Factors Influencing the Mastery of Malay Vocabulary as a Second Language Among Indigenous Students

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ABSTRACT

Minority groups such as the Indigenous community are among those who often face challenges in mastering Malay Vocabulary forms as a second language due to several factors. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing the mastery of Malay Vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students. Accordingly, this study is grounded in Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory (1987) to analyze the factors affecting the mastery of Malay Vocabulary among Indigenous students. This case study was conducted qualitatively that involved six Indigenous students of the Temuan ethnic group. The research was conducted at a primary school located in the Bentong, Pahang. The instruments used in this research were interviews that conducted by the researcher, which were analyzed thematically. The findings of the study indicate that there are several internal and external factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary among Indigenous students. These factors include sources of Malay language acquisition as a second language, language input, student's comprehension, grammatical awareness, the influence of the first language, and affective factors. The sharing of these research findings is particularly important, especially for teachers who teach Malay language to Indigenous students, as an understanding of the factors influencing Malay vocabulary mastery enables teachers to select teaching approaches and methods that are appropriate to the students background.

Keywords - Indigenous, factor, Malay vocabulary, Malay language, second language

INTRODUCTION

The Malay language plays various roles in society, focusing not only on the field of education but also in other areas (Zulkifley, 2012). Mastery of the Malay language is not only a foundation for students' academic success but also reflects social integration in this multicultural nation. For native speakers of Malay, mastering the language is not an issue as they do not face significant difficulties, and their language acquisition occurs naturally, nurtured since birth (Nor Azwahanum et al., 2022). However, this situation is different for minority communities, particularly the Indigenous, who are non-native speakers and use Malay as their second language. The mastery of Malay as a second language requires adequate preparation in terms of cognitive and linguistic development (Keeves & Darmawan, 2007).

This is because the knowledge of the first language allows an individual to utilize their analytical abilities in learning a second language. Although children are considered capable of mastering multiple languages easily at a young age, this perspective is not as simple as it seems (Ilangko et al., 2014). Children can acquire a second language more easily than adults because their brains are more flexible. Conversely, they also inherit and speak their own ethnic languages, which leads to differences in the structure of words within the Malay language system.

The Education Act of 1996 has enforced the Malay language as the official medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system. Therefore, for the Indigenous community, mastery of Malay as a second language is an added value for individuals, as they only learn it formally in school. This situation may affect the proficiency of Indigenous students in mastering Malay as a second language, as language acquisition is influenced not only

by educational factors but also by social support and the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom. Thus, education plays a crucial role in empowering the Malay language, especially within the Indigenous community, so that they do not fall behind and can progress alongside other communities. A variety of external and internal factors will influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students because it requires preparation in terms of cognitive and linguistic development (Keeves & Darmawan, 2007).

Objectives Of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

i.   Exploring the external factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

ii.   Exploring the internal factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Importance Of the Study

This study is conducted to thoroughly explore the factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students in primary schools. Therefore, this study is written to serve as a reference for stakeholders in the education sector to improve the current quality of education. The discussion on the importance of this study will be divided according to several key stakeholders: State Education Departments (JPN), school administrators, teachers, students, and the Indigenous community itself.

A. State Education Departments (JPN)

From the perspective of the State Education Department (JPN), this study can provide empirical information that helps in understanding the realities and challenges of mastering the Malay language as a second language among Indigenous students more clearly. The data and findings from this study can serve as a basis for policy improvements, allowing for more targeted interventions to be implemented efficiently and effectively. In the effort to understand the issues surrounding the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students, the JPN can develop a more holistic strategy to support the learning of students and minority communities like the Indigenous peoples, ensuring that all factors influencing the mastery of the Malay language are addressed. Furthermore, this study can also contribute to the development of more comprehensive teaching modules and support the government's efforts in empowering education for the Indigenous community.

B. School Administrators

On behalf of the school administrators, this study can strengthen the efforts of the school management in implementing an inclusive curriculum. School administrators are responsible for ensuring that academic achievement and student development are at an optimal level. With the information obtained from this study, school administrators can plan support programs as more targeted interventions to assist students who struggle with their mastery of the Malay language. Additionally, the findings of this study will help administrators identify the training needs (LADAP) for teachers, particularly in aspects of culturally-friendly pedagogy that are suitable for application to the diverse backgrounds of students. Furthermore, school administrators can utilize the data from this study to strengthen cooperation between the school and the Indigenous community, thereby creating opportunities for parents or guardians to support their children's learning. Indirectly, this will create a comprehensive learning environment that embraces the diversity of each student.

C. Teachers

For teachers, this study is crucial in assisting them as primary educators to understand the factors that hinder the mastery of linguistic aspects among Indigenous students. With a more detailed understanding of the factors influencing vocabulary acquisition of the Malay language as a second language among Indigenous students, teachers can adjust their pedagogical approaches to be more contextual and culturally friendly. Moreover, the knowledge gained from this study can help teachers determine appropriate teaching methods and strategies that

align with the students, making teaching activities more targeted and engaging for students as a whole. In this regard, this study will also enable teachers to reflect on their existing teaching and learning practices, thereby improving weaknesses to enhance understanding and mastery of the Malay language among Indigenous students.

D. Students

For the students involved in this study, particularly the Indigenous students, they benefit directly as participants in the research. The exploration conducted by the researcher regarding the mastery of Malay word forms as a second language among Indigenous students aims to understand the constraints they face. This study will examine several factors that act as barriers or challenges for them, which in turn affect their mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language. The factors that hinder students from mastering the second language will be investigated and understood so that teachers can employ more suitable and effective teaching and learning strategies in the future. The selection of more targeted teaching strategies not only enhances their language proficiency but also strengthens their confidence, enabling them to engage actively in the learning process.

E. Indigenous Community

This study also has an impact on the community, particularly the Indigenous society as a whole. Through the data findings from this study, parents and community members can understand the importance of mastering the Malay language, which serves as a communication tool and the primary medium in the education system. This increased awareness can foster collaboration between the school and the local community in supporting students' learning processes, especially in terms of educational support at home and encouraging the use of the Malay language in their daily lives. Furthermore, this study also enlightens the Indigenous community that the government has established a more equitable, fair, and culturally friendly education system for minorities, ensuring that no students are left behind in the future.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Krashen's (1987) theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been selected as the foundation of this study. This theory is one of the most influential theories in the field of linguistics and language education. According to this theory, second language acquisition and learning consist of five main hypotheses that complement one another in explaining how individuals acquire a second language. These include the acquisition–learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Based on these five hypotheses, the theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining the linguistic factors that influence the mastery of Malay as a second language.

In the context of this study, Krashen's (1982) theory is linked to the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students through a research framework as illustrated in Figure 1. According to Krashen (1982), the relationship between theory and second language proficiency does not depend solely on language input and emotional states, but is also influenced by several factors during the language acquisition process. In addition, this theory emphasizes that factors such as socioeconomic background, motivation, and environmental support also play an important role in the success of second language acquisition. Therefore, this theory is highly relevant to the context of Malay vocabulary mastery among Indigenous students, as they are non-native speakers of Malay and possess different linguistic backgrounds.
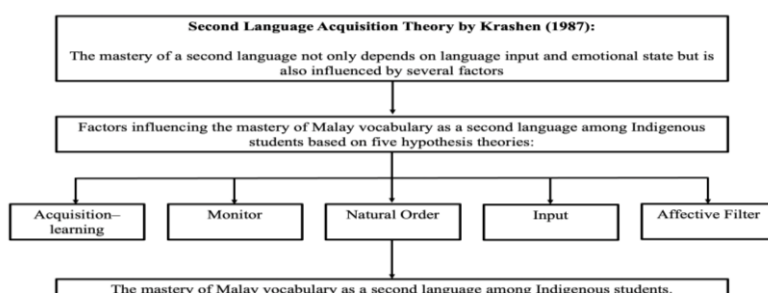

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 above illustrates the conceptual framework constructed with a focus on the research issue to be studied. This research framework shows the mastery of Malay language word forms as a second language among the Indigenous students as the dependent variable, while the factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students are the independent variables in this study. In the process of teaching and learning the Malay language in schools, Indigenous students undergo a second language learning process that leads to a shift in daily language use from their mother tongue. The processes of acquiring a second language are not easy, as they are still at the early stages of learning and have not fully mastered the Malay language skills. This is because the skill of mastering a second language is an additional skill that represents a new competency (Zuraini, 2018).

Non-native speakers like the Indigenous students are indeed influenced by several external and internal factors that affect their mastery of the Malay language as a second language, such as interference from their mother tongue, which often leads to language errors (Nora'azian & Fadzilah, 2018). This interference affects the formation of the students' usual vocabulary for speaking fluently. Therefore, research on the factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary among Indigenous students needs to be conducted from the primary school level to provide a foundational basis for students of various ethnicities. Consistency and perseverance in efforts to establish Malay as a language of civilization must be pursued so as to foster the progress of the Malaysian nation using its own indigenous framework.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of a case study. The research was conducted at a national primary school located in an Indigenous settlement in the Bentong district of Pahang. The selection of the research location was purposefully made based on several criteria, namely that the school has a significant number of Indigenous students from the Temuan ethnic group, Malay is used as the primary medium of instruction in teaching and learning, the school is situated within a Temuan community that still maintains the use of their mother tongue in daily life. The population of this study consists of six Year 6 students from the Temuan ethnic group. Details regarding the participants' backgrounds can be seen in Table I below.

In this study, the researcher selected participants through purposive sampling due to their ability to provide the desired information. The criteria used to guide the purposive sampling for selecting participants were (i) being a native speaker of the Temuan language, (ii) having at least three years of experience learning the Malay language in school, and (iii) obtaining permission from parents or guardians as well as the school administration. The interview method was used to gather data for the study. The interview sessions were recorded audibly with the participants' consent and analyzed using thematic analysis. In this study, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, the research instruments and the data coding process underwent validation by university language experts. This validation involved evaluation by experienced experts in the fields of linguistics and Malay language education.

TABLE I Background Profile of the Research Participants

Research Participant	Age	Ethinicity	Religion
PK1	12 years old	Temuan	Islam
PK2	12 years old	Temuan	Islam
PK3	12 years old	Temuan	Islam
PK4	12 years old	Temuan	Islam
PK5	12 years old	Temuan	Islam
PK6	12 years old	Temuan	Islam

FINDINGS

The findings from the analysis of data obtained through semi-structured interviews with six Indigenous students selected as research participants revealed five main themes. These themes are sources of Malay language acquisition as a second language, grammatical awareness, the influence of the first language on Malay language structure. language input and students' comprehension, and affective factors influencing the acquisition of the Malay language. All five themes focus on both external and internal factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

External factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Theme 1: Sources of Malay Language Acquisition as a Second Language

This first theme explains the main sources that influence the process of second language acquisition among Indigenous students. Through this theme, students' linguistic experiences are shown to be closely related to their environmental background and the types of language input they receive in their daily lives. Accordingly, several factors from the interview subthemes, as presented in Table II, were identified, including formal learning as the primary source of input, language acquisition through social interaction, and the dominance of the first language at home. In this regard, the findings analysed under this first theme not only describe the sources of language acquisition but also explain how each of these factors influences the ability of Indigenous students to master vocabulary in the context of learning the Malay language.

TABLE II Frequency of Themes on Sources of Malay as a Second Language Acquisition

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
Sources of Malay language acquisition as a second language	Formal learning as the main input	4
	Language acquisition through social interaction	1
	Dominance of the first language at home	1

The analysis of findings from the first interview theme indicates that the majority of the research participants acquired and learned Malay as a second language primarily through formal learning, specifically within the school environment. Based on the frequency data presented in Table II above, four participants, namely PK1, PK3, PK4, and PK5, stated that they mastered and learned Malay as a second language at school, guided by their teachers. This suggests that teachers are the most dominant source in assisting Indigenous students to acquire Malay. This is supported by the following excerpts from the interviews with PK1, PK3, PK4, and PK5:

"I learn Malay at school with the teachers because I don't stay in the hostel with my friends." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 1/ PK1)

"I learn Malay in class." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 1/ PK3)

"I know Malay language at school." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 1/ PK4)

"I learn at school with the Malay language teacher." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 1/ PK5)

Apart from formal learning factors, interview findings with the study participants also show that language acquisition through social interaction contributes to the mastery of Malay as a second language. Although this finding is at a minimum level, where only one student stated that they acquired Malay through socializing with peers or people around them, it remains a factor influencing the mastery of Malay word forms as a second language among them. This finding can be proven through the conversation excerpt of the researcher with PK2:

"I hear Indigenous Malay people chatting at school." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 2/ PK2)

Furthermore, the interview analysis with study participants also identified that the factor of first language dominance at home also influences the mastery of Malay word forms as a second language among Indigenous students. This indicates that Indigenous students only receive extensive Malay language input while at school, whereas the reception of this input is very limited if they are outside the school environment. The dominance of first language usage among family members while at home has the potential to constrain students from being exposed to using the Malay language continuously. This situation demonstrates that a balanced linguistic environment is very important in supporting students to acquire a second language more effectively. This is proven through the conversation excerpt with PK6:

"I can only learn Malay language at school because when I am at homem we mainly use Temuan language." (Interview/ Theme 1/ Subtheme 3/ PK6)

Overall, the study findings from Theme 1 show that formal learning as the primary input is the source of Malay language acquisition as a second language and is a dominant factor among the study participants. The dependence on formal learning, such as at school by teachers, explains that it is one of the factors influencing the mastery of Malay word forms as a second language among Indigenous students, particularly in terms of diversity and fluency of language use.

Theme 2: Language Input and Students' Comprehension

The second theme identified through the conversation analysis with study participants is language input and student comprehension. This theme explains the level of understanding among Indigenous students regarding the Malay language input received, particularly within the context of teaching and learning at school. Based on Table III below, the interview analysis findings show two subthemes under the theme of language input and students' comprehension. The first subtheme is that teacher input is easily understood, while the second subtheme is the difficulty in understanding Malay dialects. These findings indicate that students' understanding of Malay vocabulary is influenced by the clarity of explanations from teachers, whereas the use of dialects by surrounding people is considered input that is too distant for them to comprehend.

TABLE III Frequency of Themes Language Input and Students' Comprehension

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
Language Input and Students' Comprehension	Teacher input is easily understood	5
	Difficulty in understanding Malay dialects	3

Based on Table III, the interview analysis found that five participants in the study, namely PK1, PK2, PK3, PK5, and PK6, stated that the Malay language input delivered by the teacher was easy to understand. These Indigenous students indicated that the use of clear language, simple sentence structures, and relevant examples from their daily lives would help them understand the lesson content related to word forms more effectively. These findings suggest that the teaching strategies employed by the teacher, which emphasize clarity and simplicity in teaching the language, play a crucial role in enhancing students' understanding of the second language. Input that is comprehensible not only facilitates the learning process but also supports the acquisition of Malay vocabulary. This can be seen through the statements made by PK2, PK5, and PK6:

"I can understand new words because the teacher explains them." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 1/ PK2)

"I can understand new words if the teacher explains it to us." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 1/ PK5)

"I can understand new words if the teacher explains with examples that relate to us." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 1/ PK6)

However, the interview analysis also revealed that dialect influence affects the Indigenous students' comprehension of Malay vocabulary. Three participants in the study experienced difficulty in understanding the Malay dialect. The participants stated that the local dialect used caused them to struggle to comprehend the messages or input being conveyed. This finding can be substantiated through the statements made by PK1, PK2, and PK4:

"There are people from Kelantan. I once heard the teacher use the Kelantanese Malay dialect with other teachers, but I didn't understand it at all." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 2/ PK1)

"Teacher Hafiz is from Terengganu; I really can't understand him when he speaks in the Terengganu dialect." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 2/ PK2)

"I can understand all new words, but not in dialect." (Interview/ Theme 4/ Subtheme 2/ PK4)

Overall, this second theme indicates that the understanding and mastery of Malay vocabulary by Indigenous students are influenced by the clarity of the teacher's language and the dialect used. Clear input from the teacher that is easily understood by the Indigenous students supports the acquisition of Malay as a second language, while the use of varying dialects can confuse the students and hinder their understanding of certain concepts.

Internal factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Theme 1: Grammatical awareness

The first theme identified from the analysis of interviews with the research participants is grammatical awareness. This theme refers to the level of sensitivity among Indigenous students towards the use of language structures and Malay vocabulary when communicating in Malay as a second language. Therefore, based on Table IV below, two subthemes were identified under the theme of grammatical awareness, namely lack of speech planning and error correction in formal contexts.

TABLE IV Frequency of Themes Grammatical Awareness

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
Grammatical awareness	Lack of speech planning	6
	Error correction in formal contexts	1

The research findings based on the subthemes presented in Table IV indicate that all participants did not plan their speech in terms of vocabulary use when communicating in Malay. Indigenous students tend to speak spontaneously without considering the accuracy of sentence structure or the vocabulary used. The excerpts from conversations with all research participants below support the findings of the first subthemes:

"I just speak using Malay because my friends understand even if there are mistakes." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 1/ PK1)

"I don't think about it because the Temuan language and Malay are not very different." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 1/ PK2)

"I do not think before speaking using Malay language." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 2/ PK3)

"I also do not think." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 2/ PK4)

"I also do not think before speaking as long as people understand what I want to say." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 1/ PK5)

"I do not think before speaking because Malay is easy." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 1/ PK6)

Furthermore, the findings also reveal that the second subtheme indicates that vocabulary error correction occurs only in formal contexts, namely in the classroom. One of the research participants, PK5, stated that errors in vocabulary usage are usually pointed out or corrected by the teacher during teaching and learning sessions. However, the correction of vocabulary errors rarely occurs in informal communication contexts, as stated by PK2 and PK5 in the excerpts below:

"In class, the Malay language teacher will correct those mistakes. So we will learn the Temuan words in Malay when we do not know the actual words." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 3/ PK5)

"Even when im speaking with my Malay friends, they do not correct our language when it is wrong." (Interview/ Theme 2/ Sub-theme 3/ PK2)

Overall, the findings for this first theme indicate that students' grammatical awareness is one of the internal factors influencing their mastery of Malay vocabulary. This internal factor directly affects the acquisition of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Theme 2: The influence of the first language on Malay language structure.

The second theme identified from the analysis of interviews with the research participants is the influence of the first language on Malay language structure. This theme refers to the impact of Indigenous students' mother tongue, namely the Temuan language, to construct and use Malay structures as a second language. Based on Table V below, two subthemes emerged from this second theme. The first subtheme is code-mixing as a natural norm, while the second sub-theme is awareness of distinguishing between standard Malay and the mother tongue.

TABLE V Frequency of Themes The Influence of the First Language on Malay Language Structure.

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
The influence of the first anguage on Malay language structure	Code-mixing as a natural norm	1
	Awareness of distinguishing between standard Malay and the mother tongue.	6

The interview findings based on the first subtheme under the second theme reveal that one of the research participants engaged in code-mixing between their mother tongue, the Temuan language, and Malay during communication. This code-mixing occurred spontaneously and unconsciously during interactions. This indicates that the phenomenon of code-mixing among Indigenous students has become a norm in daily speech, as expressed by PK3 below. However, this code-mixing factor has the potential to affect the mastery of Malay structure and vocabulary if it is used uncontrollably in second language communication.

"Mixing Malay with the Temuan language is normal for us when we speak." (Interview/ Theme 3/ Sub-theme 1/ PK3)

Furthermore, the findings indicate that all participants were aware of the need to distinguish between the use of standard Malay and their mother tongue in certain situations. All six participants understood that code-mixing is not appropriate in formal contexts, such as during assessments or when interacting with teachers, as they consider the mother tongue suitable only in informal contexts. This awareness demonstrates that Orang Asli

students are capable of differentiating language use according to context. This can be seen in the following excerpts from PK2, PK3, and PK5:

"I use Malay in writing. I don't mix languages." (Interview/ Theme 3/ Sub-theme 2/ PK2)
"No, because I know Temuan words cannot be used in writing." (Interview/ Theme 3/ Sub-theme 2/ PK3)
"don't use the Temuan language in writing." (Interview/ Theme 3/ Sub-theme 2/ PK5)

Overall, the interview findings for the second theme indicate that the first language continues to influence the Malay language structure of Indigenous students, whether through code-mixing or contextual awareness in language choice. Although the students are aware of the need to differentiate between Malay and their mother tongue, the influence of the first language remains evident in their speech. This becomes an internal factor that affects the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Theme 3: Affective factors

The third theme identified through the analysis of interviews with the research participants is affective factors. Based on Table VI below, the subthemes under this third theme are peer support in reducing affective barriers and interest in learning Malay. Both subthemes relate to the emotional, attitude, and motivational aspects of Indigenous students that influence their willingness to learn Malay as a second language.

TABLE VI Frequency of Themes Affective factors

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
Affective factors	Peer support in reducing affective barriers	1
	Interest in learning Malay	3

The interview analysis revealed that one of the research participants, PK3, stated that peer support can reduce feelings of fear and embarrassment when speaking in Malay. This support includes friends' attitudes of not mocking or looking down on the Malay language errors made by Indigenous students. This is illustrated in the following excerpts from the interview with PK3. The findings also indicate that a supportive learning environment can lower affective barriers and increase self-confidence in using Malay, even though it is only a second language for Indigenous students.

"I feel confident using Malay because my friends will not laugh at me if I make mistakes." (Interview/ Theme 5/ Sub-theme 1/ PK3)

Furthermore, the second sub-theme from Table VI indicates that interest in learning Malay is a factor that enables Indigenous students to master Malay vocabulary as a second language. The interview analysis shows that three participants expressed a clear interest in learning Malay, as reflected in the excerpts below. Interest in learning Malay is an important intrinsic motivational factor in second language acquisition for the students.

"I like learning Malay because I can speak correctly." (Interview/ Theme 5/ Sub-theme 2/ PK2)
"I enjoy learning Malay because at home, we only use the Temuan language." (Interview/ Theme 5/ Sub-theme 2/ PK3)
"I like learning Malay even though at the hostel I speak a lot of Temuan." (Interview/ Theme 5/ Sub-theme 2/ PK5)

Overall, the interview findings for the third theme show that affective factors, such as peer support and interest in learning Malay, play a crucial role in mastering Malay vocabulary as a second language. These internal factors help reduce the affective barriers faced by Indigenous students and create a conducive learning environment.

DISCUSSION

This discussion section aims to explain and interpret the research findings obtained based on the research objectives set by the researcher. There are two main focuses to be discussed, namely: (i) external factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students, and (ii) internal factors that influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students. Therefore, this study is found to have achieved the objectives set by the researcher.

External factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

The first external factor indicates that the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Orang Asli students is influenced by the sources of language input they receive, whether through formal learning or natural social interactions. This factor aligns with the acquisition-learning hypothesis proposed in Krashen's (1982) Second Language Acquisition and Learning Theory, which states that there is a distinction between conscious learning and unconscious language acquisition. The majority of the research participants stated that they learned Malay vocabulary primarily at school, through their teachers. Most participants believed that to master Malay, the classroom needed to serve as the place to learn the language structure. This aligns with Zulkifley's (2011) view that second language speakers only acquire Malay through structured learning that builds language skills to produce competent language users.

In addition, the participants also stated that they enhanced their Malay vocabulary mastery through social interactions and communication outside the classroom, whether with teachers or peers. This situation reflects that unconscious language acquisition also acts as an external factor influencing their mastery of Malay vocabulary, even in natural contexts. Accordingly, this type of language acquisition is considered more effective because it occurs spontaneously, without formal pressure (Nor Azwahanum et al., 2022).

Another external factor influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students is language input and students' comprehension. The level of Malay vocabulary mastery among students is highly influenced by their understanding of the language input they receive. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) hypothesis in the Second Language Acquisition and Learning Theory, which states that language acquisition occurs most effectively when language users are exposed to comprehensible input. Therefore, teacher input is easily understood by Orang Asli students because the findings show that students are able to acquire new vocabulary presented by the teacher when explanations are supported with relevant examples. The use of examples that are easily understood by Indigenous students, along with step-by-step explanations by the teacher, helps them interpret the meaning of the language effectively (Wok, W. C. et al., 2025).

However, difficulty in understanding Malay dialects becomes an obstacle for Indigenous students in comprehending standard Malay. This is because dialectal content contains significant differences in phonology, lexis, and sentence structure compared to standard Malay (Nur Eliana & Nur Farahkhanna, 2024). Input in Malay dialects is often too distant and difficult for second language users, such as Indigenous students, to understand, as they do not have sufficient linguistic foundation to interpret the meaning of each dialect used in conversational contexts. Therefore, structured, gradual language input supported by easily comprehensible examples becomes a catalyst for improving the mastery of Malay word forms as a second language among Indigenous students (Nuradlin Syafini & Zaleha Embong, 2020).

Internal factors influencing the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students.

Awareness or knowledge of grammar in second language users functions as a monitoring tool to check and correct their language errors. This can be related to Krashen's (1982) Second Language Acquisition and Learning

Theory, specifically the monitor hypothesis, which states that monitoring occurs when speakers pay attention to the forms of language they produce. In this study, the participants did not plan their speech, often speaking without considering the arrangement of sentence structures beforehand. This indicates that the participants use Malay as a second language spontaneously, without the control of the monitor. Consequently, Indigenous students' communication occurs naturally, which sometimes leads to vocabulary errors without self-correction because the use of the monitor is minimal. According to Nor Azwahanum et al. (2022), students are highly dependent on teachers to correct language errors whenever they occur. This reliance makes it difficult for second language users to master the vocabulary they are learning because corrections do not occur consistently. Therefore, the improvement of Malay vocabulary mastery as a second language happens only gradually.

Furthermore, the influence of the first language on Malay language structure has an impact on the research participants. The first language refers to the mother tongue learned from parents or caregivers since childhood. According to Faridah Nazir (2023), the use of a mother tongue that has been routinely spoken since an early age inevitably affects a person's way of speaking. The study findings indicate that students are aware that the context of language use must be accurate, especially in formal learning situations. Although the use of Malay language among Indigenous students is not yet fully mastered, the awareness present in these second language users enables them to distinguish between their mother tongue and the target language. If this awareness is not properly managed, it can lead to code-mixing. The phenomenon of code-mixing can be defined as the combination of language elements such as clauses, phrases, words, affixes, and intensifiers from one language code into sentences of the language being spoken (Muhammad Alee et al., 2023). In relation to this, from the perspective of Krashen's (1982) Second Language Acquisition and Learning Theory, this aligns with the natural order hypothesis, which states that second language acquisition should ideally occur gradually in stages. Code-mixing in second language users should not be considered a major error because students are at a certain stage in the developmental sequence of acquiring Malay.

In addition, affective factors also influence the mastery of Malay vocabulary among Indigenous students. According to Krashen (1982), affective factors in second language acquisition such as support, motivation, interest, and anxiety levels act as variables that can either facilitate or hinder the language acquisition process, as described in the Second Language Acquisition and Learning Theory. Support from peers who do not belittle the efforts of Indigenous students when using Malay helps reduce their anxiety and simultaneously increases their confidence to communicate. Furthermore, most research participants expressed an interest in learning Malay, particularly the desire to speak more accurately. This interest demonstrates a high level of intrinsic motivation among the students. High intrinsic motivation can lower affective filters and allow students to receive language input more openly (Krashen, 1982). When students are interested and motivated, they are more likely to actively engage in the learning and acquisition process, thereby accelerating the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language. Therefore, a positive and supportive learning environment is a key condition that can help reduce affective barriers and maximize the process of acquiring Malay proficiency.

Suggestions For Future Research

Several suggestions for future research can be proposed to strengthen and expand the understanding of this study. First, future studies could involve a larger sample of Indigenous students, comprising various subethnic groups, geographical locations, and educational levels. Involving a larger sample can provide a more comprehensive and representative picture of the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students. Next, a variety of methodological approaches can be employed in future research. The integration of mixed methods, such as combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, can yield more holistic findings. For example, combining quantitative and qualitative data allows researchers not only to identify vocabulary mastery empirically but also to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous students' language learning experiences. Therefore, this integrated approach is expected to produce more comprehensive and meaningful results. Overall, these suggestions for future research are hoped to open opportunities for more in-depth and systematic studies. Such efforts can enrich the field of language and education research and contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning practices in the Malay language.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study found that the mastery of Malay vocabulary as a second language among Indigenous students is influenced by several external and internal factors, including language acquisition sources, grammatical awareness, the influence of the first language, language input and student comprehension, as well as affective factors. Consequently, the findings of this study have significant implications for the teaching and learning of Malay among Indigenous students. Curriculum adjustments, appropriate teaching strategies, and continuous support need to be provided to these second language learners as a means of fostering their motivation. Indigenous students should be approached with care and require teachers who genuinely understand their characteristics, as teacher errors may lead to students becoming easily discouraged and even skipping school (Johari & Nazri, 2007). From a linguistic development perspective, Indigenous students require structured and continuous language learning support to enable them to acquire vocabulary systematically. Strong vocabulary mastery can help students construct more grammatically accurate and meaningful sentences in Malay. Conversely, weaknesses in Malay vocabulary mastery may hinder Indigenous students' ability to comprehend learning content at school, as Malay serves as the primary medium of instruction in the education system (Fatan Hamamah, 2008).

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