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20TH AUGUST 2025

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION, DRIVING INNOVATION AND
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ME-BIPLP - THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MALAY-ENGLISH BILINGUAL LANGUAGE PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MALAYSIAN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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ABSTRACT

Parental language practices are crucial in shaping children's language development, especially in creating a bilingual environment at home. Although Malaysia promotes Malay-English bilingualism (i.e., Malay as the National Language and English as the Second Official Language), many children still fall behind in acquiring both languages simultaneously and sequentially. This highlights the urgent need for effective, accessible guidance for parents and caregivers to support bilingual development at home. However, many families lack sufficient knowledge of appropriate language strategies. To address this gap, the Malay-English Bilingual Parent Language Practices (ME-BiPLP) Questionnaire was developed as a practical, parent-friendly tool to guide Malaysian parents in fostering bilingualism. Grounded in four theoretical frameworks – Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Skinner's Theory of Learning, Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis – ME-BiPLP was created using an adopt-and-adapt method. A total of 60 items were compiled from five existing tools: Across Culture School Language Profile, Alberta Language Environment Questionnaire (ALEQ), Early Language Scales (ELS), Language Express, and CAT/CLAMS. The items were refined to 35 questions and validated by experts in Linguistics, Child Psychiatry, and Early Language Education. Following expert review, five items were revised. A pilot study involving 25 parents and caregivers demonstrated high reliability in Cronbach's Alpha (0.849). As the first dual-language parental questionnaire in Malaysia, ME-BiPLP is novel, accessible, and culturally appropriate. ME-BiPLP assists parents and caregivers with the knowledge to foster early bilingual development, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4: quality education (i.e., literacy) for all children. ME-BiPLP findings will contribute to future development of national language guidelines.

Keywords: *parental language practices, bilingual development, early childhood, Malay-English Bilingual Language Practices, children's language development*

INTRODUCTION

Malay-English bilingualism is a common phenomenon in Malaysia. This is due to the fact that Malay is positioned as the National Language of Malaysia whereas English is the Official Second Language. Despite the common practice of Malay-English bilingualism in Malaysia, many children are not able to grow up as simultaneous or sequential Malay-English bilinguals (Mahmud & Salehuddin, 2023), potentially due to lack of exposure in early childhood. Mahmud and Salehuddin (under review) note that parents and caregivers are the close caregivers that should be responsible to foster children's language development and bilingualism in early childhood. Such scenarios include parental language practices that the parents and caregivers should nurture to expose their children to languages.

Parental language practices are crucial in shaping children's language development, especially in creating a bilingual environment at home (Mahmud, Salehuddin, & Sulaiman, under review). This highlights the urgent need for effective, accessible guidance for parents and caregivers to support bilingual development at home. However, many parents and caregivers lack sufficient knowledge of appropriate language strategies to foster languages for their children. Therefore, to address this gap, this research aims to present the development of the Malay-English Bilingual Parent Language Practices (ME-BiPLP) Questionnaire as a practical, parent-friendly tool to explore what Malaysian parents do in fostering bilingualism. The ME-BiPLP is the first questionnaire in Malaysia developed and designed with the intention that results from the survey will provide knowledge to parents and caregivers of 1- to 6-years old on the possible parental language practices to raise their children as Malay-English bilinguals.

METHODS

The development of the ME-BiPLP was focused on three main stages: 1) reviewing and evaluating existing questionnaires, 2) identifying relevant theoretical frameworks, and 3) conducting adopt-and-adapt method. The three stages (Figure 1) were to determine the structured, reliable, and robust process of developing the questionnaire to ensure its clarity, Malaysian-cultured appropriateness, and parent-friendly to the context of Malay-English bilingualism in Malaysia.

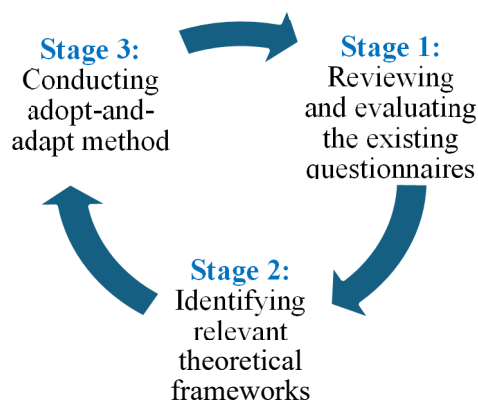


Figure 1.: The stages of developing the ME-BiPLP

Stage 1: Reviewing and evaluating existing questionnaires

An initial review identified 11 existing questionnaires related to child language exposure and language practices which are convenient for the development of ME-BiPLP. However, after thorough screening, only five questionnaires, namely, 1) Across Culture: School Language Profile (Parental Report) (Tweedie, 2014), 2) Alberta Language Environment Questionnaire (ALEQ) (i.e., Janabi et al., 2022), 3) Language Express: Preschool Speech Language Services (Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit, 2024), 4) the Early Language Scale (ELS) (Visser-Bochane et al., 2021), and 5) The Capute Scales: Cognitive Adaptive Test/clinical Linguistic & Auditory Milestone Scale (CAT/CLAMS) (Accardo & Capute, 2005), were shortlisted and chosen due to their relevance, format, and accessibility. Nevertheless, the five existing tools were mainly designed for Western context which involved unrelated questions for Malaysian setting such as “Coat on” that indicates dressing during winter and also immigrant communities such as question “What is your home country?”. These sorts of questions are considered unsuitable for Malaysia context, therefore, adaptation and modification of certain questions from existing questionnaires are needed.

To address the limitations of selected five existing questionnaires, the items were reconstructed via adopt-and-adapt method. Prior to the development of the ME-BiPLP via an adopt-and-adapt method, the selection of appropriate questions was grounded in four theoretical frameworks: Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, Skinner’s Theory of Learning, Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory, and Krashen’s Input Hypothesis. The subsequent sections further discuss the four relevant theories on parental language practices.

Stage 2: Identifying relevant theoretical frameworks

As mentioned, the ME-BiPLP was guided by four relevant theories related to children’s language development and parental language practices as the four main constructs of ME-BiPLP. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, Skinner’s Theory of Learning, Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory, and Krashen’s Input Hypothesis were used because of their emphasis on language acquisition and parental practices through modelling and imitation (i.e., Bandura’s), reinforcement and punishment in terms of stimulus, rewards, and responses (i.e., Skinner’s), social interaction between parent-child interaction and scaffolding in parental practices (i.e., Vygotsky’s), and the importance of comprehensible input in language exposure (i.e., Krashen’s). These constructs were used to guide the adopt-and-adapt method to develop the items of ME-BiPLP from the existing questionnaires that assess the quality and quantity of parental language practices. The constructs not only ensure that ME-BiPLP can help give information to parents and caregivers in Malaysia, but also to support bilingual language development in children aged 1 to 6. Figure 2 shows the representation of four theories in each construct used for the development of ME-BiPLP.

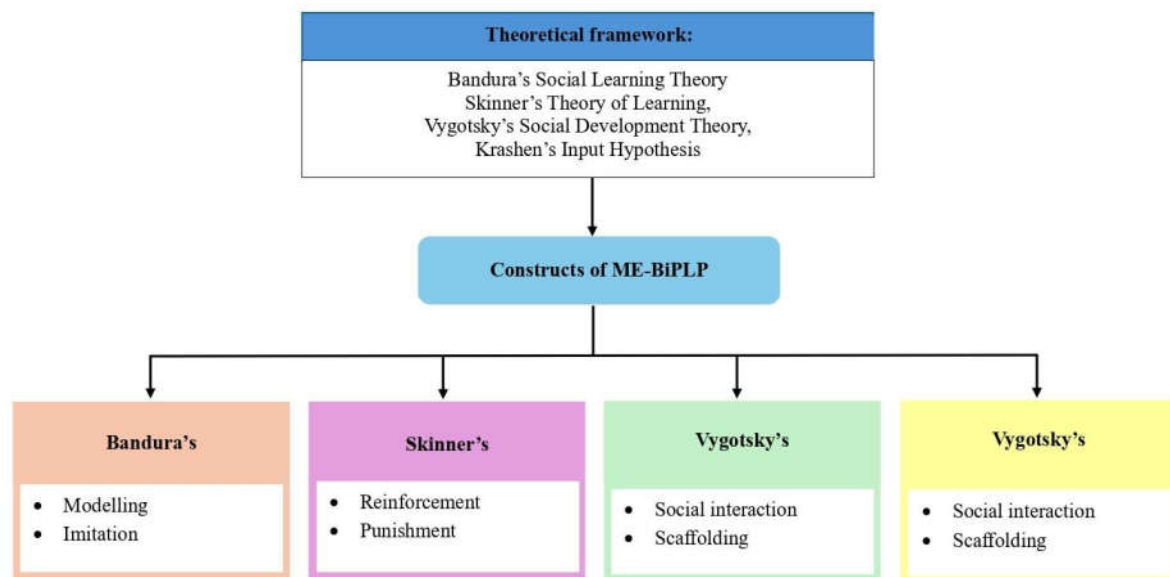


Figure 2.: Representation of four theories and constructs in ME-BiPLP

Stage 3: Conducting adopt-and-adapt method

A total of 60 items were gathered from five existing questionnaires. Guided by the four theories and constructs, the items were then refined to 35 items according to their relevance and clarity on cultural appropriateness (Malaysian context) and theoretical alignment. Sample items include using gestures during parent-child interaction (Bandura), praising the children’s language use (Skinner), doing shared reading activities (Vygotsky), and simplifying speech when interacting with the children (Krashen) (Mahmud & Salehuddin, 2024). The ME-BiPLP followed Yes/No answer options with clear examples to minimize burden and allow parents to indicate both frequency and language use. Table 1 shows examples of how theoretical constructs were translated and developed into parent-friendly items.

Table 1.: Sample Questionnaire Items Based on Theoretical Constructs

Theory	Construct	Sample Item
Bandura’s	Modelling and imitation	“Do you give more than one-step instructions to your child?” “Do you sing songs with your child in the car, or at home (not necessarily Nursery Rhymes)?”
Skinner’s	Reinforcement and punishment	“Do you praise your child (or give anything that he/she likes) when he or she produces a good word?” “Do you say or give your child something that he/she does not like when your child says a bad word?”
Vygotsky’s	Social interaction and scaffolding	“Do you encourage your child to spend time playing with friends?” “Do you read the same books repeatedly to your child?”

Krashen's Comprehensible Input "Do you simplify your words when speaking to your child?"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Expert validation

The 35-item ME-BiPLP questionnaire was given to six experts in the language area, child psychology, early childhood education, and childcare area for validation. However, only four experts (i.e., a Linguist, a Child psychiatrist, an Early Childhood Specialist, and a Childcare Specialist) returned the complete feedback and validation form. They assessed the clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment of items with the intended constructs and also language relevance and consistency between the Malay and English versions. Based on their suggestions, five items were revised for clarity as well as language and cultural relevance.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was used to quantify expert agreement to refute any potential bias (Yusoff, 2019). The overall S-CVI/UA score was 0.71, with individual scores ranging from 0.80 to 1.0 which indicates moderate to strong agreement among all experts. All experts confirmed the appropriateness of the four theoretical constructs and supported the items of the ME-BiPLP. Minor revisions on five items were made in terms of changing the wording and providing more examples, particularly in the Malay version in order to improve parent comprehension and ensure equivalence with the English items.

Internal consistency and reliability

Following validation, a pilot study was conducted with 25 Malaysian parents (i.e., 23 mothers and one father) and one female caregiver of children aged 1 to 6 years old. Using SPSS Version 27, the internal reliability of the questionnaire was tested. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.859 confirmed strong internal consistency which indicates that the instrument is reliable for assessing parental language practices among parents and caregivers of Malay-English bilinguals. The validated ME-BiPLP is reliable to provide insight and information for all parents and caregivers in Malaysia who intend to raise their children as Malay-English bilinguals.

Usability and parental feedback

Based on the pilot study, participants commented that the ME-BiPLP was easy to use and understand. This is due to the fact that the language use and examples given in the ME-BiPLP are simple, parent-friendly, and free from scientific terms which makes it easy to comprehend. Therefore, the structure of the ME-BiPLP not only focuses on accessing parental language practices, but it also intends to be accessible to all parents from various backgrounds and regions.

Educational and Social Implications

As the first dual-language parental questionnaire in Malaysia, ME-BiPLP is novel, accessible, and culturally appropriate. ME-BiPLP assists parents and caregivers with the knowledge to foster early bilingual development, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4: quality education (i.e., literacy) for all children. ME-BiPLP findings will contribute to future development of national language guidelines as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.: Sample Questionnaire Items Based on Theoretical Constructs

Aspect	Implication
Parental accessibility	Enable parents and caregivers to monitor early bilingual language development at home.
Support SDG-4	Support improved literacy and quality education through increased parental involvement.
Data utility and scalability	Provide the future development of national language guidelines which will help the parents and caregivers to foster early bilingualism at home and contribute to education and language practice in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The ME-BiPLP is a validated, reliable, and theory-oriented Malay-English bilingual questionnaire designed for Malaysian parents and caregivers of 1- to 6-year-old children. Guided by four theories and constructs, the stages of developing ME-BiPLP are robust and structured, indicating that the questionnaire is ready for broader use. ME-BiPLP supports parental involvement in bilingual development and aligns with national education goals. The development of ME-BiPLP will then help develop the future national language guidelines for all parents and caregivers in Malaysia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement goes to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia for funding this study through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) under the grant number FRGS/1/2022/SSI09/UKM/02/4. Ethics approval (JEP-2022-770) was obtained prior to the research.

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