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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN SHAPING CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN MALAYSIAN ESL CONTEXTS

Fatin Rahaina Ahmad Sani^{1*}, Siti Mukhlisa Mohamad Khairul Adilah², Nadira M. Jahaya³

¹ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Sungai Petani Campus, Malaysia
Email: fatinrahaina@uitm.edu.my

² Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Sungai Petani Campus, Malaysia
Email: sitimukhlisa@uitm.edu.my

³ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Sungai Petani Campus, Malaysia
Email: nadirajahaya@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This study explores the critical role of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction within Malaysian ESL contexts, addressing a significant gap in both academic scholarship and educational practice. The problem arises from the limited understanding of how language attitudes - evaluative beliefs and feelings toward specific languages - influence micro-level classroom dynamics, particularly in monolingual settings where English operates alongside Bahasa Malaysia as a national identity marker. While existing literature highlights the impact of macro-level sociolinguistic factors, such as national language policies and societal attitudes, it often neglects the nuanced ways in which attitudes manifest during real-time classroom discourse. This oversight is particularly problematic in Malaysia, where the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing global aspirations creates a complex linguistic ecology. The aim of this conceptual paper is to advance theoretical understanding of how language attitudes mediate classroom interactions and influence learning outcomes and social cohesion. Through a synthesis of relevant literature, the study identifies gaps in qualitative research on micro-level processes, cross-disciplinary perspectives, and context-specific frameworks tailored to monolingual ESL settings. A proposed conceptual framework integrates micro-level interactional dynamics with broader sociocultural influences, offering practical insights for educators and policymakers. The main findings reveal that positive language attitudes toward English foster inclusivity and collaboration, while negative attitudes hinder student engagement and communicative competence. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for evidence-based pedagogical strategies and longitudinal research to track the

evolution of language attitudes over time. The implications extend beyond academia, informing policy development and professional practices that align with Malaysia's sociocultural realities and global aspirations. By bridging theory and practice, this study contributes to creating inclusive, effective, and forward-looking ESL classrooms, ultimately enhancing both language learning outcomes and social cohesion in Malaysia's increasingly globalised society.

Keywords:

Language Attitudes, Classroom Interaction, Malaysian ESL Contexts, Sociolinguistics Ecology, Language Policies

Introduction

Language attitudes have increasingly been recognised as the critical area of research in the broader domains of sociolinguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in multilingual and ESL settings such as Malaysia. Language attitudes, defined as the evaluative beliefs and feelings that an individual has towards certain languages or language varieties, in which significantly influence how learners engage with target languages and within educational settings (Baker, 2021; Garrett, 2019). These attitudes are not fixed; instead, they are dynamic and develop in relation to sociocultural context, personal experiences, and social ideologies. In the Malaysian educational setting, English is utilised as the medium of teaching in specific courses, including those predominantly composed of a single ethnic group. Therefore, these attitudes play an important role in influencing classroom dynamics. A positive attitude towards English can promote effective communication, hence improving learning results, whereas a negative attitude may obstruct classroom involvement and create barriers to engagement. However, despite their significance, there is limited research that has explored the context of Malaysian ESL classrooms, how these attitudes play out in the classroom, and their direct impact on student-teacher and peer interactions. Understanding this dynamic is essential not only for advancing theoretical insights into sociolinguistic identity and SLA but also for informing pedagogical practices that are able to foster inclusive and productive learning environments (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022).

In Malaysia, the linguistic landscape exhibits a unique tension of wanting to preserve the national identity through the use of Bahasa Malaysia versus the need to adopt English as a second language for global competitiveness. This paradox constructs a complex language ecosystem that affects both macro-level policies and micro-level classroom discourse. For example, Ali and Rahman (2023) discovered that students' attitudes towards the English language were closely interrelated with their perceptions of cultural authenticity and global aspirations. Their study has revealed that the students often navigate conflicting identities during classroom activities, thus resulting in ambivalent attitudes and varying degrees of voluntary effort to interact with the target language used in the classroom. Similarly, Thompson and Garcia (2022) have highlighted that students' language attitudes must be understood as they are intertwined with their social identities, which inevitably shape their communicative behaviours and ability to negotiate meaning together through peer interactions. These findings highlight the necessity of investigating how linguistic attitudes influence classroom interactions at both individual and collective levels, especially in contexts such as Malaysia, where the interaction between local and global values is significant.

However, there are significant gaps that remain in understanding their specific impact on classroom interaction dynamics in monolingual ESL settings, such as the Malaysian classroom, despite the growing recognition of how language attitudes influence second language learning. While prior research has extensively examined language attitudes in multilingual contexts (e.g., Nguyen & Pillay, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), few studies have focused on how these attitudes shape interactions in classrooms where English is taught as a second language amidst a dominant monolingual culture. Existing literature often emphasises macro-level sociolinguistic factors, such as language policy and national identity. However, it tends to overlook micro-level interactions, including teacher-student rapport, peer communication, and the negotiation of linguistic identities during classroom activities (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022). Furthermore, much of the existing work relies on quantitative surveys, leaving a dearth of qualitative insights into the ways attitudes manifest in real-time classroom discourse (Garrett, 2019). In the Malaysian context, the socio-political struggle between the global desire for English fluency and the local moral stances of culture leads to intricate interactions between varieties that have yet to be adequately addressed.

Therefore, this limitation must be addressed, as understanding how attitudes and interactions intersect and can inform more effective pedagogical strategies would enhance learning outcomes and social cohesion in ESL classrooms (Baker, 2021). Recent studies have begun to address this gap by employing qualitative methodologies to provide richer insights into the relationship between language attitudes and classroom interaction. For example, in classroom observations and interviews, Wong and Tan (2023) have observed how students' language attitudes influenced their engagement in group discussions and collaborative work. Their results showed that students with positive opinions of English were more likely to follow accepted standards of global competency by engaging in accommodating behaviours such as code-switching and accent mirroring of the teacher. In contrast, students with negative attitudes resisted such accommodation by either using Bahasa Malaysia or remaining silent. Similarly, Rahman and Kumar (2023) showed the importance of ethnographic approaches, which uncovered the subtle ways in which language attitudes affect peer communication and the negotiation of identities in the classroom contexts. These studies have underlined the need to include qualitative approaches to reflect the dynamic and context-specific nature of language attitudes in a learning environment.

This study aims to enhance a deeper context-specific understanding of the impact of language attitudes in classroom dynamics, focusing specifically on this unexamined aspect. This conceptual paper's primary objective is to forward theoretical knowledge of how language attitudes affect classroom interaction in Malaysian ESL environments, therefore providing a new perspective through which educators and researchers could examine the sociolinguistics dynamics of language learning. This paper addresses the noted gap in present research by synthesising existing literature on language attitudes and classroom interaction, proposing a conceptual framework combining micro-level interactional processes with more general sociocultural influences. First, it is to define the ways in which language attitudes affect teacher-student and peer interactions. Second, it will investigate the implications of these attitudes for inclusive and effective ESL pedagogy; and third, it will offer a theoretical basis for future empirical research in similar monolingual educational settings (Garrett, 2019).

This concept paper focuses on reframing language attitudes as the dynamic forces that mediate classroom communication and identity negotiation, rather than viewing them solely as individual beliefs. Moreover, it also introduces a refined model for analysing the relationship between linguistic ideologies and interactional practices, offering valuable practical insights for educators seeking to address cultural and communicative gaps in ESL classrooms (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022). The structure of this paper is as follows. The introduction provides an overview of the sociolinguistic context and discusses the significance of this study. The second section of this paper is the Literature Review, which synthesises relevant literature on language attitudes and classroom interaction while highlighting critical gaps. The paper's third section addresses Future Research Gaps and Directions, which outlines the proposed framework by detailing its components and theoretical underpinnings. Lastly, the Conclusion will discuss the implications for ESL pedagogy, future research directions, and reflections on the study's contributions and potential applications in diverse educational settings.

Literature Review

Defining and Exploring Language Attitudes and Classroom Interaction: Highlighting Critical Gaps

Language attitudes, a central construct in sociolinguistics, refer to individuals' evaluative beliefs, feelings, and perceptions toward specific languages or language varieties (Baker, 2021; Garrett, 2019). These attitudes are shaped by sociocultural contexts, personal experiences, and societal ideologies, influencing how individuals engage with language learning and communication. In educational settings, language attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping classroom interaction, as they mediate students' willingness to participate, their perception of the teacher's authority, and their comfort level in peer interactions (Nguyen & Pillay, 2022). For instance, positive attitudes toward English may encourage active engagement in classroom discussions, while negative attitudes may lead to reluctance, withdrawal, or resistance to using the target language (Zhang et al., 2021).

Recent research has expanded on this understanding by examining how language attitudes intersect with identity formation and social dynamics in educational contexts. For example, Ali and Rahman (2023) explored how Malaysian students' ambivalent attitudes toward English were influenced by their desire to maintain cultural authenticity while aspiring for global competence. Their findings revealed that students often navigate these conflicting identities during classroom interactions, leading to fluctuating levels of engagement. Similarly, Thompson and Garcia (2022) highlighted the role of language attitudes in shaping peer relationships, noting that students with positive attitudes toward English were more likely to collaborate effectively in group activities, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

On the other hand, classroom interaction encompasses the verbal and non-verbal exchanges that occur between teachers and students, as well as among peers, during instructional activities. It is a critical component of second language acquisition (SLA), as it provides opportunities for learners to practice language skills, negotiate meaning, and develop communicative competence (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022). However, the quality and dynamics of these interactions are heavily influenced by underlying language attitudes. For example, in Malaysian ESL classrooms, where English often carries connotations of global prestige and cultural alienation, students may exhibit ambivalent attitudes that affect their interaction patterns. This dynamic highlights the need to understand how language attitudes shape micro-

level processes such as teacher-student rapport, peer communication, and identity negotiation during classroom activities.

The interplay between language attitudes and classroom interaction has also been explored through the lens of linguistic identity negotiation. Lim and Hassan (2023) conducted a qualitative study in Malaysian schools and found that students' language choices during classroom interactions were deeply tied to their desire to maintain cultural authenticity while navigating global aspirations. Their findings align with Martinez and Lee's (2022) findings, which emphasised the role of teacher-student rapport in facilitating effective scaffolding, particularly in settings where students exhibit ambivalent attitudes toward the target language. These studies underscore the importance of addressing both individual attitudes and broader sociocultural factors to enhance interactional dynamics in ESL classrooms.

Significant gaps remain despite the growing body of research on language attitudes and classroom interaction. Most studies focus on macro-level factors such as national language policies or societal attitudes toward English, leaving micro-level processes largely unexplored. Additionally, much of the existing literature relies on quantitative surveys, which, while valuable, fail to capture the nuanced and context-specific ways in which attitudes manifest in real-time classroom discourse (Garrett, 2019). This limitation is particularly problematic in monolingual settings like Malaysia, where the interplay between global aspirations for English proficiency and local cultural values creates a complex linguistic ecology that demands deeper qualitative exploration.

To address this gap, recent studies have employed qualitative methodologies to provide richer insights into the relationship between language attitudes and classroom interaction. For instance, Wong and Tan (2023) used classroom observations and interviews to examine how students' language attitudes influenced their participation in group discussions and collaborative activities. Their findings revealed that students with positive attitudes toward English were more likely to engage in accommodative behaviours, such as code-switching and mimicking the teacher's accent, to align with perceived norms of global competence. Conversely, students with negative attitudes often resisted such accommodation, opting to use Bahasa Malaysia or remain silent. Similarly, Rahman and Kumar (2023) demonstrated the value of ethnographic approaches in uncovering the subtle ways language attitudes shape peer communication and identity negotiation during classroom activities.

Another critical gap in the literature is the lack of attention to the intersection of language attitudes and power dynamics in ESL classrooms. Smith and Brown (2023) argued that students' attitudes toward English are often influenced by their perceptions of the teacher's authority and the broader socio-political context. Their study highlighted how students from marginalised communities were more likely to exhibit resistance toward English due to its association with colonialism and cultural imperialism. This finding underscores the need for educators to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices that acknowledge and address the historical and political dimensions of language attitudes.

Finally, there is a pressing need for longitudinal research to track the development of language attitudes over time and their impact on classroom interaction. Chen et al. (2022) conducted a three-year study in Malaysian schools and found that students' attitudes toward English became more positive as they progressed through different grade levels, influenced by factors such as

exposure to international media and increased awareness of global opportunities. Their findings suggest that language attitudes are dynamic and may evolve due to changes in societal values, educational experiences, or external influences. Investigating these changes can provide deeper insights into the factors shaping language attitudes and their implications for classroom interaction.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for research to bridge this gap by examining how language attitudes shape classroom interaction at individual and group levels in Malaysian ESL contexts. Such research would provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to foster inclusive and effective learning environments. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, future studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between language attitudes and classroom dynamics, ultimately contributing to developing pedagogical strategies that promote both language learning outcomes and social cohesion.

Relevant Theories and Models: Frameworks for Understanding Language Attitudes and Interaction

Several theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the relationship between language attitudes and classroom interaction. One prominent model is the Attitude-Behaviour Framework (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which posits that attitudes influence behavioural intentions, which in turn shape actual behaviours. Applied to the ESL classroom, this framework suggests that students' attitudes toward English, whether positive, neutral, or negative, directly impact their willingness to engage in classroom activities, such as answering questions, participating in group discussions, or practising oral communication (Nguyen & Pillay, 2022). This connection between attitudes and behaviour highlights the critical role of fostering positive attitudes to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Another relevant theory is Linguistic Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991), which explains how individuals adjust their language use to align with or differentiate themselves from others based on perceived social identities. This theory can help explain how students and teachers negotiate their linguistic identities through interaction in Malaysian ESL classrooms. For example, students who perceive English as a marker of global competence may adopt more accommodative behaviours, such as mimicking the teacher's accent or using English exclusively during class activities. Conversely, those who view English as a threat to their cultural identity may resist such accommodation, opting instead to use Bahasa Malaysia or remain silent (Zhang et al., 2021). This dynamic underscores the importance of addressing the sociocultural dimensions of language attitudes to create inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The Sociocultural Theory of Learning (Vygotsky, 1978) further enriches our understanding of classroom interaction by emphasising the role of social contexts in mediating language learning. According to this theory, interaction serves as a scaffold for cognitive development, enabling learners to internalise new knowledge through collaborative dialogue. In the Malaysian ESL context, however, this process is complicated by the presence of conflicting language attitudes. For instance, students with negative attitudes toward English may struggle to engage in meaningful interactions, thereby hindering their ability to benefit from the scaffolding provided by teachers and peers (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022). This tension between

individual attitudes and collaborative learning highlights the need for strategies to bridge classroom cultural and communicative divides.

While these theories offer robust explanations for the interplay between language attitudes and classroom interaction, they often overlook the unique challenges faced in monolingual settings. For example, none of these models explicitly addresses how the tension between preserving national identity and embracing English as a global lingua franca influences interactional dynamics in Malaysian classrooms. This theoretical gap underscores the need for a more context-specific framework that integrates micro-level interactional processes with broader sociocultural factors. By addressing this limitation, researchers and educators can better understand how language attitudes shape classroom dynamics and inform pedagogical practices that foster inclusivity, engagement, and effective learning outcomes in Malaysian ESL contexts.

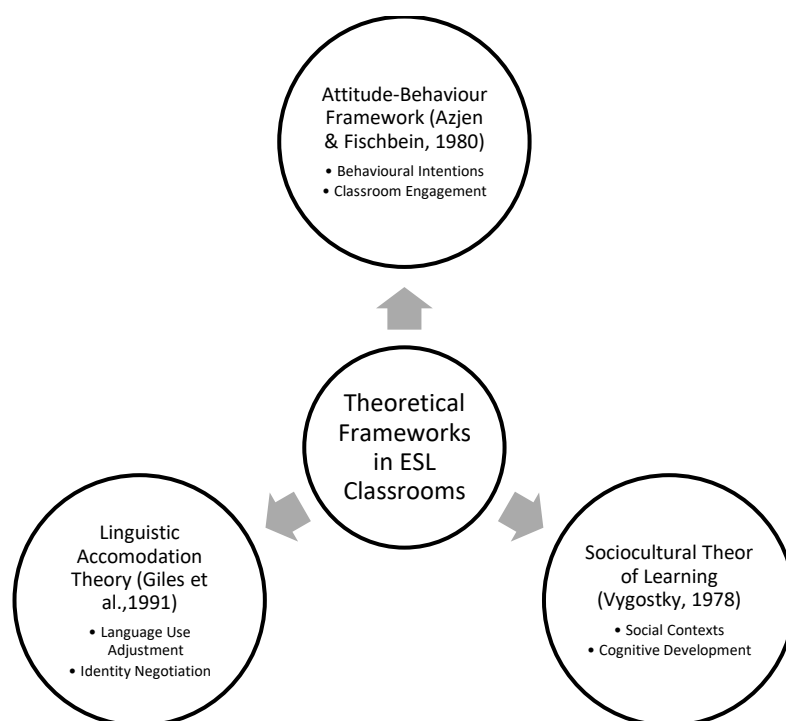


Figure 1: Theoretical Frameworks in ESL Classroom Dynamics

The diagram illustrates the integration of three key theoretical frameworks in ESL classroom dynamics: the Attitude-Behaviour Framework, Linguistic Accommodation Theory, and Sociocultural Theory of Learning. At the center of the diagram, the central box represents the concept of Theoretical Frameworks in ESL Classrooms, which is connected to each framework through dotted lines, symbolising their interconnectedness. The Attitude-Behaviour Framework emphasises how students' attitudes influence their behavioural intentions and subsequent classroom engagement. In contrast, Linguistic Accommodation Theory focuses on language use adjustment and identity negotiation within the classroom context. Lastly, the Sociocultural Theory of Learning highlights the role of social contexts in facilitating cognitive development. Together, these frameworks provide unique insights into the complex interplay between language attitudes and classroom interaction, offering a comprehensive lens for understanding the dynamics of ESL classrooms.

Addressing Research Gaps and Concluding the Literature Review

The review of existing literature reveals several critical gaps that warrant further investigation. First, while numerous studies have explored language attitudes in multilingual contexts (e.g., Nguyen & Pillay, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), few have explicitly focused on monolingual ESL settings like Malaysia. This oversight is particularly concerning given the unique linguistic ecology of Malaysia, where English operates within a predominantly monolingual culture characterised by strong ties to Bahasa Malaysia and local cultural values. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how language attitudes influence classroom interaction in similar contexts.

Second, the majority of existing research relies on quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, to measure language attitudes. While these approaches provide valuable insights into general trends, they often fail to capture the dynamic and context-specific ways in which attitudes manifest in real-time classroom discourse (Garrett, 2019). To address this limitation, qualitative methods such as classroom observations, interviews, and discourse analysis are needed to explore the nuanced interplay between attitudes and interaction in greater depth. Such methods can reveal how language attitudes shape micro-level processes, including teacher-student rapport, peer communication, and identity negotiation during classroom activities.

Finally, there is a pressing need for research that moves beyond descriptive accounts of language attitudes to examine their implications for pedagogy and policy. For instance, how can educators leverage positive language attitudes to foster inclusive and effective ESL classrooms? What strategies can be employed to address negative attitudes and mitigate their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes? Answering these questions requires not only empirical investigation but also the development of practical frameworks that bridge theory and practice (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022). By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to creating more inclusive, engaging, and productive learning environments in Malaysian ESL contexts and beyond.

Relevant Previous Studies

The table below presents a summary of relevant previous studies that are closely related to this paper. It highlights the authors, year of publication, title of the study, methods used, and key findings. By reviewing these studies, the table provides a clear overview of existing knowledge in the field, identifies common themes, and shows how past research contributes to the understanding of the current topic.

Table 1: Relevant Previous Studies

Author(s)	Year	Title	Method	Key Findings
Too, W. K.	2023	“People are already doing it” – Malaysian English language teachers’ perceptions on translanguaging	Qualitative case study; Online interviews with 7 Malaysian public secondary school English teachers (rural/suburban)	Teachers used Malay as the main scaffolding language despite monolingual policy. Four themes: multilingual classroom profiles, selective use of other languages, limited spontaneous translanguaging, and challenges from policy gaps, training,

Kaur & Sidhu	2022	English Language Teaching in Malaysia: Challenges and Opportunities	Mixed-methods; surveys and classroom observations	workload, and fear of repercussions (Too, 2023). Found that negative language attitudes toward English hindered student participation while positive attitudes fostered inclusivity and collaboration in ESL classrooms (Kaur & Sidhu, 2022).
Nguyen & Pillay	2022	Language Attitudes and Motivation in ESL Contexts: A Systematic Review	Systematic review of 45 studies	Identified a gap in qualitative research on micro-level interactions emphasizing the need for context-specific analyses of how attitudes shape classroom discourse in monolingual settings (Nguyen & Pillay, 2022).
Zhang et al.	2021	Exploring Language Attitudes in Asian ESL Classrooms: A Comparative Study	Quantitative survey; cross-cultural comparison	Demonstrated that Malaysian students exhibited ambivalent attitudes toward English influenced by cultural pride in Bahasa Malaysia and aspirations for global competence (Zhang et al., 2021).
Garrett	2019	Language Attitudes and Language Learning	Theoretical synthesis; literature review	Argued that language attitudes mediate behavioural intentions impacting classroom engagement and interaction patterns but noted a lack of focus on real-time classroom discourse in past studies (Garrett, 2019).

The table provides a comprehensive overview of recent studies (from the past five years) that have explored the role of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction within Malaysian ESL contexts. These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of language attitudes and their influence on both macro- and micro-level classroom dynamics. For instance, Too (2023) conducted a qualitative case study through online interviews with seven experienced Malaysian secondary school English teachers to explore their perceptions and reported translanguaging practices. The findings revealed that despite Malaysia's monolingual-oriented English language policy, teachers frequently used Malay as a scaffolding tool to facilitate comprehension, manage classrooms, and explain cultural concepts. The study identified four main themes: the complex multilingual tapestry of classrooms, judicious use of students' home languages, the prevalence of limited spontaneous translanguaging, and challenges in integrating such practices due to policy silence, monolingual teacher training, workload, and fear of repercussions. The research highlights the gap between language policy and classroom realities, advocating for pedagogical translanguaging to better reflect Malaysia's multilingual context. Similarly, Kaur and Sidhu (2022) used mixed methods to explore how language attitudes affect classroom inclusivity, finding that negative attitudes toward English often resulted in reduced student participation and collaboration.

Nguyen and Pillay's (2022) systematic review further underscores the need for more qualitative research, particularly in monolingual settings like Malaysia, where the interplay between cultural values and global aspirations creates a unique linguistic ecology. Their analysis of 45 studies highlighted a critical gap in understanding how language attitudes manifest in real-time classroom discourse. Zhang et al. (2021) provided a comparative perspective, demonstrating that Malaysian students' attitudes toward English are often ambivalent, shaped by both cultural pride and the desire for global proficiency. Lastly, Garrett's (2019) theoretical synthesis reinforced the importance of examining language attitudes through frameworks such as the Attitude-Behaviour Framework, while also pointing out the lack of attention to micro-level interactional processes in existing literature. Together, these studies underscore the need for deeper, context-specific investigations into how language attitudes shape classroom interaction in Malaysian ESL settings, providing a foundation for future research in this area.

Conceptual Framework Development

Process of Development

The framework was developed through a synthesis of existing studies rather than new data collection. The process involved three main stages. First, relevant works on language attitudes, classroom interaction, and sociocultural influences (e.g., Baker, 2021; Garrett, 2019; Kaur & Sidhu, 2022; Nguyen & Pillay, 2022; Too, 2023) were reviewed to trace recurring themes and highlight gaps. Second, the analysis focused on underexplored areas, particularly the limited attention to micro-level classroom processes and the insufficient integration of sociocultural factors with classroom practices. Third, insights from established theories, including the Attitude-Behaviour Framework (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), Linguistic Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991), and Sociocultural Theory of Learning (Vygotsky, 1978), were combined with the reviewed findings to construct a framework positioning language attitudes as the central construct linking macro-level influences, classroom interaction, and outcomes.

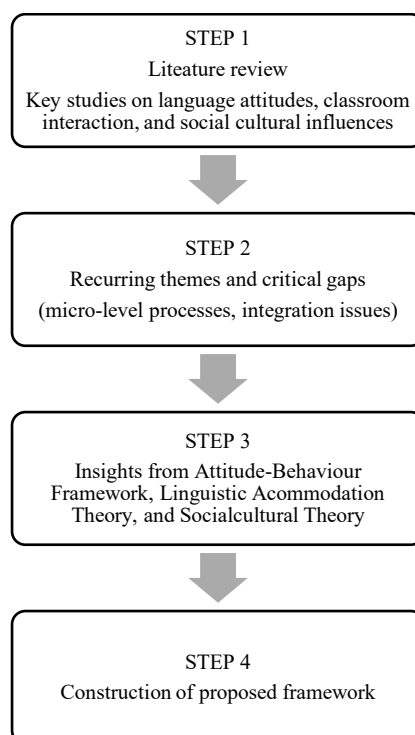


Figure 2: Process of Development

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is designed to explore the role of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction within Malaysian ESL contexts. Language attitudes are at the heart of the framework, which serve as the central construct influencing all other components. Language attitudes encompass the evaluative beliefs and feelings individuals hold toward English and Bahasa Malaysia, shaped by both personal experiences and broader societal ideologies. These attitudes play a pivotal role in mediating how students and teachers engage with one another in the classroom, ultimately affecting the quality of interactions and learning outcomes.

Language attitudes directly shape classroom interaction dynamics, which occur at the micro-level and include teacher-student rapport, peer communication, and the negotiation of linguistic identities. These interactions are critical for fostering effective learning environments, as they provide opportunities for students to practice language skills, negotiate meaning, and develop communicative competence. However, the nature of these interactions is heavily influenced by underlying attitudes toward English and Bahasa Malaysia. For instance, positive attitudes toward English may encourage active participation and collaboration, while negative attitudes may lead to resistance, withdrawal, or limited engagement. The framework highlights how these micro-level processes are essential for achieving two key outcomes: learning outcomes and social cohesion.

The quality of classroom interactions, mediated by language attitudes, directly impacts learning outcomes, which refer to students' ability to acquire English language skills and achieve academic success. Simultaneously, these interactions influence social cohesion, reflecting the extent to which students feel included and engaged in the classroom. A harmonious and collaborative learning environment fosters social cohesion, enabling students to build

relationships and work effectively with their peers. Both outcomes are interconnected and demonstrate the broader implications of language attitudes on educational and social dimensions.

At the macro-level, sociocultural factors such as national identity and global competence further shape language attitudes and, consequently, classroom interactions. National identity, closely tied to Bahasa Malaysia as the national language, often leads to resistance or ambivalence toward English. This tension can manifest in reduced willingness to use English in classroom settings, affecting interaction patterns. On the other hand, the global prestige of English as a lingua franca motivates some students to adopt positive attitudes, encouraging active participation and accommodation in classroom interactions. These macro-level influences reflect the broader linguistic ecology of Malaysia, where the interplay between preserving cultural heritage and embracing global aspirations creates a complex dynamic.

The framework integrates micro-level processes, such as classroom interaction dynamics, with macro-level influences, such as national identity and global competence, offering a comprehensive lens for analysing the issue. By examining how language attitudes mediate classroom interactions and influence learning outcomes and social cohesion, this framework provides a structured approach to understanding the unique challenges and opportunities within Malaysian ESL contexts. It underscores the need for context-specific strategies that address both individual attitudes and broader sociocultural factors to enhance the effectiveness of ESL education.

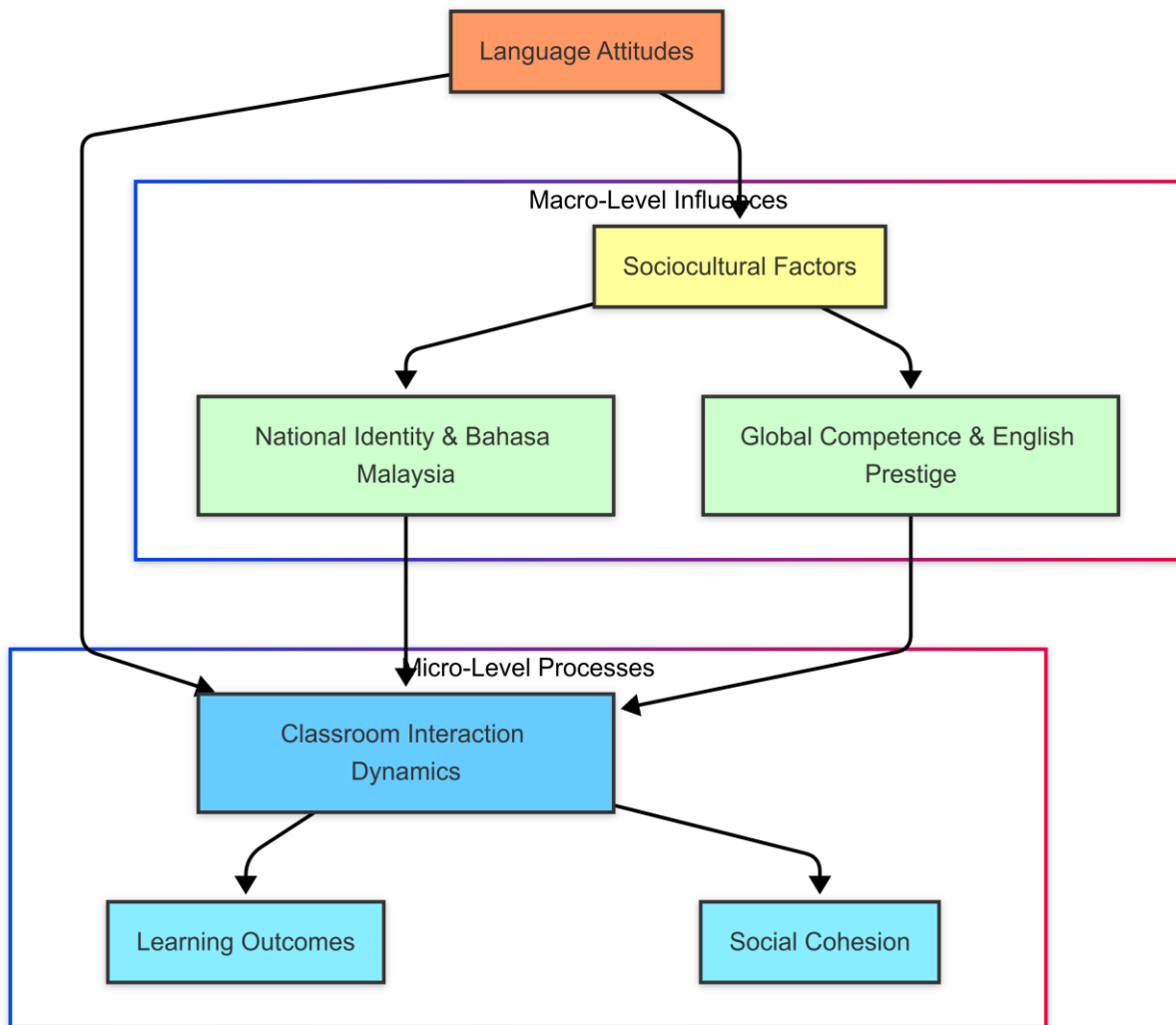


Figure 3: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Future Directions and Research Gaps

The exploration of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction within Malaysian ESL contexts reveals several critical gaps in the current literature, highlighting the need for further research and innovative approaches to address the complexities of language learning in sociolinguistically diverse settings. A significant limitation in existing studies is the lack of attention to micro-level classroom dynamics, as most research relies heavily on quantitative surveys that provide general trends but fail to capture the nuanced ways in which language attitudes influence real-time classroom discourse. For instance, while studies such as those by Zhang et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Pillay (2022) have identified broad patterns in students' attitudes toward English, they often overlook how these attitudes manifest during specific classroom activities, such as group discussions or teacher-student interactions. There is limited understanding of how students negotiate their linguistic identities in bilingual or multilingual settings, or how teachers mediate conflicting attitudes to foster inclusivity and engagement. To address this gap, future research should employ qualitative methods such as ethnographic observations, classroom discourse analysis, and interviews to examine the intricate interaction processes in greater depth. Such approaches could reveal how specific pedagogical strategies, such as code-switching, scaffolding, or culturally relevant teaching materials, are used to

navigate the tension between Bahasa Malaysia and English, ultimately enhancing both language learning outcomes and social cohesion.

Recent studies have begun to emphasise the importance of qualitative methodologies in uncovering the dynamic interplay between language attitudes and classroom interaction. For example, Ali and Rahman (2023) conducted an ethnographic study in Malaysian ESL classrooms and found that teachers who employed code-switching strategically could better bridge cultural divides and foster positive attitudes toward English. Similarly, Thompson and Garcia (2022) used discourse analysis to explore how students negotiated their linguistic identities during collaborative tasks, revealing that peer interactions often served as a platform for reinforcing or challenging prevailing language ideologies. These studies underscore the value of qualitative methods in capturing the real-time dynamics of classroom interaction and highlight the need for more in-depth investigations into how language attitudes shape communicative practices in diverse educational settings.

Another notable gap is the neglect of cross-disciplinary perspectives in existing research, which tends to operate within the confines of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. While these fields provide valuable insights, integrating theories from psychology, sociology, and education policy could offer a more holistic understanding of the issue. For example, psychological theories of motivation, such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), could help explain how intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence students' attitudes toward English and their willingness to engage in classroom activities. Similarly, sociological frameworks on identity negotiation and power dynamics, such as Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital, could illuminate how language attitudes intersect with broader issues of equity and inclusion in educational settings. By fostering collaboration across disciplines, researchers can develop more comprehensive models that account for the multifaceted nature of language attitudes and their impact on classroom interaction. Encouraging cross-disciplinary studies would enrich academic scholarship and provide practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

Wong and Tan (2023) highlighted the potential of interdisciplinary approaches by integrating psychological and sociolinguistic frameworks to explore how students' self-efficacy beliefs interact with their language attitudes. Their findings revealed that students with higher self-efficacy were more likely to adopt positive attitudes toward English, leading to increased participation in classroom activities. Similarly, Rahman and Kumar (2023) demonstrated the utility of Bourdieu's theory in analysing how power dynamics influenced language use and identity negotiation in Malaysian ESL classrooms. These studies illustrate the benefits of adopting cross-disciplinary perspectives and underscore the need for more integrative research in this area.

National language policies in Malaysia, which prioritise Bahasa Malaysia while promoting English as a second language, play a pivotal role in shaping language attitudes and classroom dynamics. However, there is limited research examining how these policies are implemented at the grassroots level and their impact on students' and teachers' attitudes. For instance, while policies aim to balance national identity and global competence, teachers often face challenges reconciling these dual objectives in their daily practices. The tension between preserving cultural heritage through Bahasa Malaysia and embracing English as a tool for global competitiveness creates a complex linguistic ecology that remains underexplored. Future

research should investigate how educators interpret and enact language policies and how students perceive and respond to these policies in their learning experiences. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the alignment or misalignment between policy goals and classroom realities, informing more effective policy design that addresses diverse learners' sociocultural and educational needs.

Recent work by Too (2023) has shed light on the challenges faced by Malaysian educators in implementing national language policies. His study explored Malaysian secondary school English teachers' perceptions of translanguaging through interviews with seven experienced educators. The findings showed teachers used the Malay Language as a key scaffolding tool despite monolingual policy constraints, with challenges including policy silence, monolingual training, workload, and fear of repercussions. Similarly, Kaur and Sidhu (2022) examined how students perceived the tension between national identity and global aspirations, finding that ambivalent attitudes toward English were often rooted in conflicting societal expectations. These studies highlight the need for more research into the practical implications of language policies and their impact on classroom dynamics.

Another pressing concern is the lack of context-specific frameworks tailored to monolingual ESL settings like Malaysia. While existing theoretical models, such as Linguistic Accommodation Theory and Sociocultural Theory of Learning, offer valuable insights, they often lack specificity to Malaysia's unique linguistic and cultural dynamics. For example, these frameworks do not adequately account for the interplay between Bahasa Malaysia as a marker of national identity and English as a symbol of global prestige. This gap could be addressed by developing and validating conceptual frameworks that integrate micro-level classroom processes with macro-level sociocultural factors. Such frameworks would serve as tools for researchers and practitioners, enabling them to understand better and address the challenges posed by conflicting language attitudes in Malaysian ESL classrooms. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to track the development of language attitudes over time, as these attitudes are dynamic and may evolve due to changes in societal values, educational experiences, or exposure to global influences. Investigating how students' perceptions of English shift as they progress through different grade levels or interact with international media could provide deeper insights into the factors shaping language attitudes and their implications for classroom interaction.

For instance, Nguyen and Pillay (2022) emphasised the need for longitudinal studies to explore how language attitudes evolve, particularly in response to changing societal norms and educational practices. Their systematic review identified a critical gap in understanding the long-term effects of language policies on students' attitudes and suggested that tracking these changes could inform more adaptive and responsive pedagogical strategies. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2021) provided a comparative perspective, demonstrating that exposure to global media significantly influenced Malaysian students' attitudes toward English, highlighting the role of external factors in shaping language ideologies.

Finally, there is a notable lack of practical recommendations for educators on addressing the challenges posed by conflicting language attitudes in the classroom. While academic research has shed light on the broader sociolinguistic and pedagogical issues, it often falls short of providing actionable strategies for teachers. For instance, how can educators create an inclusive environment that respects students' cultural identities while encouraging the use of English?

What techniques can be employed to foster positive language attitudes and mitigate resistance or ambivalence toward English? Addressing these questions requires evidence-based pedagogical strategies and professional development programs for ESL teachers. These initiatives could focus on incorporating culturally relevant materials, promoting collaborative learning activities, and reframing bilingualism as a strength rather than a deficit. Policymakers also have a crucial role in aligning research findings with practical applications, such as integrating inclusive teaching practices into teacher training programs and curriculum design. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, researchers and educators can work together to enhance language learning outcomes and promote social cohesion in Malaysia's increasingly globalised society.

Recent contributions by Ali and Rahman (2023) and Wong and Tan (2023) have offered practical insights into addressing these challenges. Ali and Rahman proposed a framework for integrating culturally relevant materials into ESL curricula, emphasising the importance of aligning content with students' sociocultural contexts. Wong and Tan, on the other hand, advocated for professional development programs that equip teachers with strategies to navigate the tension between national identity and global aspirations. These studies provide a foundation for developing actionable recommendations that bridge the gap between research and practice.

Conclusion

This paper has systematically explored the intricate role of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction within Malaysian ESL contexts, emphasising their profound impact on learning outcomes and social cohesion. By synthesising insights from sociolinguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and education policy, the study has illuminated how language attitudes, defined as evaluative beliefs and feelings toward specific languages or language varieties, mediate how students and teachers engage with one another in the classroom. The review of existing literature revealed significant gaps, particularly in understanding micro-level interactional processes, the influence of sociocultural factors, and the implementation of national language policies at the grassroots level. These gaps underscore the need for more context-specific frameworks and cross-disciplinary approaches to address the unique challenges faced in monolingual ESL settings like Malaysia.

The proposed conceptual framework integrates macro-level sociocultural influences, such as national identity tied to Bahasa Malaysia and global competence associated with English proficiency, with micro-level classroom dynamics, including teacher-student rapport and peer communication. This framework highlights the complexity of Malaysia's linguistic ecology, where the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing global aspirations creates a dynamic interplay that shapes classroom interactions. By reframing language attitudes as dynamic forces that mediate communication and identity negotiation, this study contributes a deeper, context-specific understanding of how these attitudes influence interaction patterns and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the framework offers practical insights for educators aiming to bridge cultural and communicative divides in ESL classrooms, fostering inclusivity and collaboration among students.

This paper makes several vital contributions to academic scholarship. First, it addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on micro-level classroom dynamics, an area often overlooked in favour of macro-level analyses. By integrating theoretical perspectives from

sociolinguistics, SLA, and education policy, the study advances interdisciplinary understanding of language attitudes and their role in shaping classroom interaction. Second, the proposed conceptual framework serves as a foundation for future empirical research, offering a structured approach to examining the interplay between language attitudes, sociocultural factors, and classroom dynamics. Third, the study advocates for longitudinal and cross-disciplinary investigations, encouraging researchers to explore the evolving nature of language attitudes and their implications for educational practice. These contributions enrich the theoretical landscape of sociolinguistics and SLA while providing a roadmap for future studies in similar monolingual or multilingual contexts.

The paper also significantly contributes to educators and policymakers by addressing the critical interplay between language attitudes, classroom practices, and national policies. For educators, the findings highlight the importance of understanding students' language attitudes to design culturally responsive teaching strategies that foster inclusivity, engagement, and collaboration in ESL classrooms. By leveraging insights from the proposed framework, educators can create learning environments that bridge communicative divides, encouraging positive attitudes toward English while respecting students' cultural identities. At the policy level, the study underscores the need for evidence-based language policies that align with the sociocultural realities of learners, ensuring a balance between promoting Bahasa Malaysia as a marker of national identity and embracing English as a tool for global competence. Policymakers are encouraged to collaborate with researchers and educators to address the disconnect between policy goals and classroom realities, fostering bilingualism and biliteracy without compromising cultural heritage. Together, these contributions aim to enhance the effectiveness of ESL education and support the development of equitable, inclusive, and forward-looking educational systems.

At the national level, this study contributes to Malaysia's efforts to position itself as a competitive player in the global economy while preserving its rich cultural heritage. By fostering positive language attitudes and enhancing English proficiency, the study supports the development of a skilled workforce capable of navigating multicultural and multilingual settings. Industries and employers stand to benefit from graduates equipped with strong communication skills and the ability to adapt to diverse professional environments. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on bilingualism as a valuable skill aligns with global trends, advocating for partnerships between educational institutions and industries to create programs that meet workforce demands. These contributions not only strengthen Malaysia's economic competitiveness but also promote social cohesion and cultural preservation, laying the groundwork for a more interconnected and equitable society.

However, achieving these goals requires sustained collaboration between academicians, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. Academicians are called upon to conduct longitudinal and cross-disciplinary studies that examine the evolving nature of language attitudes and their impact on classroom interaction over time. Policymakers must work closely with researchers to design evidence-based policies that address the needs of diverse learners and provide adequate support for educators. Employers and industries can play a pivotal role by advocating for bilingualism as a valuable skill and partnering with educational institutions to create programs that align with workforce demands. Such collaborative efforts will ensure that research findings translate into actionable strategies that benefit students and society as a whole.

Exploring the role of language attitudes in shaping classroom interaction in Malaysian ESL contexts represents a critical yet underexplored area of inquiry with far-reaching implications. By addressing the identified gaps and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, this study lays the groundwork for future research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing both language learning outcomes and social cohesion. As Malaysia continues to navigate the complexities of globalisation and cultural preservation, understanding and leveraging the power of language attitudes will be essential for creating inclusive, effective, and forward-looking educational systems. This endeavour not only holds the promise of transforming ESL classrooms but also contributes to building a more equitable and interconnected society, benefiting academia, the education sector, policymakers, industries, and the nation as a whole.

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