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A Correlational Analysis of National Identity and Language Choice Among Malaysian ESL Undergraduates

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Abstract For many students of English as a second language (ESL), reconciling national identity with language choice is a considerable challenge. In Malaysian tertiary education, ESL undergraduates often experience tension between developing English proficiency and maintaining a strong sense of national belonging. This study investigated the association between perceived national identity and reported language-choice patterns of final-year ESL undergraduates at a Malaysian university. A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was employed, and data were collected from 108 final-year ESL students using a structured, self-developed questionnaire. The analysis employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and simple linear regression to examine the relationships between the measured constructs. The source-reported findings indicated high perceived national identity (M = 4.86, SD = 0.69) and conscious language-choice behaviour (M = 4.47, SD = 0.70) among the surveyed undergraduates. Furthermore, the reported results indicated a positive correlation ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.001$) between perceived national identity and language choice patterns. The reported regression coefficient was positive ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < 0.001$), although the regression tables contain discrepancies that require confirmation using the original statistical output. These findings suggest that language planning in Malaysia should treat national identity and English proficiency as interconnected realities rather than competing goals.

Index Terms ESL undergraduates, language choice, multilingualism, national identity

I. Introduction

Understanding how national identity shapes language choice is crucial in modern society. The choice of a specific linguistic code is rarely a neutral act of communication but rather a significant marker of ideological affiliation and national belonging. In multicultural and multilingual societies, language choice is often characterized by a push-and-pull between the pragmatic demands of globalization and the preservation of domestic cultural heritage. In this context, language choices are associated with identity and ideology and may help speakers negotiate their positions within social hierarchies [1]. Bucholtz and Hall [2] argue that language variation and identity construction in multilingual societies are inextricably linked. This is because individuals utilize linguistic choices to signal their membership in specific social groups. Nonetheless, the ideological battle over language is not merely a matter of preference but can escalate into identity erasure. For instance, Pidkuimukha [3] examined how language is weaponized to dismantle collective consciousness in conflict zones, such as Ukraine. The study highlights the role of language as a site of "neo-nationalism", where language policies and the suppression of local languages have implications for collective identity. The situation may lead to increased polarization within a nation [4], [5].

Historically, national identity has often been centered on the "language question", particularly in post-colonial regions where linguistic sovereignty is equated with national freedom. This concept, as explored by Ghosh [6], suggests that indigenous languages are essential for achieving true self-rule and resisting external cultural hegemony. In essence, studies demonstrate that the association between national identity and linguistic preferences is a deeply rooted historical process where the choice of a language is a declaration of an individual's national allegiance [7], [8]. Language serves as a symbol of collective belonging and ideological resistance against cultural assimilation. Recent studies showed that native languages were vital tools for self-governance and active resistance against colonial rule. In this sense, choosing which language to speak became a powerful way of reclaiming a stolen national identity. In contemporary multilingual contexts, linguistic choices can continue to signal belonging, perceived social boundaries, and sometimes political divisions. Ultimately, this shows that language choice plays an inherent role in deciding who belongs to a nation's "in-group" and who is left on the outside [5], [6], [9].

In education, the classroom becomes a critical context

for identity negotiation as students experience the "worlds between languages", particularly when studying in an environment with global languages such as English [10]. This negotiation is particularly visible in university classrooms, where language use and intercultural competence highlight how multilingualism impacts a student's sense of belonging and academic performance [11]–[14]. Educational policies and curricula reflect the ongoing struggle to balance multilingualism with national unity. This situation often places English as a second language (ESL) learners at the center of these identity tensions. In China, for example, Wang and Geng [15] unpacked the tensions between learners' multilingualism and national identity. The study found that while students recognize the importance of English, their sense of national belonging remains a primary driver of their language choice. Similarly, research illustrates how education and multilingualism interact to shape the identities of minority groups within a dominant national culture [16]–[19].

In Malaysia, the association between national identity and language choice among ESL undergraduates is a subject of profound academic and social relevance [20], [21]. Malaysian undergraduates often find themselves at a crossroads where the institutional push for English proficiency for global competitiveness intersects with a commitment to their national and ethnic identities. Research has investigated how local language practices function within specific intercultural school environments [20]. However, there remains a noticeable empirical gap regarding the active agency of tertiary students outside formal instruction. Additionally, how students' perceived national belonging is associated with their reported linguistic preferences in academic settings remains under-researched. In particular, the available literature provides limited direct examination of how an ESL undergraduate's sense of national identity influences their conscious language choices in daily interactions. Accordingly, the present study aims to address the following research questions.

1) What are the ESL undergraduates' levels of national identity and language choice patterns in Malaysia?
2) To what extent does national identity influence the language choice of ESL undergraduates in Malaysia?

II. Literature Review

A. Multilingualism in the ESL Context

The demand for English as a global lingua franca has necessitated a shift in how students approach their language diversity. Today, undergraduates are often caught between maintaining their national identity and attaining a high level of English proficiency. This situation creates a complex sociolinguistic environment where language choice becomes a symbolic act of identity negotiation rather than a mere tool for communication. This phenomenon requires a systematic investigation. Several studies have explored the challenges and opportunities of ESL education in different contexts (e.g., [22]–[25]). During writing and other collaborative tasks, for instance, the interaction between different languages becomes highly visible through student engagement. Martinez-Buffa [23] conducted a discourse analysis of pragmatic-related episodes during collaborative writing tasks to investigate multilingual learners' engagement with languages. The study focused on how students negotiated meaning and resolved linguistic problems by drawing on their entire linguistic repertoire. The findings revealed that students frequently used their first language to discuss complex grammatical structures of the target language. According to the study, this situation leads to more accurate final products. These observations support translanguaging as a potentially useful communicative and pedagogical resource when writers actively evaluate their linguistic choices.

Correspondingly, Nawaz [24] utilized a case-study approach to investigate the impact of multilingual repertoires on ESL writing performance in multicultural classrooms. The findings revealed that students who were encouraged to use their full multilingual repertoires exhibited higher levels of creativity and better skills in their English writing compared to those restricted to English-only instruction. This outcome suggests that suppressing a student's native language can stifle their intellectual expression and limit their ability to convey complex ideas. This outcome suggests that the ESL context is dynamic, where the student's national and linguistic identities are used to construct meaning in the second language. Similarly, Canagarajah [22] conducted a classroom-based study of multilingual academic writing and identified teachable strategies through which a student combined linguistic resources in a written assignment. That study highlighted recontextualization, voice, interactional, and textualization strategies and described how instructor and peer feedback can support critical decision-making during revision. Such findings suggest that strategic movement between linguistic resources may contribute to academic writing development, although the present survey did not assess writing outcomes directly.

The role of pedagogy in fostering multilingual learning is another vital area of recent scholarly inquiry. In this regard, Zondi [26] employed a qualitative research design rooted in a social justice framework to examine multilingual pedagogies in ESL literature classrooms in South Africa. The study sought to determine how allowing students to respond to English literature using their multiple languages could deepen their intellectual connection to the texts. The findings revealed a substantial increase in students' level of engagement and critical thinking. This outcome highlights the potential for literature classrooms to synthesize national identity and ESL learning. Additionally, Li and Lin [27] employed interviews and classroom observation to investigate teacher practices in supporting multilingual learners' literacy in Canada. The study revealed a difference between teachers' positive attitudes toward multilingualism and their actual classroom practices. This outcome suggests that while educators value diversity, they often lack the practical tools or institutional permission to implement multilingual pedagogies effectively. Karpava [28] found that an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges the students' primary languages can enhance their academic receptivity. Recognizing students' multilingual realities may therefore contribute to more supportive educational

experiences and to greater engagement with the curriculum.

In Malaysia, the ESL context is uniquely complex due to the co-existence of ethnic identities and the institutional push for English proficiency in higher education. In this regard, Sauffi, Alias, and Senom [25] investigated the challenges of identity, capital, and ideology among multilingual ESL learners at a Malaysian university. The findings revealed that many students struggle to balance their English with their desire to maintain their national identities. Some participants described tensions between investment in English and the maintenance of locally grounded identities and values. Similarly, Ravinthar and Zainal [29] found that rigid adherence to English often prevents students from fully expressing their identities. Despite these insights, an important gap remains concerning associations between national identity and ESL students' reported language choices outside formal classroom instruction. Existing studies have touched on the "challenges" and "pedagogical practices" of multilingualism in the ESL context. However, there is a lack of empirical data explaining how a student's sense of being "Malaysian" influences their preference for English, which the present study aims to investigate.

B. National Identity and Language Choice in the ESL Context

Language is often used not only to communicate but also to signal belonging, difference, and future aspirations. The negotiation between national identity and language choice represents a significant challenge for ESL students. National identity plays a decisive role in shaping how ESL learners choose languages, especially when they move between English, their first language, and local multilingual academic settings. Addressing this issue is crucial for understanding how ESL learners construct their sense of belonging in multicultural academic settings (e.g., [1], [2], [19], [30], [31]). Many existing studies have explored the role of language in constructing national identity. For instance, Miller [31] employed a qualitative technique to explore how Australian ESL speakers negotiate identity through language choice. The study found that speaking ESL is not merely a linguistic act but a social performance tied to belonging, power, and self-positioning. This outcome suggests that language choice among ESL learners is often guided by identity concerns rather than by proficiency alone. Similarly, Nero [32] used a classroom-based analytical approach to examine the relationship between language, identities, and ESL pedagogy in the US. The findings revealed that identity-sensitive pedagogy can support more inclusive language practices and help learners participate more confidently in ESL classrooms. This is highly relevant to university students who manage how they are perceived in both formal and informal interactions.

Additionally, Marshall [30] conducted a qualitative study with multilingual university students to explore how they "re-become" ESL learners through the construction of a deficit identity in a university context in the United Kingdom. The findings showed that some students internalize weakness-based labels about their English use, which can lower confidence and influence language selection. This outcome suggests that language avoidance may reflect identity insecurity rather than a lack of linguistic ability. Ahn [33] employed a qualitative study to examine English language learners' visualization of identities in transformation in South Korea. The findings revealed that learners imagine future identities through English and view language learning as part of becoming someone new. This suggests that language choice is also shaped by aspiration and identity development, not only by present linguistic competence. Khan [34] conducted a narrative literature review to examine how bilingual students labeled as ESL negotiate identity in educational settings, mainly across English-medium schooling contexts in North America. The review found that being labeled "ESL" can shape how students see themselves and how others position them, often influencing whether they use English confidently or resist it in favor of a more familiar language. This outcome suggests that language choice is not simply a matter of proficiency but also a response to social labeling and identity pressure.

Moreover, Norton and Pavlenko [35] used a conceptual and theoretical review to explore imagined communities, identity, and English language learning in multilingual contexts. The study draws on international contexts rather than a single country. The findings revealed that learners often choose English because they associate it with imagined futures, mobility, and access to wider communities. This outcome suggests that identity and language choice are forward-looking, since students may speak English to align themselves with who they hope to become. Ali and Mujiyanto [36] employed a qualitative technique to investigate the influence of identity on ESL acquisition at a secondary school in Indonesia. The findings revealed that students' identity strongly affected their willingness to engage with the second language, including when and how they used it in school. This outcome suggests that identity belonging can either support or constrain language choice. Taken together, these studies show that ESL learners' language choice is deeply shaped by identity negotiation. In addition, Sholihah et al. [1] utilized a discourse analysis to investigate language, identity, and ideology. The findings revealed that language choice reflects identity, with learners using specific codes to assert their cultural agency and resist dominant social hierarchies.

The association between national identity and language choice is also heavily mediated through educational policies, curricula, and the materials used in ESL instruction. Wajahat, Batool, and Imran [17] utilized a qualitative content analysis to explore the construction of national identity in English textbooks in Pakistan. The findings revealed that textbooks are designed to socialize students into a unified national and religious identity through language. In the higher education context, the process of language socialization plays a crucial role in how undergraduates negotiate their identities. Chavoshi and Miller [10] utilized a qualitative longitudinal design to investigate identity shifts and language socialization among international students in the US. The findings revealed that

students undergo a complex reconstruction of their "selves" as they adapt to the English-dominant environment, suggesting that the university is a place of constant identity transformation. These findings are echoed by Rabahi and Makhlouf [11] in the Algerian context, where they found that multilingualism and code-switching are critical for students to express their intercultural competence while maintaining their national roots. In a similar vein, Aben and Zeinolla [12] further investigated code-switching in academic communities. The study found that code-switching reflects a sophisticated blend of global, professional, and national identities, validating code-switching as a strategic tool for identity expression.

In Malaysia, very few studies have examined how national identity shapes language choice among ESL undergraduates. Specifically, Sauffi et al. [21] used a qualitative approach explore how translanguaging supports ESL learners' identity preservation at a Malaysian university. The findings revealed that students often move flexibly between languages to protect a sense of self while still engaging with English. This outcome suggests that language choice is closely tied to identity maintenance rather than linguistic convenience alone. Taken together, these studies show that Malaysian ESL learners negotiate identity, community, and participation through language choice. However, quantitative evidence on the association between national identity and language choice among ESL undergraduates remains limited. This gap indicates the need for a study that examines this relationship in the Malaysian tertiary context. Against this backdrop, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between national identity and language choice among ESL undergraduates in Malaysia.

H2: National identity significantly contributes to (or predicts) the language choice of ESL undergraduates in Malaysia.

C. Theoretical Underpinning

This study employed Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Giles [37] and later developed by Giles and Ogay [38]. The theory posits that during social interactions, individuals strategically adjust their communicative behavior, including language choice, to manage social distance, identity, and interpersonal relations. CAT is built upon several core theoretical assumptions; one of which states that communication is not merely the exchange of objective information but an active process through which speakers manage, negotiate, and sometimes emphasize personal and social identities. According to Giles and Ogay [38], speakers use linguistic choices to signal their group memberships, seek social approval, or assert distinctiveness. In the context of the present study, Malaysian ESL undergraduates' choice of language, specifically English, Bahasa Melayu, and localized colloquial codes, is assumed to reflect active cognitive and social negotiation.

A strong sense of national identity may influence students' language choices that function as accommodating behaviors and reflect alignment with their national group. By utilizing CAT, this study can systematically analyze how an undergraduate's internal sense of national belonging manifests as an interpersonal communicative strategy. The theory further details two primary communicative strategies: convergence and divergence, both of which apply to the sociolinguistic realities of Malaysian tertiary education. Convergence shows how individuals adapt their communicative behaviors to become similar to those of their conversational partners, typically driven by a desire for social integration, approval, and cognitive efficiency [38]. Conversely, divergence refers to the way in which speakers highlight linguistic differences between themselves and others to emphasize their distinct in-group identity, express national pride, or maintain cultural boundaries.

For ESL undergraduates in Malaysia, these two strategies are in tension. When interacting in an English-dominant academic context, a student might choose to converge by speaking formal English to gain academic approval and align with global professional identities. However, if a student's Malaysian identity is highly salient, they may engage in divergence by deliberately switching to Bahasa Melayu or incorporating local socio-pragmatic particles (such as lah or kah) to signal solidarity with their local peers and distance themselves from what they might perceive as an overly Westernized or colonial linguistic identity. This theoretical assumption is crucial for this study, as it provides the mechanism to hypothesize that a stronger national identity will significantly predict and correlate with language choices that diverge from standard global English in favor of culturally symbolic, localized linguistic codes. Recent studies have successfully adopted CAT to explore language and identity negotiations in various contexts (e.g., [39], [40]). This emphasizes the theory's relevance in explaining how individuals choose language to negotiate relationships and assert identity.

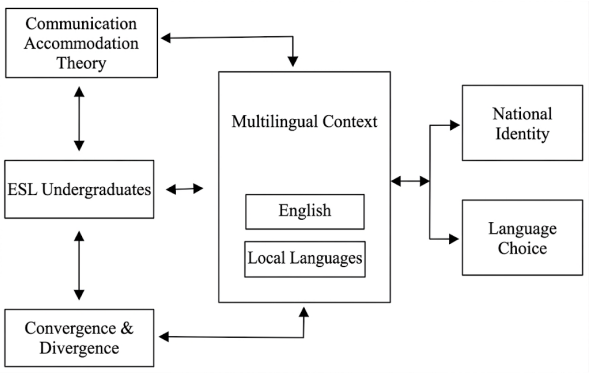


Figure 1: Communication Accommodation Theory and the Hypothesized Language-Choice Relationship

As shown in Figure 1, CAT explains how Malaysian ESL undergraduates demonstrate national identity and language choice in a multilingual environment. Students may converge toward English in academic settings to seek approval and align with wider academic norms, or diverge toward Bahasa Melayu and localized codes to express solidarity, cultural

belonging, and national identity. For Malaysian ESL learners, this means language choice is not merely a matter of convenience but a socially meaningful act shaped by how they see themselves as Malaysians and how they position themselves among peers. The framework also highlights that convergence and divergence are active communication strategies that reflect students' interactional goals in university life. Overall, the present study shows how national identity may influence language choice through everyday communicative negotiation in Malaysia's multilingual tertiary context.

III. Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative survey method to investigate the relationship between national identity and language choice. This design was chosen for its ability to provide objective and standardized trends within a specific population. It allows associations to be examined within the sampled group, although purposive recruitment does not justify statistical generalization to all Malaysian ESL undergraduates. According to Creswell and Creswell [41], a quantitative survey is essential when the research goal involves testing theories by examining the relationships between variables, which can be measured through instruments and analyzed using statistical procedures. By adopting a survey method, this study provides a structured means of operationalizing perceived national identity and self-reported language choice as questionnaire variables. Nardi [42] emphasizes that survey research is particularly advantageous. It allows data on people's attitudes, beliefs, and reported behaviors to be systematically collected, analyzed, and reported. In this context, the survey design enables the researcher to examine ESL undergraduates' perceptions of their national belonging and how these perceptions manifest in their language choice. A structured approach improves procedural transparency, although self-reporting, purposive selection, and unreported item wording may introduce sources of bias that require consideration.

A. Data Collection and Sampling

This study used a self-developed questionnaire to gather data from a targeted group of 108 final-year students of the Bachelor of English with Communication program at a Malaysian university. This study utilized purposive sampling to select a sample that fit the specific research objectives. The final-year students were selected because they had progressed through several years of language-focused university study and were relevant to the specified research questions. This is because utilizing an appropriate sample and sampling technique is crucial for ensuring that the gathered data truly reflects the demography under investigation [43]. Additionally, the use of a well-structured instrument in survey research ensures consistency in data collection across a varied group of respondents [42]. The instrument was specifically constructed with three sections. The first section comprises students' demographic information, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The second section contains five items on students' perceived national identity. Equally, the third section covers five items on students' language choice patterns. Established guidance for constructing, administering, and evaluating second-language research questionnaires emphasizes the importance of clear item wording and appropriate sampling decisions [44]. The use of a self-developed questionnaire allowed the researchers to tailor the items to the specific research objectives.

B. Validity and Reliability

To ensure valid findings, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability processes before full-scale implementation. First, the instrument was subjected to validity checks to ensure content and face validity. This process involved having the questionnaire reviewed by a panel of two experts in Communication and ESL education, respectively. The experts evaluated the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. Following expert feedback, the questionnaire was refined to eliminate ambiguity and enhance its technical accuracy. This process is vital in survey research to ensure that the instrument translates theoretical concepts into understandable items [42]. Subsequently, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the items within each scale. The results yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 for the national identity scale and 0.91 for the language choice scale. Both coefficients indicate strong internal consistency in the source analysis. However, internal consistency does not, on its own, establish construct validity or the stability of responses over time. Cronbach's alpha is a crucial technique in research practice. It determines how closely related a set of items is as a group, with scores above 0.70 generally considered acceptable [45]. Cronbach's alpha provides information about inter-item consistency but cannot establish test–retest stability, exclude response bias, or demonstrate that the intended construct was measured without error.

C. Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis was conducted using a multi-staged statistical approach. The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics to address the research questions. For the first research question, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to determine the respondents' levels of national identity and language choice patterns. This method allowed the researchers to categorize the students' perceptions into low, moderate, or high levels. For the second research question, the study utilized Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression to measure the association between national identity and language choice. According to Archdeacon [46], correlation and regression analyses are fundamental tools for understanding relationships between variables. Specifically, the Pearson correlation (r) was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship. Likewise, the regression analysis was employed to quantify the extent to which the variance in language choice can be attributed to perceived national identity. Darlington and Hayes [47] emphasize that regression models are essential

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for implementation when the goal is to establish a mathematical link between a predictor and an outcome variable. Additionally, Norouzian and Plonsky [48] highlight that these statistical methods provide the necessary evidence to support claims about language use and social identity. Recent applied-language research has employed correlational analysis [49], and established methodological guidance explains the assumptions and interpretation of linear regression [47], [48].

IV. Findings

The sample is predominantly composed of young adults, with most respondents aged 21-25 (88.9%), while only small proportions (5.6%) fall within the 18-20 and 26–30 age groups, respectively. In terms of gender, the sample comprises a large proportion of females (83.3%) compared with 16.7% male participants. In addition, the majority of respondents are Malay (94.4%), while Chinese, Indian, and other ethnic groups represent 5.6%. Overall, this demography shows a homogeneous group of ESL undergraduates. This sample is relevant to the stated research objectives, but its composition also limits the transferability of findings across ethnic and institutional contexts. The first research question aimed to determine the ESL undergraduates' levels of national identity perceptions and language choice patterns. Table 1 represents the ESL undergraduates' perceived national identity.

Table 1: National Identity Perceptions

SN	Item	Mean	SD	A + SA, n (%)	D + SD, n (%)	Neutral, n (%)
1	Being a Malaysian/Indonesian is an important part of who I am.	4.89	0.82	89 (82.41)	5 (4.63)	14 (12.96)
2	I feel proud when my country's culture and traditions are represented.	4.89	0.60	104 (96.30)	1 (0.93)	3 (2.78)
3	National events (e.g., Independence Day, cultural festivals) are meaningful to me.	4.83	0.58	105 (97.22)	0 (0.00)	3 (2.78)
4	Literature and the history of my country help me understand my identity.	4.78	0.77	93 (86.11)	4 (3.70)	11 (10.19)
5	I believe that learning the national language(s) strengthens unity.	4.89	0.70	97 (89.81)	2 (1.85)	9 (8.33)
	Total (Average)	4.86	0.69	98 (90.74)	2 (1.85)	8 (7.41)

Note. Source-reported values are preserved. Scale: 0.1–2.99 = low; 3.0–3.49 = moderate; 3.5–5.0 = high. The wording "Malaysian/Indonesian" and several frequency–mean inconsistencies require author verification.

The source tables report a high average perceived-national-identity score (M = 4.86, SD = 0.69) among respondents. Their printed aggregate frequency indicates 90.74% agreement or strong agreement across items, although some item means and response frequencies do not reconcile arithmetically and require checking against the original questionnaire data. This agreement is most pronounced regarding participation in national events and the representation of cultural traditions, both of which garnered the highest consensus among the participants. Conversely, disagreement across all indicators was insignificant (1.85%). A few participants (7.41%) maintained a neutral stance, especially regarding historical literature and personal definition of identity. Collectively, these findings highlight a unified sense of national belonging among the students. The students demonstrate that their language study coexists with national roots and culture. This directly mirrors the Malaysian sociolinguistic context, where Bahasa Melayu, as the national language (Bahasa Kebangsaan) fosters cross-cultural cohesion, even as the students pursue higher-level English proficiency as ESL learners. They emphasize that the nation's history, literature, and sovereign identity remain core pillars of self-actualization. The surveyed group reported a high level of national identification; this result should not be generalized to the wider and more diverse population of Malaysian ESL undergraduates. They view their multilingualism and cultural diversity as collective strengths that reinforce their shared sense of identity.

Table 2 represents the distribution of language choice patterns among the ESL undergraduates. The source-reported responses indicated a high level of conscious language-choice behaviour (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.70). A large majority of the participants (92.59%) agreed or strongly agreed that their linguistic choices influence social interactions, identity projection, and future aspirations. This pattern is especially evident in reported tendencies to adapt their language to gain social acceptance and manage perceptions. On the other hand, disagreement was insignificant across all items (0.93%). Only a few participants (6.48%) maintained a neutral stance, which slightly manifested in items regarding global career goals and multilingual social interactions. Overall, these findings reveal that for Malaysian ESL undergraduates, language choice is highly adaptive and conscious for social integration within the academic environment.

Table 2: ESL Learners' Language Choices

SN	Item	Mean	SD	A + SA, n (%)	D + SD, n (%)	Neutral, n (%)
1	The language I use with friends affects how I am perceived.	4.44	0.73	100 (92.59)	2 (1.85)	6 (5.56)
2	I switch between languages depending on whom I am talking to.	4.54	0.69	102 (94.44)	2 (1.85)	4 (3.70)
3	Using English (or other global languages) is important for my future goals.	4.41	0.71	99 (91.67)	1 (0.93)	8 (7.41)
4	I feel more accepted when I use the same language as my peers.	4.51	0.68	101 (93.52)	1 (0.93)	6 (5.56)
5	My social interactions are influenced by my ability to speak multiple languages.	4.44	0.69	100 (92.59)	1 (0.93)	7 (6.48)
	Total (Average)	4.47	0.70	100 (92.59)	1 (0.93)	7 (6.48)

Note. Source-reported values are preserved. Scale: 0.1–2.99 = low; 3.0–3.49 = moderate; 3.5–5.0 = high.

The second research question examined the association between perceived national identity and reported language choice among ESL undergraduates. Table 3 shows a statistically significant, strong positive correlation (r = 0.621, $p < 0.001$) between perceived national identity and language choice patterns among the participants. Therefore, the reported association is consistent with H1 for this sampled group, provided that the statistical results are confirmed. The reported correlation suggests that participants with higher national-identity scale scores also tended to report greater awareness of their language choices. The data do not establish which construct precedes the other. Within the Malaysian sociolinguistic context, this finding indicates that the high level of perceived national identity (Mean = 4.86, SD = 0.69) is associated with students' reported awareness of linguistic choices; a causal effect is not established. For instance, a stronger identity score may accompany more deliberate self-reported language choices, such as using localized expressions or code-switching.

The findings also indicate that linguistic competence is associated with students' socio-cultural self, where the decision to use a specific language is influenced by national identity.

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Table 3: Correlation Between National Identity and Language Choice

SN	Variable	Mean	SD	Statistic	Language Choice	National Identity
1	National Identity	4.86	0.69	Pearson r	0.621	1
				Two-tailed p	< 0.001	—
				N	108	108
2	Language Choice	4.47	0.70	Pearson r	1	0.621
				Two-tailed p	—	< 0.001
				N	108	108

Note. The source printed $p = 0.000$; following statistical reporting conventions, this is presented as $p < 0.001$. Values otherwise remain as originally reported.

The unprovided regression figure was described as showing a distinct upward, positive trajectory, with the regression line indicating a robust association between the two constructs. Statistically, the strong positive correlation provides empirical evidence that the sample association is inconsistent with a zero correlation under the assumed statistical test. This outcome represents how a student's perceived national identity influences their communicative agency. For example, the high concentration of participants in the upper-right quadrant reflects a population of "identity-aware" communicators. They possess both a high degree of national identity perceptions and a rational approach to language choice. This suggests that students who are deeply connected to national representation, national language, and shared cultural values do not view English as a replacement for their identity. They, rather, choose their linguistic code strategically to perform that identity. A student with a high level of perceived national identity is more likely to engage in language choice patterns, such as purposeful code-switching or adapting speech to gain peer acceptance.

The narrow-shaded area that would represent a confidence interval could illustrate uncertainty around an estimated trend, but no underlying figure or interval data were supplied for independent verification. The r-value is well above the threshold for a meaningful relationship, and the p-value is significantly lower than 0.05. Thus, the findings support the hypothesis stating that there is a significant positive relationship between national identity and language choice among ESL undergraduates in Malaysia (H1). Accordingly, this outcome suggests that fostering national belonging may support reflective multilingual practices, although the present cross-sectional design cannot establish an intervention effect, as their linguistic choices become a deliberate reflection of their national identity.

Table 4: Regression Model Summary for National Identity and Language Choice

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	0.621	0.386	0.384	0.58352

Note. Values reproduced from the source; the adjusted R^2 and standard error require confirmation for $N = 108$.

The analysis aimed to describe the statistical association between perceived national identity and language-choice responses among the surveyed undergraduates. As presented in Table 4, the correlation coefficient (R = 0.621) indicates a strong positive linear relationship. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R2 = 0.386) shows that national identity accounts for 38.6% of the variance in the students' language choice. The remaining 61.4% of the sample variation is not captured by the reported fitted model and may reflect unmeasured factors, measurement error, or other sources of unexplained variation. The source-reported ANOVA values in Table 5 would ordinarily provide a test of the fitted regression relationship, which, if verified, would indicate that the estimated regression slope differs from zero under the model assumptions. The source table reports $F(1, 382) = 239.792$ and $p < 0.001$, but its denominator degrees of freedom correspond to a much larger sample than the 108 respondents described in the methods. The original model output must therefore be reviewed before this statistic is interpreted as a result for the stated sample. This source-reported result cannot independently establish model fit or prediction quality, because the degrees of freedom and sample size are inconsistent. It should be interpreted provisionally until the original model is independently checked. Consequently, the hypothesis stating that national identity significantly contributes to or predicts the language choice of ESL undergraduates in Malaysia (H2) is firmly accepted.

Table 5: Reported ANOVA for the Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance (p)
Regression	81.652	1	81.652	239.792	< 0.001
Residual	130.071	382	0.341	—	—
Total	211.723	383	—	—	—

Note. Source figures are retained. Total df = 383 implies 384 observations, incompatible with the declared $N = 108$; verification from original statistical output is required.

Table 6 presents the source-reported coefficients of the simple linear regression model, which are provisionally retained pending reanalysis. The original regression table reports a positive association between the two scales ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < 0.001$). However, these test statistics cannot be accepted as internally consistent with the declared sample of 108 respondents until the analysis is repeated using the original records. Both the constant intercept and the independent variable demonstrate strong statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), with a standardized beta coefficient (beta = 0.621) indicating that for every single-unit increase in a student's national identity perception, their strategic language choice score rises by 0.621 standard deviations. This suggests that as students become more anchored in their national belonging, they do not simply "speak" English; they "choose" how to use it as a tool for accommodation or divergence to signal their identity. This relationship is structurally expressed through the unstandardized regression equation: Language Choice = 1.156 + 0.678(National Identity) + e. Here, 1.156 is the source-reported intercept, 0.678 is the unstandardized coefficient B, and the residual term e represents unexplained individual variation. The separate reported standard error of the estimate is 0.58352; it is not identical to the residual itself. The coefficients and this error estimate must be checked together against

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the original regression output. Taken together, the reported coefficients are consistent with a positive association between the two questionnaire constructs. However, they do not show that national identity independently causes changes in actual conversational behaviour, nor do they establish how students adapt their multilingual repertoires in observed interactions. Given that the printed significance levels are reported as $p < 0.001$ and the standardized coefficient as 0.621, the reported analysis provides provisional statistical support for H2, conditional on verification against the original observations.

Table 6: Reported Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Standard Error	Standardized β	t	Significance (p)
Constant	1.156	0.183	—	6.315	< 0.001
National Identity	0.678	0.044	0.621	15.485	< 0.001

Note. Values are source-reported and must be reconciled with the declared participant count and descriptive statistics.

The source-reported regression equation is $y = 1.156 + 0.678x$. This positive slope is directionally consistent with the reported correlation, but the equation, standard deviations, and ANOVA degrees of freedom do not form a fully consistent set of estimates for the declared sample of 108 respondents. No regression plot or participant-level points were included with the source manuscript, so an additional graph should not be inferred. The reported $R^2 = 0.386$ corresponds descriptively to 38.6% of outcome variance within the fitted model; it does not establish a causal effect of national identity on students' language choices. The model should be re-estimated from the original 108 responses before the regression claims are used for substantive inference.

A. Consistency Checks and Reporting Limitations

The source tables must be reconciled before final acceptance of the inferential claims. The methods describe 108 respondents, whereas the ANOVA table reports a residual degree of freedom of 382 and a total degree of freedom of 383; for a simple regression with one predictor and 108 independent complete observations, the corresponding degrees of freedom would ordinarily be 106 and 107. Moreover, $r = 0.621$ is compatible with $R^2 \approx 0.386$, but the source-reported $F(1, 382) = 239.792$ and coefficient $t = 15.485$ cannot simultaneously describe that same 108-observation simple regression. Under the usual assumptions, a correlation of 0.621 with 108 independent complete observations would instead imply a test statistic of approximately $t = 8.16$ and $F = 66.54$. These conditional arithmetic checks are not re-estimated study results.

Additional concerns arise from the reported descriptive tables. For example, in the first national-identity item, 89 respondents are recorded as agreeing or strongly agreeing, 14 as neutral, and 5 as disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Even assigning the maximum available Likert score within each group produces a mean below the printed item mean of 4.89. The combined scale scores, raw item coding, and any reverse-scored items should therefore be checked against the original dataset. These inconsistencies do not justify replacing the observed values with conjectural corrections. The study's association-based conclusions should remain provisional until the underlying observations, analysis syntax, and summary tables are reconciled.

V. Discussion

The findings reported in this study demonstrated that Malaysian ESL undergraduates hold a strong sense of national identity and, at the same time, use language very deliberately. This pattern is important because it shows that their use of English is not detached from who they are as Malaysians; rather, it sits alongside their attachment to Bahasa Melayu, cultural traditions, and local ways of speaking. These findings concur with Miller [31], who showed that language choice is never just about speaking but about positioning the self in relation to group membership and belonging. Equally, Marshall's [30] study suggests that learners' confidence in using English can be shaped by how they see themselves within the academic setting. In the Malaysian context, this means that students do not simply switch between English and local codes for convenience. They often do so because language carries social meaning, and that meaning is tied to how they present themselves as members of a national community.

The findings also highlight that national identity and language choice are not competing forces for ESL undergraduates. They coexist in a way that allows students to remain Malaysian while still engaging with English in university life. This outcome shows that the source-reported pattern may reflect a balance between multilingual practices and perceived national belonging rather than a rejection of English. According to Norton and Pavlenko [35], learners often use English in relation to imagined futures and wider participation. This is because Malaysian ESL undergraduates may see English as useful and not as a threat to national belonging. On the other hand, Ahn [33] and Khan [34] posit that identity is also emotionally loaded, and learners may avoid or embrace English depending on how safe they feel within their social group. In this study, however, the students appear to approach language choice with a fairly stable sense of belonging, which suggests that national identity gives them confidence rather than conflict. Additionally, Ali and Mujiyanto [36] showed that identity shapes learners' willingness to use a second language. This is very much reflected in the present findings. Language choice among Malaysian ESL undergraduates is therefore not random; it is connected to identity, social meaning, and the need to feel locally grounded even in English-medium settings.

Additionally, the findings indicate that national identity is a strong predictor of language choice among Malaysian ESL undergraduates. This outcome shows that as students feel more attached to their national identity, they are more likely to make language choices that carry social meaning, such as using English strategically in formal settings or shifting toward Bahasa Melayu and localized forms when they want to signal closeness, solidarity, or cultural belonging. These findings concur with Miller [31], who argued that language

use is a social performance tied to identity. In the Malaysian context, the result is especially meaningful because students are not choosing between English and national identity as if one must cancel the other out. Instead, they seem to use language to balance both, which fits the CAT's assumptions. For instance, convergence is visible when students adjust to English to meet academic expectations. Alternatively, divergence appears when they use local codes to maintain in-group solidarity and express Malaysian identity. This outcome suggests that CAT provides a useful explanation for the present pattern: students are not passive users of language but active social actors who adjust their speech to fit the situation and the identity they want to display.

According to Marshall [30], learners may internalize deficit views of their English, but this does not seem to dominate because the students show a more confident, identity-aware pattern of communication. In contrast, studies that focus only on classroom language practices may miss the broader social meaning of these choices, especially outside formal instruction. On the other hand, the present findings show that Malaysian undergraduates likely make language choices with a clear sense of audience and identity. National identity works as a guiding force in everyday communication. It helps students decide when to align with English norms and when to remain visibly local, which concurs with CAT's presumption. The findings suggest how perceived identity shapes how students move between English, Bahasa Melayu, and colloquial expressions depending on the setting and the people around them. These findings concur with Khan's [34] review, which showed that labeling and identity pressure can affect how confidently learners use English. In the Malaysian context, however, the present study points to a more balanced pattern; students could maintain a strong national identity while still using English in purposeful ways. This outcome matters because it suggests that multilingual behavior should not be viewed as divided loyalty.

The findings also highlight that Malaysian ESL undergraduates may use language to express both membership in the nation and competence in the academic world. According to Ali and Mujiyanto [36], identity can either support or limit second language use. The patterns are compatible with the interpretation that code-switching may convey social or identity value rather than merely reflect limited English proficiency; they do so because language choice carries social and identity value. That is consistent with CAT's assumption, which explains how speakers modify their communication to reduce distance, show similarity, or mark difference. In this sense, convergence and divergence are not abstract ideas but practical features of how students talk in real Malaysian university settings. On the other hand, if national identity were weak or fragmented, language choice might become less stable and more dependent on external pressure. Additionally, this supports the idea that Malaysian ESL undergraduates are active users of language who adapt to context without losing their sense of self. Students may speak English when they want to sound professional or academically aligned. Yet they may return to Bahasa Melayu or local speech forms when they want to signal warmth, familiarity, or shared identity. According to CAT, accommodation is not weakness or imitation, but a social strategy shaped by relationship and identity.

The role of national identity is important for understanding how students manage academic and social interaction. According to Marshall [30], identity can affect language behavior. However, the present findings suggest that Malaysian ESL undergraduates may use identity as a source of confidence and direction. In contrast, this does not mean that tension is absent; rather, it may be managed through flexible accommodation choices. Additionally, the use of localized codes can be read as a form of divergence that preserves in-group belonging while still allowing participation in English-medium settings. This balance is one of the strengths of CAT in explaining the present findings. The present study could enhance our understanding of the relationship between perceived national identity and language choice patterns, particularly among ESL undergraduates. The study shows that national identity can support strategic multilingual use rather than reduce English use. Students appear to be comfortable using accommodation as part of daily interaction. When they converge toward English, they may aim for academic acceptance and wider communicative reach. When they diverge toward Bahasa Melayu or local forms, they may be protecting cultural closeness and national belonging. The role of national identity means that language policy and teaching practice should not assume that adopting English requires cultural detachment. Thus, educators in Malaysia should recognize the social meaning of language choice.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined the association between national identity and language choice among ESL undergraduates in Malaysia. The study pays particular attention to how students perceive their national belonging and how it shapes their linguistic behavior in a multilingual university setting. According to the findings, the selected Malaysian ESL undergraduates showed a strong sense of national identity and a similarly conscious approach to language choice. The findings indicate students do not view English as separate from their Malaysian identity. Instead, they use language in ways that reflect both academic aims and cultural attachment. This means that English, Bahasa Melayu, and localized speech forms are not simply tools for communication, but also markers of identity, belonging, and social positioning. The source-reported data also suggest a positive statistical association between national identity and language-choice responses. This outcome supports the idea that students with a stronger sense of national belonging are more likely to make deliberate choices about when to use English and when to rely on local codes. In practical terms, this indicates that language use among Malaysian ESL undergraduates is shaped by identity awareness rather than by proficiency alone. The reported findings are consistent with students viewing language choice as an active communicative decision associated with perceived national identity, rather

than establishing that identity independently determines language use. Therefore, this study examined not only whether students use English, but also why they choose English.

The contribution of this study lies in its empirical evidence that national identity can function as a meaningful predictor of language choice in the Malaysian tertiary context. The study offers useful insights for educational policy and practice. In the Malaysian educational sector, the findings suggest that language planning should not treat English proficiency and national identity as competing goals, but as connected realities that students manage every day. This means university policies and classroom practices should recognize multilingualism as a normal part of student life rather than a problem to be corrected. The study also points to the need for teaching approaches that allow students to use English without feeling that they are distancing themselves from their national identity. At the same time, the study is limited by its focus on a single group of undergraduates from an academic program. Future research should employ a broader sample from different universities and ethnic backgrounds to help clarify whether the same pattern appears across Malaysia. It would also be useful to explore other factors that may shape language choice, such as ethnicity, language proficiency, peer influence, and institutional language policy. Taken together, this study provides a useful starting point for understanding how Malaysian undergraduates balance identity and communication.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, and the drafting and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

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Data Availability

The data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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