

# Mastery of the Malay Language among Students of Unitar International University: Level, Challenges, and Perceptions of the National Language

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the level of mastery and use of the Malay Language (Bahasa Melayu; BM) among students of UNITAR International University and analyses the relationship between students' perceptions of BM and their proficiency, communication ability, challenges faced, and attitudes towards the National Language. Using a quantitative approach involving 103 respondents, the study found that BM proficiency among UNITAR students was high (highest mean = 4.52), and their attitudes towards BM as the National Language and as a marker of national identity were very positive (highest mean = 4.65). Pearson Correlation analysis confirmed that all hypotheses were supported, with the strongest correlation found between Perception and National Language ( $r = 0.792$ , High). The most significant challenge was the lack of academic and co-curricular activities in BM at UNITAR (mean = 3.83). These findings indicate that positive student perceptions strongly contribute to sustaining the status of BM despite an academic environment dominated by English.

**Keywords:** Malay Language, Language Proficiency, Student Perceptions, National Language, Higher Education, UNITAR International University

## Introduction

The Malay Language (BM) holds constitutional status as Malaysia's national language under Article 152 of the Federal Constitution, serving as the primary medium for national unity, administration, and social integration (MOE, 2013). As a language deeply embedded in Malaysia's sociocultural fabric, BM embodies both symbolic and functional significance, shaping national identity, shared values, and linguistic citizenship. Recent studies have

highlighted that BM continues to play a crucial role in strengthening civic participation and cultural belonging among Malaysian youth (Hashim & Aziz, 2021; Ariffin et al., 2023).

However, emerging empirical evidence indicates that linguistic practices among university students, especially in private higher education institutions (IPTs), have undergone substantial shifts due to the expanding influence of English as a global lingua franca. The Education Act 1996 and the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 allow English-medium instruction (EMI) at IPTs, which has reduced the use of BM within academic domains (Gill, 2014). More recent studies confirm a growing dominance of English in higher education spaces, particularly in private universities offering business, technology, and international programmes (Rahman & Karim, 2020; Mahmud, 2022; Noor, 2024). UNITAR International University reflects this trend, where English is extensively used across courses and student activities.

Globalisation, digitalisation, and labour market pressures contribute to this linguistic shift, creating tensions between English proficiency demands and sustaining BM as the national language (David & Govindasamy, 2020). Scholars warn that the growing English preference may affect linguistic confidence, cultural affiliation, and the academic use of BM among young adults (Yusof et al., 2021). These findings point to the need for updated and context-specific empirical evidence focusing on student proficiency, usage patterns, challenges, and perceptions within IPTS environments.

Thus, this study seeks to extend prior research by examining Malay Language proficiency within a contemporary private university context, identifying current challenges experienced by students, and assessing how they perceive the status and importance of BM at tertiary level. By doing so, this research complements existing empirical work while providing recent data that may inform BM policy strengthening within higher education.

The study focuses on undergraduate students at UNITAR International University and examines both academic and non-academic language use. It aims to establish the current level of BM mastery, the factors influencing BM use, and the attitudes students hold toward BM as the National Language.

#### *Research Objectives*

1. To assess the level of Malay Language proficiency among UNITAR students.
2. To analyse factors influencing the use of BM in students' daily and academic communication.
3. To identify challenges faced by UNITAR students in mastering BM effectively.
4. To analyse students' perceptions of the use of BM in learning.
5. To evaluate students' attitudes and views towards BM as the National Language.

#### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides empirical insights into the usage patterns of the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu, BM) within the context of a private university, where the dominance of English in academic instruction and social interactions is particularly pronounced. By examining students' proficiency, communication practices, perceptions, and the challenges they face in using BM, the research highlights areas where the national language may be underutilized or

at risk of marginalization. Such insights are critical for policymakers and educational authorities seeking to formulate strategies that strengthen the role of BM in higher education, while balancing the practical demands of English-medium instruction. The findings offer university administrators concrete evidence to support language policies, curricular development, and student engagement initiatives aimed at enhancing BM proficiency and promoting its active use across academic, social, and professional domains.

Moreover, the study contributes to broader scholarly discussions on language maintenance, identity formation, and bilingualism in Malaysia. Understanding how students negotiate between BM and English in a multilingual environment sheds light on the complex interplay between linguistic competence, cultural identity, and institutional practices. This is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where BM serves as both a national language and a symbol of national unity, yet English continues to dominate in private and international educational contexts (Asmah, 2017; Omar, 2016). By providing evidence-based insights, the study not only underscores the importance of maintaining BM as a living, functional language in higher education but also informs future research on language policy, pedagogy, and sociolinguistic dynamics in multilingual settings.

Furthermore, the research has practical implications for educators and curriculum designers. The identification of specific challenges faced by students in using BM—whether in academic writing, oral communication, or professional discourse—can guide targeted interventions, instructional strategies, and resource allocation to support language learning. In the long term, such efforts contribute to sustaining BM's relevance, fostering bilingual or multilingual competencies, and enhancing students' readiness for professional and civic engagement within Malaysia and in international contexts. Consequently, this study bridges the gap between theoretical understanding of language use and its practical applications, making it a valuable resource for stakeholders committed to preserving the status and vitality of BM while responding to the realities of a globalised educational environment.

## **Literature Review**

### *The Dominance of English and Challenges of Globalisation*

The dominance of English in higher education has intensified over the past few decades due to globalisation, the internationalisation of universities, and the widespread availability of English-language academic resources. English is often regarded as the lingua franca of science, technology, and professional communication, which has led institutions to adopt English-Medium Instruction (EMI) policies to align with global academic standards. According to David and Govindasamy (2020), the increased mobility of students and academics, alongside the prestige and economic opportunities associated with English, has resulted in significant language shifts among young Malaysians, particularly in urban and private university contexts. While EMI environments contribute to improved English proficiency and global competitiveness, they simultaneously limit formal opportunities for the use of BM, restricting students' engagement with the national language in academic discourse (Gill, 2014).

Furthermore, research indicates that students often prioritise English for career advancement, particularly in sectors such as finance, technology, and multinational corporations where English dominates professional communication. Hashim and Tan (2021)

highlight that students perceive English as a critical tool for employability, promotion, and professional networking, which inadvertently relegates BM to a secondary role in formal and academic domains. The challenge of globalisation, therefore, lies not only in the prominence of English but also in the subtle sociolinguistic pressures that influence language choice, identity, and cultural continuity, resulting in complex negotiations between global competencies and national language maintenance.

#### *Proficiency Level and Frequency of Use*

The proficiency and frequency of BM usage among university students are heavily influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. Exposure to social media, pop culture, urban linguistic landscapes, and peer networks has contributed to a reduction in BM usage among younger populations. Amirul Mukminin Mohamad et al. (2023) reported that only 63.6% of university students regularly used BM in informal peer communication, suggesting a gradual decline in everyday usage outside family and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, BM remains the dominant medium in familial interactions, cultural ceremonies, and traditional practices, indicating that its role in identity and cultural heritage persists despite reduced daily exposure. Furthermore, in the context of secondary schools, studies like Selvarajoo et al. (2024) highlight that students are increasingly responsive to technology, finding digital tools effective and engaging for language learning, a trend that underscores the importance of technological integration in shaping modern language exposure and proficiency, even if focused on English.

Research underscores that language proficiency is closely linked to meaningful exposure and practical use (Krashen, 2013). Students in EMI institutions, for example, may demonstrate high passive comprehension of BM but limited active mastery, particularly in academic writing, formal presentations, and critical discourse. The lack of structured opportunities to practice BM in rigorous academic settings can therefore result in weakened expressive competence, which may have long-term implications for both professional and cultural engagement. Additionally, the frequency and context of BM use are key predictors of proficiency, as repeated, contextually meaningful interactions reinforce lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic skills.

#### *Attitudes and Perceptions of the Malay Language*

Despite the challenges posed by globalisation and English dominance, students generally exhibit positive attitudes towards BM as a marker of national identity and cultural pride. This perspective is strongly affirmed by research, including a study by Ghazali and Mahindran (2024) focusing specifically on private higher education institutions, which underscored BM's critical role in reinforcing students' national identity. Mohd Khaidir Abdul Wahab (2023) found that 82% of tertiary students felt proud when using BM, reflecting the persistence of linguistic patriotism. Such attitudes are significant for language maintenance, as positive perceptions and intrinsic motivation are essential determinants of continued language use.

However, this sense of pride is tempered by pragmatic considerations. A considerable proportion of students (56.25%) perceive English as more instrumental for career success, indicating a dual attitude in which BM is culturally valued but perceived as less utilitarian in professional contexts. According to Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, attitudes and motivation play a crucial role in shaping language acquisition and usage patterns. Positive

attitudes toward BM, coupled with social reinforcement and institutional support, can foster resilience in language use despite the dominance of English, highlighting the importance of integrating BM into academic, social, and professional spheres to sustain its functional relevance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study examines the relationship between students' perceptions of BM (independent variable) and four dependent variables: Proficiency Level, Communication, Challenges, and National Language. This framework is grounded in language attitude theory (Garrett, 2010), which posits that individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and values toward a language directly influence their language learning, use, and maintenance. By integrating both attitudinal and performance-based constructs, the framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of how perception shapes practical competence and engagement with BM in a private university context. It also accounts for the mediating effects of external factors, such as institutional language policies, exposure to EMI, and peer language practices, providing a robust basis for examining the interplay between language attitudes, proficiency, and actual usage patterns.

### **Research Methodology**

#### *Research Design and Location*

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, which is suitable for capturing trends and patterns related to language proficiency at a single point in time. This design allows for efficient data collection from a relatively large sample and enables statistical examination of relationships between variables.

The research was conducted at UNITAR International University, a private higher education institution in Malaysia known for its multicultural student population. This setting was chosen because it provides an appropriate context for investigating the mastery of the Malay language among university students, particularly in relation to academic and social communication.

#### *Sample*

A total of 103 undergraduate students participated in the study. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, considering accessibility and feasibility. Despite its non-probability nature, this sampling technique is widely used in social science research and is appropriate for exploratory studies focusing on perceptions and self-reported proficiency. The sample size meets the minimum recommendation for correlation research, ensuring adequate statistical power for detecting meaningful relationships between constructs.

#### *Research Instrument*

Data for this study were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire, carefully designed to capture multiple dimensions of students' engagement with the Malay language. The questionnaire comprised several sections, each targeting specific constructs relevant to the research objectives. To ensure consistency and clarity, all items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This format allowed participants to express varying degrees of agreement with statements pertaining to

their language practices, perceptions, and experiences, thereby providing nuanced insights into both attitudes and self-reported competencies.

The questionnaire was developed to measure five key constructs central to understanding Malay language mastery in a higher education context. The first construct, Proficiency Level, assessed students' self-perceived competence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking BM. The second construct, Communication Ability, explored how effectively students could use BM in academic, professional, and social contexts. The third construct, Challenges in Language Use, identified obstacles faced by students when using BM, including issues related to vocabulary, grammar, institutional norms, and peer interactions. The fourth construct, Perception of Malay Language Importance, examined students' attitudes toward BM as a national language and its relevance in both academic and professional domains. Finally, the fifth construct, National Language and Identity, focused on the role of BM in fostering cultural identity, national pride, and social cohesion. Collectively, these constructs allowed for a holistic evaluation of language mastery, incorporating both functional competence and socio-cultural significance.

The items were adapted from established and validated language proficiency frameworks as well as prior empirical studies in Malaysian and multilingual higher education settings, ensuring content validity and theoretical alignment. To increase relevance and contextual appropriateness, minor modifications were made to reflect the specific cultural and institutional environment of UNITAR International University, including references to academic practices, social interactions, and bilingual contexts prevalent among private university students. This careful adaptation ensured that the instrument was both culturally sensitive and methodologically rigorous, allowing for meaningful interpretation of data and comparability with previous research on language proficiency, attitudes, and identity in multilingual settings.

Moreover, the questionnaire underwent expert review by language lecturers and educational researchers, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of each item. Feedback from the review process informed refinements to item wording, scale orientation, and section organization, thereby enhancing both the face validity and reliability of the instrument. This rigorous development process ensured that the questionnaire not only captured students' self-reported abilities and perceptions but also provided a robust foundation for subsequent statistical analyses, including reliability testing, descriptive statistics, and correlation analyses.

### *Procedures*

The data collection process for this study was carefully structured to ensure both methodological rigor and the accuracy of the information obtained. The first step involved instrument preparation, in which the questionnaire was meticulously designed and subsequently refined through a review by language and educational experts. This process ensured that each item was clear, relevant, and closely aligned with the research objectives, while also maintaining cultural and institutional appropriateness for students at UNITAR International University. Expert feedback facilitated adjustments to wording, scale orientation, and item sequencing, thereby enhancing both face and content validity.

Following instrument finalisation, the distribution of the questionnaire was conducted using a dual approach. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire either in person during lecture sessions or online via secure links disseminated through official university communication channels. This mixed-mode distribution strategy was adopted to maximize accessibility and participation, accommodating students' varied schedules and preferences, and ensuring a representative sample of the target population.

The data collection timeline spanned a period of two weeks, providing sufficient time for students to respond while minimizing potential biases associated with rushed completion. The extended timeline also allowed reminders and follow-ups, improving response rates and the overall quality of the dataset.

Once the questionnaires were returned, a thorough data verification process was implemented. Completed responses were carefully screened for accuracy, completeness, and consistency, with incomplete or ambiguous responses excluded from the final analysis. This rigorous verification step ensured that the data used for subsequent statistical analysis was reliable and valid, forming a robust foundation for descriptive and inferential procedures such as mean calculations, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation analysis. By following these systematic steps, the study maintained a high standard of methodological integrity, which is critical for producing credible and generalizable findings regarding Malay language proficiency, communication practices, and attitudes among university students.

#### *Reliability and Validity*

Reliability and validity of the research instrument were rigorously assessed to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, a widely accepted measure for assessing the degree to which items within a construct are correlated and consistently measure the intended variable. The analysis indicated that all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating strong reliability and internal consistency. Specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.955 for Proficiency Level, 0.838 for Communication, 0.935 for Challenges in Language Use, 0.922 for Perception of Malay Language Importance, and 0.964 for National Language and Identity. These high reliability coefficients indicate that the questionnaire items reliably capture the intended dimensions of Malay language mastery, students' attitudes, and their perceived challenges (see Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Reliability Coefficients*

Aspect	Cronbach's Alpha
Proficiency Level	0.955
Communication	0.838
Challenges	0.935
Perception	0.922
National Language	0.964

In terms of validity, the study employed multiple strategies to ensure that the instrument accurately measured the constructs of interest. Content validity was established through a comprehensive expert review involving experienced language lecturers and educational

researchers, who examined each item for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. This process ensured that the questionnaire captured all pertinent aspects of language proficiency, communication, and attitudes toward BM. Additionally, face validity was confirmed during a pilot testing phase, where a small group of students reviewed the instrument and reported that the items were clear, understandable, and culturally appropriate. Together, these measures of reliability and validity provide strong support for the instrument's methodological rigor, ensuring that the subsequent data analysis reflects an accurate and reliable assessment of Malay language proficiency, communication patterns, and student perceptions within the private university context.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the study. Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with detailed information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes, and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were explicitly assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and that individual data would not be identifiable in any reports or publications arising from the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty or explanation, ensuring that involvement was based solely on willingness and free choice.

To further uphold ethical standards, all data were securely stored using password-protected files and were accessible only to the research team. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes, including statistical analysis and dissemination in academic publications. Additionally, the study received formal ethical clearance from the university's internal review board, which verified that all procedures complied with institutional and national ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. These measures ensured that the study adhered to the highest standards of ethical practice, safeguarding participants' welfare while maintaining the credibility and validity of the research findings.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted systematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of Malay language proficiency, communication patterns, and attitudes among university students. Initially, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for all variables to identify overall trends, central tendencies, and variability within the dataset. This preliminary analysis allowed the researchers to determine the general levels of proficiency, communication ability, perceived challenges, attitudes toward the Malay language, and engagement with the national language, providing a foundation for interpreting the broader patterns of language use in the private university context.

To explore the relationships among the five primary constructs, Proficiency Level, Communication Ability, Challenges in Language Use, Perception of Malay Language Importance, and National Language and Identity, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted. This statistical method was selected because it enables assessment of the strength and direction of linear relationships between continuous variables, providing insights into how students' attitudes and perceptions might be associated with their functional competence and language practices.

All analyses were performed using SPSS Version 29, which facilitated accurate computation of descriptive and inferential statistics and allowed for rigorous verification of assumptions, data integrity, and reliability measures. The combination of descriptive and correlational analyses provided both an overview of students' language proficiency levels and a detailed examination of the interconnections among attitudinal and performance-based constructs, thereby supporting the study's aim to understand the dynamics of Malay language mastery within a multilingual higher education environment.

## **Findings**

### *Demographic Data*

The demographic profile of the participants provides essential context for interpreting the study's findings. Of the 103 respondents, a majority were female (66.0%), reflecting the gender distribution within the sampled population. In terms of ethnicity, Malay students constituted 62.1% of the sample, indicating that the study primarily reflects the experiences of the Malay majority, though other ethnic groups were also represented. Most participants fell within the 22–25 age range (68.9%), typical of undergraduate students in their final years of study. Additionally, 63.1% of respondents were pursuing bachelor's degrees, while the remaining participants were enrolled in diploma or postgraduate programs. This demographic composition ensures that the findings are representative of the target population of undergraduate students at UNITAR International University and provides a foundation for analyzing language proficiency, attitudes, and usage patterns in a university context.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive analyses revealed that students generally exhibited high levels of Malay language proficiency and communication ability, with mean scores exceeding 4.2 on the five-point Likert scale. These findings suggest that participants are confident in their ability to read, write, and communicate effectively in BM, both in academic and social contexts. Moreover, students demonstrated very positive perceptions and attitudes toward BM as the national language, with mean scores above 4.4, reflecting strong linguistic patriotism and a sense of cultural identity. Despite these strengths, the study identified a key challenge related to the lack of BM-related activities, with a mean score of 3.83, indicating moderate concern. This finding highlights the need for increased opportunities for students to actively engage with BM in both formal and informal settings, in order to reinforce proficiency and foster sustained usage.

### *Pearson Correlation Analysis*

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the five primary constructs: Proficiency Level, Communication Ability, Challenges in Language Use, Perception of BM Importance, and National Language and Identity. The results indicated that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant at  $p < .01$ , suggesting strong interconnections between students' perceptions and their language proficiency, communication skills, and engagement with BM. These findings confirm that positive perceptions and attitudes toward the Malay language are closely associated with higher levels of functional competence and effective communication, while challenges in language use may mediate these relationships. Overall, the correlation analysis provides empirical support for the conceptual framework, demonstrating that attitudinal variables are meaningfully linked

with both the practical and socio-cultural dimensions of BM mastery among university students.

## **Discussion**

### *Perception Drives Proficiency and Communication*

The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between students' perceptions of BM and both their proficiency ( $r = 0.572$ ) and communication ability ( $r = 0.698$ ), suggesting that positive attitudes toward the national language are closely linked to functional competence. These results align with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which emphasizes that learner attitudes and motivation play a critical role in shaping language acquisition and usage patterns. In the context of a private university, students who recognize the importance of BM tend to invest more effort in reading, writing, and oral communication, thereby enhancing their overall mastery.

Moreover, factors such as family background, early exposure to BM, mother tongue influences, and peer interactions further reinforce language proficiency (Asmah, 2017). Students who grow up in environments where BM is actively used and valued are more likely to maintain high levels of competence, even within EMI-dominated settings. Peer interactions, in particular, provide meaningful opportunities for informal practice, contributing to vocabulary development, fluency, and confidence in using BM across diverse contexts. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of perception, exposure, and social reinforcement in sustaining both proficiency and effective communication in BM.

### *Institutional Challenges*

Despite generally positive perceptions and high proficiency levels, institutional challenges continue to impact students' use of BM. The correlation between perception and perceived challenges ( $r = 0.497$ ) indicates that students who value BM are also aware of barriers imposed by the academic environment, particularly the dominance of English-Medium Instruction (EMI). Limited opportunities to engage in BM-based academic tasks, co-curricular activities, or formal discourse constrain students' ability to practice and apply their skills in meaningful ways. These findings are consistent with Gill (2014), who criticized EMI environments for inadvertently marginalizing the national language and reducing students' functional exposure. Addressing these institutional challenges requires strategic policy interventions, curriculum design, and the creation of more BM-centered activities to support language maintenance without compromising global competency.

### *The National Language as Identity*

The strongest correlation observed in this study was between perception and National Language and Identity ( $r = 0.792$ ), reflecting a deep-seated sense of linguistic nationalism among students. This finding demonstrates that students not only recognize the functional value of BM but also associate it with cultural heritage, national pride, and social cohesion. It supports Omar's (2016) assertion that BM remains central to Malaysian identity, even in the face of globalization and the increasing dominance of English. The data suggest that while English is valued for academic and professional advancement, BM continues to play a crucial role in shaping collective identity and cultural belonging, highlighting the dual functions of language as both a practical tool and a symbolic marker of nationhood.

Collectively, these findings indicate that attitudes toward BM strongly influence both practical language competence and engagement with national identity, while institutional constraints and EMI dominance moderate the extent to which students can actively apply their skills. The results reinforce the importance of integrating attitudinal, social, and institutional factors in strategies aimed at maintaining and promoting BM in higher education, ensuring that the national language retains its functional and symbolic relevance in a rapidly globalizing educational landscape.

## **Recommendations**

### *Recommendations for the University*

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to strengthen the use and status of BM within the university context. First, the university should increase the number and variety of BM-related academic and co-curricular activities, providing students with structured opportunities to engage meaningfully with the national language. Examples include BM-based debates, forums, and competitions, which can enhance both language proficiency and confidence in formal communication settings. Additionally, the institution should strengthen bilingual communication practices by encouraging the integrated use of BM alongside English in lectures, tutorials, and official communications. Allowing BM-based assessments in selected courses can further validate the practical and academic relevance of the language. Finally, the university should expand BM academic resources, such as textbooks, journals, and online platforms, to facilitate self-directed learning and promote a culture of active engagement with the language. Collectively, these strategies aim to create an institutional environment that supports both the functional and symbolic roles of BM, balancing global competitiveness with national language maintenance.

### *Recommendations for Students*

Students themselves also play a critical role in maintaining and promoting BM proficiency. They are encouraged to actively participate in BM clubs, cultural events, and academic activities, providing informal and formal opportunities to practice the language. In addition, students should use BM in professional and formal contexts, including presentations, report writing, and peer collaborations, to strengthen functional competence and professional readiness. Enhancing bilingual competence—the ability to switch effectively between BM and English—can help students navigate both national and global environments while maintaining proficiency and confidence in their mother tongue. By taking these proactive steps, students can contribute to the sustained relevance and vitality of BM within the university community.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Future research should build on the findings of this study by employing qualitative methods, such as interviews or group discussions, to explore in greater depth students' experiences, motivations, and challenges in using BM. Such approaches can provide richer insights into the socio-cultural and emotional dimensions of language use that are not easily captured through questionnaires alone. Additionally, comparative studies between private (IPTS) and public universities (IPTA) could highlight contextual differences in BM use, institutional support, and student attitudes, providing a broader understanding of language maintenance across higher education in Malaysia. Expanding the methodological scope and research contexts will enable scholars to develop more comprehensive strategies for promoting BM proficiency, fostering bilingual competence, and supporting national identity among university students.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that BM proficiency among UNITAR International University students is generally high, with participants demonstrating strong functional competence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This high level of proficiency is closely linked to positive perceptions and attitudes toward BM, highlighting the role of learner motivation and linguistic identity in maintaining language mastery. Despite the challenges posed by the dominance of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and limited opportunities for formal BM engagement, students exhibit a clear commitment to using BM in both academic and social contexts, reflecting a balance between global competitiveness and national linguistic loyalty. These results are consistent with broader educational objectives articulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MOHE, 2015), which underscores the importance of strengthening BM as a knowledge language while promoting bilingual competence among tertiary students. The study demonstrates that positive attitudes, institutional support, and meaningful opportunities for language use collectively contribute to the sustained relevance of BM in higher education. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of integrating language policy, pedagogy, and co-curricular initiatives to reinforce BM usage, promote cultural identity, and ensure that students are equipped to navigate both local and global contexts.

In conclusion, while globalization and EMI present ongoing challenges, the study provides empirical evidence that BM continues to hold both functional and symbolic significance among university students. By fostering positive perceptions, providing institutional support, and creating opportunities for active use, universities can ensure that BM remains a vibrant and integral component of Malaysia's linguistic and cultural landscape, in alignment with national educational goals and the promotion of bilingual competence.

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