

# Language Maintenance in Malaysia: Identifying the Challenges Faced by the Foreigners in Preserving and Maintaining their Native Languages

Amir Lukman Abd Rahman <sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Haziq Abd Rashid<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

\*corresponding author: <sup>2</sup>haziqrashid@uitm.edu.my

## ABSTRACT

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:

20 July 2023

Accepted:

1 September 2023

Published:

19 October 2023

### KEYWORDS

Language Identity

Language Maintenance

Language Preservation

Native Languages

Foreigners

Foreigners residing in foreign countries often encounter difficulties in maintaining and preserving their native languages, mainly because they find themselves amongst the minority and lack formal platforms to support language preservation efforts. This paper aims to delve into the various issues and challenges faced by foreigners in their pursuit of preserving their mother tongues. To gain insights into these challenges, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving in-depth interview sessions with ten foreigners whose first language is not English. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods was used to select the participants. The research framework was constructed based on the Language Identity Theory proposed by Tong and Cheung (2011). The framework comprises of five essential factors of language identity: status, demographic, institutional support, linguistic, and cultural factors. Through this comprehensive framework, the study thoroughly explored the dynamics of language preservation and maintenance among foreigners. The research findings revealed that the foremost challenges faced by foreigners are attributed to environmental influences and their status as linguistic minorities. These factors often push them towards shifting away from their native language and embracing the dominant language of the host country. However, the study also shed light on proactive steps taken by foreigners to prevent language loss and maintain their language identity despite these challenges. In conclusion, this paper offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by foreigners in preserving their native languages. It emphasizes the significance of providing proper support systems and platforms for linguistic minorities to safeguard their language heritage. By understanding the intricacies of language identity and the factors affecting language preservation, policymakers and educators can take informed steps to foster a more inclusive linguistic environment that respects and celebrates the diversity of languages. Ultimately, the research contributes to the ongoing discourse on language preservation and identity in multicultural societies.

e-ISSN 2600-7274

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang  
This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The age of globalisation has seen thousands of people immigrate to other countries in search of better employment and educational opportunities. Sometimes people migrate in order to escape conflicts at home and to find safer and more stable living conditions abroad. This movement from one place to another affects peoples' mother tongue. Blommaert (2013), established that language is not simply an assortment of words but an entity that connects an individual to his family, identity, culture, music, beliefs and wisdom. Hiratsuka and Pennycook (2020) added that the focus of language usage in a family is not on legacy language maintenance or any other form of language policy, but rather on getting by translingually, on conducting family life with the help of a repertory of various resources. It is the carrier of history, traditions, customs and folklore from one generation to another. Without language, no culture can sustain its existence especially when the native language is actually a part of a person's identity. The native language plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality as well as his or her psychological development, thoughts and emotions (Tseng et al., 2021). The findings by Bruce et al. (2022) revealed the existence of both psychological and biological predictors as they differentially impact several components of expressive language development over the first two postnatal years. According to Norton (2013), the childhood stage is the most important stage of a person's life because children at that stage can comprehend concepts and skills that are taught to them in their mother tongue quite quickly. Cheng and Mayberry (2020) also posited that early language experience is crucial for the formation of fundamental sentence structure especially at a young age.

With the many definitions of the language identity of a person, at the end of the day, it will be related to how they try their best to preserve and maintain their mother tongue; another term for it is native language. Due to globalization, migration happens to many people all around the world in order to find a better education, experience, lifestyle, workplace or simply to explore the world as a journey to understand life better. Questions arise among scholars, researchers and linguists: How do foreigners who are simply visiting or staying in a country for a short while preserve their native languages in order to preserve their language identity? In Malaysia, the Statistics Department under the Prime Minister's Department (Economy) has recorded around 2.1 million foreigners working in various sectors in Malaysia up to June 2022 (The Star, 2022). Moreover, Raja Rahim (2023) also reported that the Malaysian government is expecting to approve the entry of 500,000 foreign workers under the Foreign Workers Employment Relaxation Plan as it is crucial for the manufacturing, construction, farming, agriculture and services (restaurants) sectors and most of the workers are going to be from Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and India. The entrance legality of immigrants into a country is neglected by linguists as they emphasise more on the foreigners' language preservation and maintenance (Wei et al., 2019). With the rising number of foreigners in Malaysia, problems are bound to arise for foreigners in maintaining and preserving their native languages (Stapa et. al, 2013). Furthermore, it was found that Japanese foreigners who are staying in Malaysia for work purposes had a hard time learning the English language and maintaining their native language which is the Japanese language due to their environment where they need to converse in English. Moreover, the challenge escalated with the cultural factor where the locals in Malaysia only speak two languages best, their native languages (either Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin or Cantonese, and Tamil) or the English language. The hardest part of all is trying their best to maintain their language identity because there are not many Japanese in their workplace, to the point that it was hard for them to exercise the accurate languages in the respective settings or domains.

The issue of foreigners having problems communicating in their native language does not only happen in Malaysia but in other countries as well. In countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom, France and Australia, most foreigners who are from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia tend to make grammatical errors in speaking and writing sometimes, to the point that they prefer to use the English language to communicate with their family, relatives and peers back in their home country (Dewaele, 2019; Rintaningrum, 2018; Norton, 2016). Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the issues and challenges faced by foreigners in preserving and maintaining their language and the steps taken to overcome them. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the issues and challenges faced by foreigners in preserving and maintaining their language identity in Malaysia?
2. What are the steps taken by foreigners in preserving and maintaining their language identity in Malaysia?

### ***1.1 Problem Statement***

Regardless of how many foreigners coming to a country for the purpose of education, finding a better job in another country in order to gain a wider experience, or for any other reasons as an individual, surely it is a challenge for all of these foreigners to maintain and preserve their language especially if their status as an individual in a country is the same as the indigenous people. Romanowski (2021), stated that the issues of preserving and maintaining language identity will not be a problem for foreigners whose native language is the English language because the English language is considered the lingua franca of the world and around 80% of English speakers in the world are non-native speakers. Instead, it is a problem for foreigners whose first language is not the English language because they will have difficulty being the minority in a country due to their condition and status as a person who decided to migrate to another country. Moreover, despite the fact that these language preservation and maintenance issues made headlines before in various newspapers in Malaysia and also in other countries, some of the reports stated the concern of the need to preserve their own language identity to ensure the language status by promoting its use instead of inhibiting it. Furthermore, most long-term migrants or foreigners know what it is like to be a slightly rusty native speaker and the process seems obvious: the longer you are away, the more your language suffers but it is not quite so straightforward (Laila, 2018; Hardach, 2018).

Furthermore, most studies on language identity have delved into investigating how immigrants learn the native language of a foreign country (Fang et al., 2023). As reported by Jahan and Hamid (2019), most past studies have focused more on language identity either in the education or business sector. By setting these two sectors as a point of reference, immigrants or foreigners try to adapt to the current country they are residing in without a clear consideration of how they can preserve and maintain their native language (Norton, 2016). Thus, due to limited studies conducted on the aspect of how foreigners, specifically in Malaysia, preserve and maintain their native language while they are here, this study will focus more on that aspect and what are the steps taken by foreigners in Malaysia to overcome those challenges in ensuring that their language identity will not be affected while staying in another country.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Language Preservation and Maintenance by Foreigners***

Language preservation is the effort to prevent languages from becoming unknown. A language is at risk of being lost when it is no longer taught to the younger generations, while fluent

speakers of the language (usually the elderly) die because language is an important part of any society as it enables people to communicate and express themselves (Vallejos, 2014). When a language dies out, future generations lose a vital part of the culture that is necessary to completely understand it. This makes language a vulnerable aspect of cultural heritage, and it becomes rather important to preserve it. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2007, as cited by Norton (2013), there is a total estimation of 7,000 languages spoken worldwide and half of the population speaks only around 8 languages, while there are more than 3,000 languages which are spoken fewer than 10,000 people. On the other hand, according to Tran et al. (2021), language maintenance refers to the situation where a speaker, a group of speakers or a speech community continues to use their language in the same or all spheres of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main language in these spheres; whereas spheres can also be defined as the environment, domain or country.

However, despite the definitions of language preservation and language maintenance, in terms of language identity, Kubota (2013) and Stapa et al. (2013) highlighted when it comes to immigrants or foreigners, these two language terms are in accordance with how they decided to preserve and maintain their identity by ensuring that they will not have any difficulties with their native language when they are in another country. Most of the time, foreigners whose first language is not the English language will have certain issues in ensuring that they will not forget some of their own native language's words, syntax or grammatical structure. This will further pinpoint the ability for them to write or speak in their native languages in which they have to preserve their native language identity. At the same time, it is required for them to maintain their communication abilities by practising, finding the opportunity to study or communicating with people from their own country to maintain their language identity (Norton, 2016). The biggest challenge that most foreigners will be facing is their status as the minority since they have to adapt, not just to the culture but also to the languages used by the majority speakers. It is also a common case where they will have to learn the country's national language which is not usually the English language.

## ***2.2 Theoretical Framework – Language Identity Theory by Tong and Cheung (2011)***

Tong and Cheung (2011) viewed the issue of foreigners preserving and maintaining their language identity as an effort to ensure that they will never forget their root despite the fact that they are currently staying in a foreign country for various purposes. With that in mind, Tong and Cheung created a framework that is called the Language Identity Theory (2011) which is actually an improvement from the Language Identity and Maintenance Model by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1987). The improved version of the framework looks at 5 factors of language preservation and maintenance that can be done by foreigners and they are status, demographic, institutional support, linguistic and cultural factors.

The status factor can be divided into three which are economic status, social status and language status where these three statuses concern how easily the minority can shift to the other country's national language due to their status as the minority. Demographic factor concerns the number of members of a linguistic minority group and their social distribution in which the absolute number of speakers of a certain language becomes important when it decreases. Institutional support refers to the extent to which the language of the minority group is represented in the various institutions of a nation or community whether they are being supported by various institutions such as the government, church, cultural organisation and other agencies. Linguistic factor refers to the flexibility of a language is in a foreign country in the aspects of writing, literature, media representation and other platform availability that encourage people to speak

the minority language. Cultural factor refers to whether the cultural aspect of a country can influence a person's ability to preserve and maintain their native language. Hence, this framework is being chosen due to these several factors that will assist with the completion of studying language identity by foreigners in Malaysia through preserving and maintaining their native language.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### ***3.1 Research Design***

This study will apply a qualitative approach in order to gain data regarding the language issues and challenges faced by foreigners in Malaysia to maintain and preserve their languages which have been mentioned in the earlier section and to get descriptive data from interviewees to answer the two (2) research questions. Anney (2014) stated that basic interpretive qualitative research provides descriptive statements in order to get a better understanding of a study using data collected in a variety of ways, such as interviews, observations, and document reviews. Another study conducted by Romanowski (2021) on language maintenance in the Polish community residing in Melbourne, highlighted the significance of conducting a qualitative approach to get a better understanding of the minorities' living situation, honest interaction when meeting physically, to avoid confusion caused by quantitative approach (survey or questionnaire) due to language barriers, and researcher could see whether there are any other environmental factors that contribute to the difficulties in language maintenance in other countries. This is further supported by another study on language maintenance among Chinese-Malaysian families which through a qualitative approach (observation and interview) resulted in a proper understanding of the issues of language transmission and maintenance for the families (Ong & Ben-Said, 2022). It was found that it is not easy for mainland Chinese to be influenced and could not speak Hokkien due to cultural factors and strong ties with family members, relatives and friends from China. Hence, a qualitative approach was used for this study as well in order to get a better understanding of what makes it challenging for foreigners in Malaysia to preserve and maintain their native language.

#### ***3.2 Instruments***

Two instruments were used in this study. One of the instruments used in this study is the Language Identity Theory by Tong and Cheung (2011) where the framework was created in relation to language and cultural identity among the minorities in order to help them in maintaining and preserving their languages. Based on the framework, there are 5 factors that need to be considered in order to analyse language identity among foreigners. The second instrument used in this study was a list of interview questions whereby the questions revolved around language identity. The interview questions consist of 12 items which were edited beforehand in order to achieve the purpose of the study. Tong and Cheung (2011) first highlighted that past studies on language identity often considered sociocultural factors, language and speech, and identity to reflect a person's cognitive understanding in maintaining their language. However, it was found that it lacked consideration of workplace influence (support) and decided to separate sociocultural factors resulting in the development of Language Identity Theory that focuses on five factors – status, demographic, institutional support, linguistic and cultural. Furthermore, the list of questions was adapted to answer the two research questions that heavily rely on understanding the issues and challenges, as well as the steps taken for foreigners to preserve their native language in Malaysia whereby the questions matched the factors considered.

Table 1: List of Interview Questions

Factors	List of Questions
Demographic questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Working status (Name of company and years of service)</li> <li>• Academic background</li> <li>• Living status</li> </ul>
Status factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have you been living in Malaysia and what is the reason that you decided to come here?</li> <li>• May I know where are you from and what is your native language/mother tongue?</li> <li>• What is your opinion about the many races in Malaysia?</li> </ul> <p><i>(Note that working status and living status are also considered during the data analysis process).</i></p>
Demographic factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At certain point in Malaysia, either when doing shopping, communicating with a Grab driver or on other occasions, have you ever experienced any language barrier?</li> <li>• Have you ever experienced any problem in conversing in your mother tongue to communicate with the people back home or people from your country here in Malaysia?</li> <li>• Are there any challenges that you are facing in order to preserve your mother tongue? For example, in some cases for the Malays, when they go overseas, they tend to make grammatical errors when using the Malay language. Do you have any challenges like that?</li> </ul>
Institutional support factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since you are a minority group in Malaysia, do you receive any support from the embassy, religious places where you are practising, or even your workplace?</li> <li>• What about the people back home in your country? Do you receive support from them in ensuring that you will not lose your native language?</li> <li>• What kind of support/other support you can suggest to receive from the people/organisations/institutions in Malaysia?</li> </ul>
Linguistic factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What other language(s) can you speak and what is/are the level of fluency of that other language(s)?</li> <li>• Since your native language/mother tongue is not the Malay language, have you ever experienced any difficulties while speaking with other Malaysians?</li> <li>• Are there any challenges that you are facing in order to preserve your mother tongue? For example, in some cases for the Malays, when they go overseas, they will tend to make grammatical errors when using the Malay language. Do you have any challenges like that?</li> </ul>
Cultural factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think you can do or you are doing it either daily or weekly, the steps can be taken to ensure that you are preserving your language?</li> <li>• In your opinion, for parents who either (husband/wife) is not Malaysian, what steps can be taken by them in order to preserve their native language? Will it be effective?</li> <li>• Do you think the younger generation, whose parents (either one) are not Malaysian, will the children be able to preserve their parents' native language?</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Furthermore, in collecting the data which involved foreigners, basically, people who are not Malaysians, it is suitable in locating a certain part in Malaysia where there are many foreigners to approach and encounter foreign students who are studying in Malaysian universities or through mutual contacts. When it comes to a study on language identity among foreigners, immigrants or simply minorities, the interview session is best to be conducted with the community who has been living in a country for more than 5 years or at least has 2 years of experience living in that country to ensure that they have the exposure towards the issue;

another requirement is their native language must not be the English language. This is because the English language is the commonly practised language either as the first or second language (Kubota, 2013).

Table 2: Simplified Data Collection Procedure

<b>Data Collection Procedure</b>	
<b>Purposive Sampling</b>	<b>Convenience Sampling</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the requirements (must be 5 years or at least 2 years of experience living in Malaysia, and the native language must not be English).</li> <li>2. Contacted relatives and friends to introduce any foreigners.</li> <li>3. Conducted interview sessions at their respective residents / nearby restaurants (8 interviewees).</li> <li>4. The audio was recorded for analysis purposes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the requirements (must be 5 years or at least 2 years of experience living in Malaysia, and the native language must not be English).</li> <li>2. Went to Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur.</li> <li>3. Approached foreigners who are working in restaurants, small shops, and apartment buildings.</li> <li>4. Conducted interview sessions at nearby restaurants.</li> <li>5. The audio was recorded for analysis purposes.</li> </ol>

For this study, two types of sampling were used in answering the research questions. The first one is purposive sampling where the researchers contacted relatives and friends in order to set up interview sessions with their foreign colleagues or friends and managed to conduct 8 interview sessions. The second one is convenience sampling, where the researchers went to Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur and interviewed the remaining 3 foreigners. A total of 10 foreigners participated in the interview session in order to get a better understanding on what are the issues and challenges for them to preserve and maintain their native languages, and the steps taken by the interviewees to overcome them. Obilor (2023) highlighted that purposive sampling is to ensure that the participants involved are introduced through mutual contact in order to avoid being restricted in sharing or providing information during an interview session. Obilor (2023) further elaborated that convenience sampling is to get relevant interview data from participants who are not planned in order to get more genuine and sudden answers to make it easier for researchers to find similarities and differences between the two sampling approaches. This study is done in order to find out the issues and challenges faced by foreigners in Malaysia to preserve and maintain their native language. Meanwhile, the questions asked during the interview session might be personal or sensitive towards them so purposive sampling is more appropriate to ensure that the interviewees know who the researchers (interviewers) are through a mutual connection in avoiding unnecessary uncomfortable moments when providing answers. Convenience sampling was also done to see the similarities and differences between interviewees who were introduced through a mutual connection, but it was difficult to do so as most foreigners tend to not participate in the interview process due to language barriers, in fear of that it might be a police investigation and not willing to participate, resulted in three interviewees only for this approach.

Next, an audio recording was used for the coding process in analysing the data by referring to the framework and research questions and whether there are any emerging themes in answering the research questions. In order to organise and properly validate the transcriptions, a computer software called NVivo was used. For a qualitative study to be accurate in its data collection, this kind of software assists in automatically coding the transcriptions of the audio recording. This can be supported as an audio recording to help researchers gain a better understanding and

avoid any misunderstanding during the interview session to avoid data collection errors (Rosenthal, 2016).

Table 3: Interviewees' Background

Interviewees	Details (Names will not be disclosed as per the interviewees' request)
Interviewee A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Bangladesh</li> <li>• 5 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a cleaner</li> <li>• Single</li> <li>• Native language is Bengali</li> <li>• Poor command of both Malay and English languages</li> </ul>
Interviewee B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Pakistan</li> <li>• 6 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working at a laptop store repairing personal computer and laptop</li> <li>• Single</li> <li>• Native language is Urdu</li> <li>• Good command of Malay language but poor command of the English language</li> </ul>
Interviewee C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Cambodia</li> <li>• 7 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working at a mobile store repairing telephone</li> <li>• Single</li> <li>• Native language is Khmer</li> <li>• Good command of Malay language but poor command of the English language</li> </ul>
Interviewee D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is India</li> <li>• 5 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a cleaner</li> <li>• Single</li> <li>• Native language is Hindi/Hindustani</li> <li>• Poor command of both Malay and English languages</li> </ul>
Interviewee E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is South Korea</li> <li>• 8 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a customer service</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Native language is Korean</li> <li>• Average command of Malay language but fluent in English language</li> </ul>
Interviewee F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contry of origin is Bangladesh</li> <li>• 5 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a staff member at a refugee centre</li> <li>• Single</li> <li>• Native language is Rohingya</li> <li>• Poor command of both Malay and English languages</li> </ul>
Interviewee G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Myanmar</li> <li>• 7 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a content moderator</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Native language is Burmese</li> <li>• Good command of both Malay and English languages</li> </ul>
Interviewee H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Japan</li> <li>• 14 years living in Malaysia (from studying and now working in Malaysia)</li> <li>• Working as a translator</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Native language is Japanese</li> <li>• Fluent command of the English language and average command of Malay language</li> </ul>



Interviewee I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Egypt</li> <li>• 10 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a clerk</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Native language is Arabic (Masry dialect)</li> <li>• Fluent in both Malay and English languages</li> </ul>
Interviewee J	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country of origin is Indonesia</li> <li>• 6 years living in Malaysia</li> <li>• Working as a waiter</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Native language is Indonesian</li> <li>• Good command of Malay language but poor command of the English language</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data collection procedure is divided into two parts. Firstly, through mutual contact by requesting permission from the foreigners to conduct an interview session as one of the requirements to complete this study. A semi-structured interview session was conducted where the questions were related to answering the two research questions. McIntosh and Morse (2015) posited that the objective of conducting a semi-structured interview is to allow the findings equivalent to the initial reasoning in answering research questions in a study. Thus, it justifies the reason for conducting a semi-structured interview session. The interview session was conducted using the guidelines from the framework used in this research. When listening to the audio recordings for data analysis, it was found that most of the respondents have poor to average control of the English language and only some are fluent. NVivo computer software was used during the transcription process to ease the transcription and organisation process of the audio recording. Some manual transcriptions had to be done by the researchers due to the fact that the interviewees tended to repeat certain points multiple times, fillers, and pauses, signifying the easiness of the transcription process. The data obtained from the audio recording was used for analysis purposes in order to answer both research questions in identifying the factors involved based on the Language Identity Theory (2011). Each factor from the framework (status factor, demographic factor, institutional support factor, linguistic factor and cultural factor) was tabulated before being explained and only selected answers during the interview sessions were tabulated.

## 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Issues and Challenges Faced by Foreigners in Preserving and Maintaining Their Language Identity in Malaysia

Table 4: Factors and Responses – Issues and Challenges Faced by Foreigners in Preserving and Maintaining Language Identity in Malaysia

Factors	Answers given by the interviewees
Status factor	Interviewee A: <i>I need to learn and understand Bahasa and English language to communicate with most of the local, most local have basic English but fluent Bahasa that it affects my grammatical structure when communicate with my brother back home.</i>
Demographic factor	Interviewee B: <i>In my company, most workers are the Chinese and foreign workers are mostly have the English language as their native language.</i>
Institutional support factor	Interviewee H: <i>Not really, due to time constraint and distance, I never went to any temple here.</i>

Linguistic factor	Interviewee I: <i>The news here, for my understanding will be reading the English language, if I were to look for any news in my language it will be online and mostly the sources comes from my own country.</i>
Cultural factor	Interviewee E: <i>I have to participate in the local's celebration more than my own.</i>

The findings above indicate that all interviewees have their own issues and challenges in preserving and maintaining their native languages. It can be noted that most of the responses are similar. The foreigners in Malaysia are experiencing the same problems despite their background differences in terms of their origin country, language and year of staying in Malaysia. Status, demographic, linguistic and cultural factors are the common problems faced by foreigners but they differ on how each foreigner is facing it and they are usually related to one another. In order to summarise the findings based on the framework, most foreigners are facing difficulties because the majority of Malaysians understand the Malay language and some basic English principles. In the context of a workplace, it is not a problem for them to communicate because most workers have good English skills in both writing and speaking. However, due to their status as a minority, they are afraid that their surroundings will influence their native language. By communicating a lot in Malay or English, it can influence the way they use their native language with their friends back home to the point that even an interviewee who is from Indonesia mentioned that when she goes back to her country, she finds that there are interferences when she speaks the Indonesian language. Sometimes, she ends up using words from the Malay language that have different meanings and her ability to exercise native-like sentence structure has noticeably deteriorated. Hence, she needs time to adapt to communicating in her native language because it has been a long time since she stayed in Indonesia.

These findings are actually supported by other studies conducted by Tong and Cheung (2011) and Norton (2016), where they found that even foreigners who are staying in countries where their first language is English experience that interference to the point that people shift from their native languages when they come back because of the difficulties of maintaining their own language identity and they feel weird in using languages other than the English language. The same study was also conducted in China and Vietnam where most locals who went to other countries for education, work or married the locals there; when they came back, they had the desire to shift to the country's national language instead of using their own even when they are back in their own country (Blommaert, 2013; Kubota, 2013). Moreover, some of the interviewees also mentioned the fact that sometimes they have to Google the meanings of the words in their native language because they no longer understand or forget what they mean. In fact, sometimes they have a hard time pronouncing the words. In terms of the institutional support factor, most of the interviewees admitted that most institutions that can advocate the use of their native languages are publicly unknown or simply nonexistent.

#### ***4.2 Steps Taken to Preserve and Maintain Their Language Identity***

Table 5: Factors and Responses – Steps Taken to Preserve and Maintain Language Identity by Foreigners in Malaysia

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Answers given by the interviewees</b>
Status factor	Interviewee C: <i>I have the value of respecting my language so I often practice it with my girlfriend</i>
Demographic factor	Interviewee D: <i>I participate in an online chat on FB then meet up with people from my country.</i>
Institutional support factor	Interviewee F: <i>Sometimes I participated in volunteering works at any refugees schools and camps which they are from my country.</i>
Linguistic factor	Interviewee G: <i>Reading news from my country and communicate with my family helps me a lot</i>

Cultural factor	Interviewee J: <i>Meet up with a few friends and we create our own small celebration together or I'll go back to celebrate with my family.</i>
-----------------	--

For this finding, despite the fact in the previous sub-heading, all of the interviewees have their own struggle in preserving and maintaining their native languages. They will find ways to use their native languages either with their friends, partners or online platforms while they are in Malaysia where most interviewees admitted that they do not want to come to a point in life where they question their language identity. It is made visible that they shift a lot to the country's national language but steps have been taken to overcome and slowly practise their native languages. They struggled to locate institutional support through churches, NGOs, communities, embassies, or other agencies that supported their native languages. Thus, they decided to join volunteering programmes to ensure that the younger generations are able to meet with people who are working in Malaysia and encourage the children there to never lose their native languages when they grow up. Stapa et al. (2013) and Tran et al. (2021) have highlighted the fact that foreigners do admit they are facing problems but they will find ways to try to use their own language because they want to make sure that they will never forget their origins. For instance, in China, certain Malaysian foreigners chose to teach at a Malay language tuition centre, while in the United States, volunteers facilitated and taught at refugee camps.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has strongly justified the issues and challenges faced by foreigners in Malaysia in preserving and maintaining their native language and the steps taken by them to ensure that they will never forget their own identity when in a foreign country. Five factors have indeed influenced the advantages and challenges of foreigners' efforts to preserve and maintain their languages. It was found that they will make every effort to reconnect with their roots. The implication of this study will benefit the government and the Human Resources department (for workplace setting) in terms of helping foreigners preserve and maintain their native languages. The limitation inherent in this study is that only input from Asian foreigners was generated. Input from European foreigners with those conversing in Italian, Spanish, French and other languages was not catered in this study. The following are a few thoughts to be shared and considered for future studies of this topic where they can conduct activities or events to help foreigners to preserve and maintain their languages like what countries such as Australia, France, Scotland and New Zealand are doing according to Norton (2016).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the people involved in the journey of this research, making it possible to fulfil the purposes of this study. We sincerely thank all participants for their commitment and cooperation which makes it possible for us to identify language maintenance issues in Malaysia.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

AL and MH carried out the research by dividing the tasks accordingly. AL contributed to the completion of the introduction, the first part of the literature review, findings and discussion for the first research question, and the conclusion. MH contributed to the second part of the literature review, methodology, findings and discussions for the second research question, and proofread the paper. Moreover, both AL and MH also carried out the interview together in collecting the data as well as for the data analysis.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

## REFERENCES

- Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 5(2), 272-281.
- Blommaert, J. (2013). Citizenship, language, and superdiversity: Towards complexity. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 12(3), 193-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2013.797276>
- Bruce, M., McFayden, T., Ollendick, T., & Bell, M. (2022). Expressive language in infancy and toddlerhood: The roles of child temperament and maternal parenting behaviors. *Developmental Psychobiology*, 64(6). <https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.22287>
- Cheng, Q., & Mayberry, R. I. (2020). When event knowledge overrides word order in sentence comprehension: Learning a first language after childhood. *Developmental Science*, 24(5). <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.13073>
- Dewaele, J. M. (2019). The effect of classroom emotions, attitudes toward English, and teacher behavior on willingness to communicate among English foreign language learners. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 38(4), 525-535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X19864996>
- Fang, F., Soleimanzadeh, S., Zhang, W., & Shirvan, M. E. (2023). Chinese students' multilingual identity constructions after studying abroad: A multi-theoretical perspective. *System*, 115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103053>
- Hardach, S. (2018, June 8). Can you lose your native language? *BBC*. <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180606-can-you-lose-your-native-language>
- Hiratsuka, A., & Pennycook, A. (2020). Translingual family repertoires: 'no, Morci is itaitai panzita, amor'. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(9), 749-763. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1645145>
- Jahan, I., & Hamid, M. (2019). English as a medium of instruction and the discursive construction of elite identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOSL.12360>.
- Kouhpaenejad, M. H., & Gholaminejad, R. (2014). Identity and language learning from poststructuralist perspective. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 5(1), 199-204. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.5.1.199-204>
- Kubota, R. (2013). 'Language is only a tool': Japanese expatriates working in China and implications for language teaching. *Multilingual Education*, 3(1), 155-179.
- Laila, A. (2018, August 15). Other languages necessary when dealing with foreigners. *The Star*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/08/15/dr-m-other-languages-necessary-when-dealing-with-foreigners/#VtTm9ym7CmR2Irh7.99>
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090563>
- Norton, B. (2016). Identity and language learning: Back to the future. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(2), 475-479. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.293>
- Obilor, E. I. (2023). Convenience and purposive sampling techniques: Are they the same?. *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research*, 11(1), 1-7.
- Ong, T. W. S., & Ben-Said, S. (2022). Language maintenance and the transmission of ideologies among Chinese-Malaysia families. In S. Makoni, A. Kaiper-Marquez, & L. Mokwena (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language and the global south/s* (1st ed., pp. 297-308). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003007074>

- Raja Rahim, R. N. (2023, January 18). Government approves entry of 500,000 foreign workers. *New Straits Time*. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/01/871302/government-approves-entry-500000-foreign-workers>
- Rintaningrum, R. (2018). Investigating reasons why listening in English is difficult: Voice from foreign language learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 20(11), 6-15.
- Romanowski, P. (2021). A deliberate language policy or a perceived lack of agency: Heritage language maintenance in the Polish community in Melbourne. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 25(5), 1214-1234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069211000850>
- Rosenthal, M. (2016). Qualitative research methods: Why, when, and how to conduct interviews and focus groups in pharmacy research. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 8(4), 509-516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2016.03.021>
- Stapa, S. H., Musaev, T., Hieda, N., & Amzah, N. (2013). Issues of language choice, ethics and equity: Japanese retirees living in Malaysia as their second home. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 13(1), 60-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2012.748790>
- The Star. (2022, October 20). About 2.1 million foreign workers in Malaysia as at June, 2022 says Statistics Dept. *The Star*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/10/20/about-21-million-foreign-workers-in-malaysia-as-at-june-2022-says-statistics-dept>
- Tong, H. K., & Cheung, L. H. (2011). Cultural identity and language: A proposed framework for cultural globalisation and glocalisation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 32(1), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2010.527344>
- Tran, V. H., McLeod, S., Verdon, S., & Wang, C. (2021). Vietnamese-Australian parents: Factors associated with language use and attitudes towards home language maintenance. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1904963>
- Tseng, Y., Lai, D., & Guo, H. (2021). Language and culture backgrounds of mothers and child development: A nationwide study on the incidence of developmental delays in children born to immigrant mothers in Taiwan. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.646444>
- Vallejos, R. (2014). Integrating language documentation, language preservation, and linguistic research: Working with the Kokamas from the Amazon. *Language Documentation & Conservation*, 8.
- Wei, K., López, D. J., & Wu, S. (2019). The role of language in anti-immigrant prejudice: What can we learn from immigrants' historical experiences? *Social Sciences*, 8(3), 92-109. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SOCSCI8030093>

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Amir Lukman Abd Rahman** is an English lecturer at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam. He holds a Master in Professional Communication and his research interests are in the field of visual communication, applied linguistics, language and communication, and technology in English language learning. He participated in several innovation competitions as well as published research articles since 2020.

**Muhammad Haziq Bin Abd Rashid** graduated from Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam with a Master of Arts in Professional Communication. With affiliations to Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, he currently lectures courses on technology applications for language learning. He actively participates in various innovation and invention competitions with research areas specialising in ESL and visual communication.