (Model 3), 0.403 (Model 4), and 0.410 (Model 5), On the contrary, the Beta value of National Education Policy and UEC recognition was only -0.032 (model 5). Therefore, students' motivation contributed the most to students' learning interest in the Malay language.

The fitted regression model of the student learning strategies is $SI = MOT.410 + LA.298 - LP.081 - FE .073 - NEP.032$. This means that when students' motivation and language attitude increase by one unit, students' learning interest in the Malay Language is expected to increase by 0.410 and 0.298, respectively. On the contrary, when students increase one unit in the learning strategies in the classroom, the family engagement,

Table 5. Coefficients of Models

| Model | | Unstandardized | | Standardized | |
|-------|---|----------------|------|--------------|----------|
| | | <i>B</i> | SE | Beta | <i>p</i> |
| 1 | (Constant) | .011 | .070 | | .879 |
| | Motivation | .833 | .020 | .516 | .000** |
| 2 | (Constant) | -.805 | .083 | | .000** |
| | Motivation | .612 | .024 | .379 | .000** |
| | Language attitude | .557 | .033 | .246 | .000** |
| 3 | (Constant) | -.222 | .110 | | .043* |
| | Motivation | .652 | .024 | .404 | .000** |
| | Language attitude | .646 | .035 | .286 | .000** |
| | Learning strategies | -.312 | .039 | -.114 | .000** |
| 4 | (Constant) | -.035 | .115 | | .761 |
| | Motivation | .650 | .024 | .403 | .000** |
| | Language attitude | .677 | .035 | .300 | .000** |
| | Learning strategies | -.241 | .041 | -.088 | .000** |
| | Family engagement | -.170 | .032 | -.074 | .000** |
| 5 | (Constant) | .095 | .127 | | .455 |
| | Motivation | .662 | .025 | .410 | .000** |
| | Language attitude | .675 | .035 | .298 | .000** |
| | Learning strategies | -.223 | .041 | -.081 | .000** |
| | Family engagement | -.168 | .032 | -.073 | .000** |
| | National Education Policy & UEC recognition | -.061 | .025 | -.032 | .016* |

** $p < 0.01$. * $p < 0.05$

National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and students' learning interest in the Malay language are expected to decrease by 0.081, 0.073, and 0.032, respectively.

In conclusion, linear multiple regression showed that students' motivation, language attitude, the learning strategies in class, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition contributed 32.2% to their learning interest in the Malay language. Therefore, H02 reads as "Students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition are not predictors of students' learning interests in the Malay Language" was rejected, except instructional methods.

IV. DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that factors such as students' attitudes toward language learning, motivation, teachers' instructional methods, student learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policies and the UEC recognition exhibited weak to moderate positive correlations with students' interest in learning the Malay

language. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the significance of attitudes and motivation in language acquisition (Dewaele et al., 2020; Dörnyei, 2009; Pham, 2021; Wang & Liu, 2024). For instance, Dewaele et al. (2020) identified positive correlations between foreign language enjoyment and learners' attitudes and motivation, while Wang and Liu (2024) reported a positive relationship between language attitudes and extrinsic motivation

Family involvement emerged as a pertinent factor influencing the teaching and learning of the Malay language. Turhan (2022) found that parental engagement, including activities like reading to children, offering learning support, and maintaining high educational expectations, is positively related to children's academic performance. Smith (2020) also noted that parental participation has become a focal point in educational policies across various countries, reshaping the dynamics between families and educational institutions.

The study further indicated a relationship between National Education Policies, UEC recognition, and the teaching and learning of the Malay language among MCISS students. Gorter

and Cenoz (2017) highlighted the direct influence of language policies on curriculum implementation and assessment in multilingual settings. Decisions regarding the medium of instruction significantly affect language learning outcomes, including the duration and intensity of language exposure.

Research on parental involvement in multilingual families underscores effective educational practices such as culturally responsive communication between families and educators (Salinas, 2024), diverse participation in school-related activities such as attendance in parent-teacher conferences to family culture fairs to home literacy events (Coady, 2019), and support for children's learning at home to strengthen family bonds (Choi, et al., 2024).

Multiple regression analysis indicated that students' motivation, language attitudes, learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition collectively accounted for 32.2% of the variance in students' interest in learning the Malay language. Among these, motivation and language attitudes were the most significant contributors, accounting for 41% and 29.8%, respectively. Conversely, learning strategies, family engagement, and national education policies, along with UEC recognition, contributed negatively, with 8.1%, 7.3%, and 3.2%, respectively.

These findings corroborate the perspectives of scholars who identify individual, familial, institutional, and environmental factors as pivotal to academic achievement. The individual dimension encompasses learning attitudes (Alshihry, 2023; Gardner, 1985; Mahad et al., 2021; Orfan, 2020; Ujai & Wan Mohamad, 2017; Yuan et al., 2023) and motivation (Azar & Tanggaraju, 2020; Curle et al., 2024; Gardner, 1985; Mohd Salleh & Othman, 2024; Yamirudeng & Osman, 2018; Yamirudeng & Osman, 2019). The familial aspect involves resources provided by parents, including extracurricular educational opportunities and nurturing environments (Cheng, Wang, & Liu, 2019; Choi, Jung, & No, 2024; Lu, 2021; Turhan, 2022). The institutional component pertains to the quality of education and facilities offered by schools, including teacher-student interactions (Mohd Salleh & Othman, 2024; Yamirudeng & Osman, 2018; Yamirudeng & Osman, 2019). The environmental factor relates to external influences

such as national education and language policies (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017), exemplified by the National Education Policy and UEC recognition.

This study revealed that motivation influenced the MCISS students' learning interest in the second language acquisition, as stated by Gardner (1985). It fosters positive energy and enhances students' determination to succeed in their studies (Noviana & Ayu, 2022). The finding is parallel to Peng and Fu (2021), who found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both positively correlate with learning outcomes, fostering English proficiency and psychological growth. Notably, motivation exerts a greater influence than extrinsic motivation. Therefore, the students may increase their motivation to learn the Malay language, as it enhances learners' interest and engagement by arising from personal enjoyment, curiosity, and the pursuit of self-improvement rather than external incentives. This internal drive promotes sustained engagement, persistence, and greater success in language acquisition.

Language attitude, in this study, is the second predictor that influences students' interest in the Malay language. Positive attitudes—marked by enthusiasm and recognition of a language's value—enhance motivation, increase effort, and improve learning outcomes. This study is similar to the findings of Rizmadana and Milal (2022), Wang & Liu (2024), and Pham (2021). For instance, Rizmadana and Milal (2022) revealed the language attitudes of Korean culture enthusiasts in Surabaya and their motivations for learning English and Korean, aligning with the growing interest among youth.

Numerous studies have established that attitude and motivation are deeply connected in the context of language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; Pham, 2021; Wang & Liu, 2024). When students possess a favorable view of a language and its cultural context, they are more likely to be motivated, which in turn enhances their performance and reinforces their positive engagement with the learning strategies (Tóador & Dégi, 2016; Yuan et al., 2023). Therefore, educators who foster positive attitudes in students can design engaging classroom activities, thereby increasing students' success in learning the Malay language. A significant challenge identified is the limited opportunities for MCISS students to practice speaking the Malay language, contributing

to negative attitudes toward language learning.

On the contrary, this study found that the learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy, and UEC recognition negatively predict MCISS students' interest in learning the Malay language. Contributing factors include teacher-centred pedagogy in schools (Chew, 2024), limited exposure to Malay at home (Chew, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), lack of parental support for learning Malay (Ansit et al., 2024; Ismail & Zakaria, 2019), and the issue of UEC recognition (Khalid, 2022; Siti Hafidah, 2021), which further diminishes students' interest.

Salinas et al. (2024) emphasized that affirming students' and families' identities within school curricula and activities is essential for the academic success of multilingual students. Implementing Family-Centered Pedagogy allows students to integrate familial and ancestral knowledge into their learning experiences. Educator practices that validate students' linguistic backgrounds include leveraging multiple language repertoires (García & Kleyn, 2016), promoting active bilingualism (Cummins, 2018), and facilitating cross-language transfer (Coady & Ariza, 2019; Cummins, 2018; Xin & Yap, 2025). Creating inclusive school environments, such as by displaying multilingual signage and representing community diversity on social media platforms, can foster welcoming spaces. Establishing mentoring relationships among teachers, parents, and community advocates can further support students' educational journeys.

Interestingly, the study found that teachers' instructional methods did not significantly predict students' interest in learning the Malay language. This may be attributed to the educational backgrounds of Malay language teachers in MCISS. According to the Dong Zong Information and Archives Bureau (2022), a total of 2,067 (43%) teachers had not undergone formal teacher training, and some lacked specialization in the Malay language. This disparity potentially affects teaching efficacy and student engagement.

Previous research has identified inadequate teacher training and limited teaching experience as barriers to effective language instruction. Komorowska and Krajka (2024) observed that novice teachers often possess lower language proficiency and limited pedagogical knowledge. Similarly, Tulyakul, Omar-Fauzee, and Hussin

(2018) reported that inexperienced teachers face challenges in classroom management and instructional delivery. Walsh et al. (2021) noted that untrained educators are more likely to encounter difficulties related to student behavior and engagement in the classroom.

In this context, untrained or non-specialist teachers in MCISS may struggle with classroom management, instructional competence, and assessment strategies, hindering the achievement of learning objectives in Malay language education. Therefore, implementing comprehensive training programs and involving experienced educators is crucial for enhancing teaching preparedness and pedagogical effectiveness. Employing age-appropriate teaching methodologies and considering cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors can further improve language instruction outcomes (Komorowska & Krajka, 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study identified significant relationships between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, student learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and their interest in learning the Malay language. Multiple regression analysis revealed that motivation and language attitudes were the primary predictors of students' interest, while students' learning strategies, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition also played contributory roles. To enhance students' interest in learning the Malay language, MCISS administrators and teachers must collaborate with parents in creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. Mastery of the national language is a shared responsibility among all Malaysian students, including those in MCISS.

In a nutshell, this study demonstrated that relationships exist between students' language attitudes, motivation, instructional methods, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition, and learning interests. Multiple regression indicated that MCISS students' motivation, language attitude, learning strategies in the classroom, family engagement, National Education Policy and UEC recognition are the predictors of the MCISS students' learning interest in the Malay language. Therefore, it is suggested that

all MCISS administrators and teachers work hand in hand with parents to create a joyful, creative, and interesting teaching and learning environment for the students to learn the Malay language. It is the responsibility of all students in Malaysia, including the MCISS students, to master the language due to its status as the national language.

This quantitative research has the limitation of offering a comprehensive picture and an in-depth discussion on language learning among MCISS students, which can be modified by social experience. Therefore, future scholars can optimize a qualitative investigation to further strengthen interpretative research design. Besides that, more attention should be paid to different groups of participants with different scales to provide a rich and diverse understanding in this field.

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ETHICS STATEMENTS

This study was reviewed and approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their identities have been kept strictly anonymous to ensure confidentiality. The research fully complies with the ethical standards and publication guidelines of *Jurnal Arbitrer*

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Chew Fong Peng: collect and analyse data, write and edit the whole manuscript

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that she has no known competing of financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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