Higher Education Innovation   **WALDEN UNIVERSITY**

Innovation in Practice: Embracing Multilingualism in an Intensive English Programme

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this article is to delineate and substantiate the adoption of multilingualism within an intensive English programme (IEP) conducted at a public Malaysian university. The target audience comprises international students categorised as English as a Foreign Language learners.

Innovation: A model encompassing multilingualism was formulated and applied in the specific context, involving various stakeholders. While acknowledging the primary purpose of IEPs is to develop English language proficiency, this model transitions from monolingualism to multilingualism by raising participant awareness of multilingualism, adopting translanguaging strategies, encouraging comparisons of different languages, and facilitating target language production that acknowledges the role of other languages in the process.

Conclusion: Recognising the prevalent characteristics of traditional IEPs, which typically exhibit monolingualism with respect to the English language, we advocate for a more inclusive approach that embraces linguistic diversity and supports multilingual learners. Implementation of the model yielded initially positive outcomes. However, challenges related to institutional support and resistance to change from students, educators, and programme leaders exerted pressure on instructors in their innovation of the studied IEP.

Implication for Practice: IEPs should persist in embracing multilingualism to align with the diverse linguistic landscape and enrich the student learning experiences. This endeavour necessitates consistent professional training for teachers and collaborative efforts among teachers, administrators, and students.

Recommended Citation

Hu, H., & Zhang, L. (2024). Innovation in practice: Embracing multilingualism in an intensive English programme. *Higher Learning Research Communications, 14*(0), 18–34. https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v14i0.1514

Introduction

As the popularity of English-medium instruction (EMI) continues to soar among higher education providers (HEPs) worldwide, so does the prevalence of intensive English programmes (IEPs) that provide rapid enhancement of English language proficiency for non-native English-speaking students before they embark on academic studies abroad. These programmes serve as linguistic launchpads, equipping students with the language skills essential for not only comprehending complex subject matters but also actively engaging in academic discourse (Juffs, 2020).

In Malaysia, a nation renowned for its cultural diversity and as an educational hub, the deployment of EMI is particularly pronounced, driven by educational policies implemented to satisfy the evolving needs of a globalised world (Rethinasamy et al., 2021). Nevertheless, EMI also poses significant challenges to international students from non-native English-speaking countries when it comes to engaging with course materials, communicating effectively, and participating actively in academic discourse (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Hu, 2023). With the notable increase in the enrolment of international students in Malaysian HEPs[1], IEPs have risen to these challenges by offering structured and immersive English language instruction. This has served to establish the teaching innovation presented in this article, which aims to elucidate how a model of multilingualism has been designed and integrated into that teaching context, considering particularly the predominance of monolingualism that characterises most IEPs, an issue relevant to not only Malaysia (Jan et al., 2020) but also many other countries (Litzenberg, 2023).

A Review of IEPs: Development and Characteristics

The origins of IEPs can be traced back to the mid-20th century, particularly in response to the increasing demand for English language instruction among international students and immigrants (Matsuda, 2023). The post-World War II era witnessed the expansion of English as a global lingua franca, leading to the establishment of language schools and programmes dedicated to meeting the needs of non-native English speakers (Crystal, 1999). During the 1960s and 1970s, the United States emerged as a prime site for IEPs, with universities and language institutes pioneering innovative approaches to language teaching and learning (Park, 2008). The advent of communicative language teaching in the 1970s strongly influenced the pedagogical practices of IEPs, shifting the focus from rote memorisation to meaningful communication and interaction in English (Thompson, 1996).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the development of IEPs has expanded beyond the United States to represent a global phenomenon. With the increasing globalisation and internationalisation of education, countries around the world have recognised the importance of English language proficiency for academic,

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[1] See https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/student-data/.

professional, and social mobility (Ahmed et al., 2009). As a result, IEPs have proliferated in diverse contexts, catering to the linguistic needs of learners from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In Europe, for example, the establishment of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has influenced the development of IEPs, promoting standardised language assessment and curriculum design across European countries (Little, 2006). Language schools and universities in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France have implemented IEPs to support international students and promote English language learning within their respective educational systems. Similarly, in Asia, rapid economic growth and increasing global connectivity have spurred the expansion of IEPs in countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea. Recognising the importance of English proficiency for international communication and competitiveness, governments and educational institutions have invested in the development of IEPs to enhance the English language skills of their citizens and prepare them for participation in the global economy (Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012).

In the Middle East and Northern Africa, the demand for English language proficiency has surged due to the region's growing participation in global trade, tourism, and higher education. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have invested heavily in the establishment of IEPs to meet the needs of their populations and to foster international collaboration and exchange (Hidri & Coombe, 2017). In Latin America, the expansion of IEPs has been driven by similar factors, including the region's integration into the global economy and the increasing importance of English for business, tourism, and academic purposes. Countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia have seen a rise in the number of language schools and institutes offering intensive English language courses in order to meet growing demand (Davies, 2021).

IEPs worldwide vary in their structures, durations, and objectives, but they generally share common characteristics. These programmes typically offer intensive and concentrated language instruction aimed at accelerating language acquisition and proficiency development (Juffs, 2020; Ping, 2014). They often employ immersive teaching methods, such as small group activities, communicative tasks, and language immersion experiences, to create an environment conducive to language learning. Furthermore, IEPs commonly adopt a proficiency-based approach to instruction and tailor their curriculums to the linguistic needs and goals of individual learners. This may involve diagnostic assessments, level placement tests, and ongoing progress monitoring to ensure that learners are appropriately challenged and supported in their language development journey (Eckstein et al., 2022).

In addition to language instruction, many IEPs incorporate cultural orientation components, providing learners with insights into the social and cultural norms of English-speaking countries (Snyder & Fenner, 2021; Suryanto et al., 2022). This holistic approach to language education aims to prepare learners for academic, professional, and social integration into English-speaking environments and equip them with both language skills and cultural competencies. Moreover, IEPs often emphasise authentic, interactive, and communicative language use, encouraging learners to engage in meaningful communication and collaboration with their peers and instructors. Through interactive activities, role-plays, and real-world tasks, learners have the opportunity to practice and apply their language skills in authentic contexts and enhance their communicative competence and confidence in using English (Eckstein et al., 2022; Juffs, 2020).

Monolingualism in IEPs: Reason for Innovation

IEPs have become ubiquitous in educational institutions worldwide, renowned for rigorous language instruction methods often characterised by total immersion environments and stringent English-only policies (Noguchi, 2019). Despite their widespread adoption, however, IEPs have come under scrutiny for potentially perpetuating monolingualism, a paradigm that elevates the status of English while marginalising other languages. This leads to what is termed forced monolingualism, which occurs when learners, despite living in

bilingual or multilingual sociocultural environments, are restricted from developing proficiency in languages other than English (Aronin, 2022).

While the given aim of IEPs is the enhancement of English language proficiency, the broader implications of IEPs on linguistic diversity within the educational environment must be acknowledged. Scholars have highlighted the potential ramifications of IEPs that prioritise English exclusively, pointing out the risks of overlooking the diverse linguistic backgrounds and competencies that students bring to the classroom (Dewi et al., 2021; Jan et al., 2020). A genuine concern of many scholars is that by focusing solely on the English language, IEPs may inadvertently suppress the use and development of students' native languages and multilingual abilities. This narrow linguistic focus has the potential to hinder cognitive and linguistic growth (de Groot, 2011), limiting students' capacity to engage fully with and navigate the complexities of language learning.

Moreover, the pervasive emphasis on monolingualism within IEPs raises significant concern for limiting the broader benefits of multilingualism. Multilingual individuals often exhibit heightened cognitive flexibility that allows them to adapt more readily to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Edwards, 2012). Additionally, proficiency in multiple languages can open doors to expanded academic and career opportunities, facilitate enhanced social integration, and foster a deeper appreciation of cross-cultural awareness (Holm, 2023; Hu et al., 2022). By neglecting these advantages and prioritising a monolingual approach, IEPs risk limiting students' holistic educational experiences and stifling their potential for personal and professional advancement.

There is a growing consensus among scholars and educators regarding the necessity of adopting a more balanced approach to language instruction within IEPs. Such an approach would acknowledge and celebrate the linguistic diversity present among students, while simultaneously prioritising the cultivation of English proficiency (Dewi et al., 2021; Litzenberg, 2023). By integrating students' native languages and multilingual capabilities into the curriculum, educators can create a more inclusive learning environment that champions linguistic equity and empowers learners to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. This shift toward a more inclusive and holistic approach to language instruction is essential for ensuring that IEPs effectively meet the diverse needs of learners and prepare them for success in today's globalised society.

The Context for Innovation: An IEP in Malaysia

The innovation examined here was introduced within a 3-month IEP hosted by a public university in Malaysia. This programme was designed to cater to the specific needs of Chinese international students, offering them an immersive experience with the purpose of enhancing their proficiency in all facets of the English language, including speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The overarching goal was to equip students with the language skills necessary for both academic and communicative purposes.

Within the programme, the development of English language skills was approached holistically, suggesting that the ability to use English effectively was interconnected and vital for comprehensive language competence. Assigned textbooks were utilised, such as *Pathways* (copyrighted by National Geographic Learning) and *Interchange* (published by Cambridge University Press). Moreover, the IEP was planned as a total immersion programme to create an English-speaking environment both within and outside the classroom. This approach was designed to accelerate language acquisition and foster a deep understanding of English as a living language, not just a subject of study. Students engaged in various activities that required them to apply their language skills in both academic and real-life situations, such as participating in group discussions, collaborating on projects, and engaging with local communities.

The participants of the IEP were 40 Chinese undergraduates enrolled in a business English programme from a partnered university in southwest China; their average age was 19.5 years. Results of the placement test indicated their English proficiency levels varied from B1 to C1 on the Common European Framework of Languages. Additionally, most students had passed The College English Test Band-4, a nationally standardised English test in China, equivalent to B1 to B2 on the Common European Framework of Languages, before the programme (Wang et al., 2023). According to China's Standards of English Language Ability, the students were at Level 6 to Level 7 (Coniam et al., 2022), suggesting that they were intermediate to advanced English learners able to "understand language materials on a range of topics" and "engage in in-depth discussion and exchange with others on a range of related academic and social topics," though with mixed control (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China & National Language Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2018, p. 6).

Methodological Underpinning: Developmental Research

A design and development research methodology was employed to develop a model aimed at facilitating multilingualism in the IEP. In the analysis phase, the research team conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature on multilingualism in educational settings, with a particular focus on IEPs. This involved examining previous studies, theoretical frameworks, and best practices related to promoting linguistic diversity within language learning environments. Additionally, surveys and interviews were conducted with stakeholders to gather insights into the current opportunities for multilingualism within the programme.

Total population sampling was employed to involve the 40 students, who also constituted the accessible population, with informed consent. They completed a well-piloted 5-point Likert scale questionnaire on beliefs regarding multilingualism in English learning (Appendix). The questionnaire items were adapted from Sundqvist et al.'s (2021) work and included several constructs: openness towards other cultures (inclusiveness and attitudes towards cultures other than one's own), multilingualism in general (positive perceptions of the importance and usefulness of multilingualism in today's world), current language situation (recognition of the diverse languages used in their socio-educational setting), additional language learning (desire to learn a language other than their native languages), English learning (intention to learn English specifically), and beliefs about monolingualism (attitudes towards the dominant role of English in socioeducational settings). Moreover, 10 students, along with nine teachers and staff members involved in the IEP and recruited through voluntary sampling, were interviewed before the commencement of the programme. The interviews aimed at further understanding interviewees' opinions on multilingualism, particularly in the higher education setting through the medium of English instruction. Additionally, the interviews explored participants' expectations, if any, regarding how languages other than English could be embraced in higher education.

Following the analysis phase, the design and development phase involved the creation of a conceptual model for promoting multilingualism in the IEP. Drawing upon findings from the analysis, as well as theoretical frameworks and expert input, the research team developed a prototype of the multilingualism model. This prototype outlined key components and strategies aimed at fostering linguistic diversity and proficiency among students enrolled in the IEP. The design and development phase also included iterative testing and refinement of the model, based on feedback from stakeholders and experts in the field.

Finally, in the evaluation phase, the effectiveness of the multilingualism model was assessed, principally through qualitative measures. This involved implementing the model within the IEP and collecting data on its impact on students' perceived language learning outcomes, attitudes towards multilingualism, and overall satisfaction with the programme. Feedback from students, teachers, and staff members was solicited through focus group discussions and interviews to gauge the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the model.

Since these three stages involved both quantitative and qualitative data, they were analysed separately according to their nature. Specifically, quantitative data collected from the questionnaire underwent descriptive analysis to understand the levels of each construct. Cut-off scores were applied to interpret the data, categorised as low, moderate, and high, with ranges from 1 to 2.33, 2.34 to 3.67, and 3.67 to 5, respectively. On the other hand, qualitative data were thematically analysed. These included data collected from literature reviews, focus group discussions, and interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Development and Description of the Innovation

In the initial phase of the needs analysis, students demonstrated a high level of openness towards other cultures (M = 4.53) and multilingualism in general (M = 4.12), indicating their willingness to learn about cultures beyond their own and their recognition of the significance of multilingual abilities. In follow-up interviews, student participants further confirmed this perspective, expressing their desire to learn more about local cultures through the exchange offered by the IEP. However, while acknowledging the importance of multilingualism in interviews, along with a high level of recognition of the current language situation (M = 4.22) in China, Malaysia, and globally, students did not express a significant need or desire to learn an additional language other than English. This perception was supported by their high level of intention for English learning (M = 4.76) and low desire for additional language learning (M = 2.31). Nevertheless, students also demonstrated a low level of belief in monolingualism (M = 2.17), indicating that they recognised the importance of embracing different languages in various contexts for academic development, cultural understanding, and career prospects, despite the importance of English as a lingua franca.
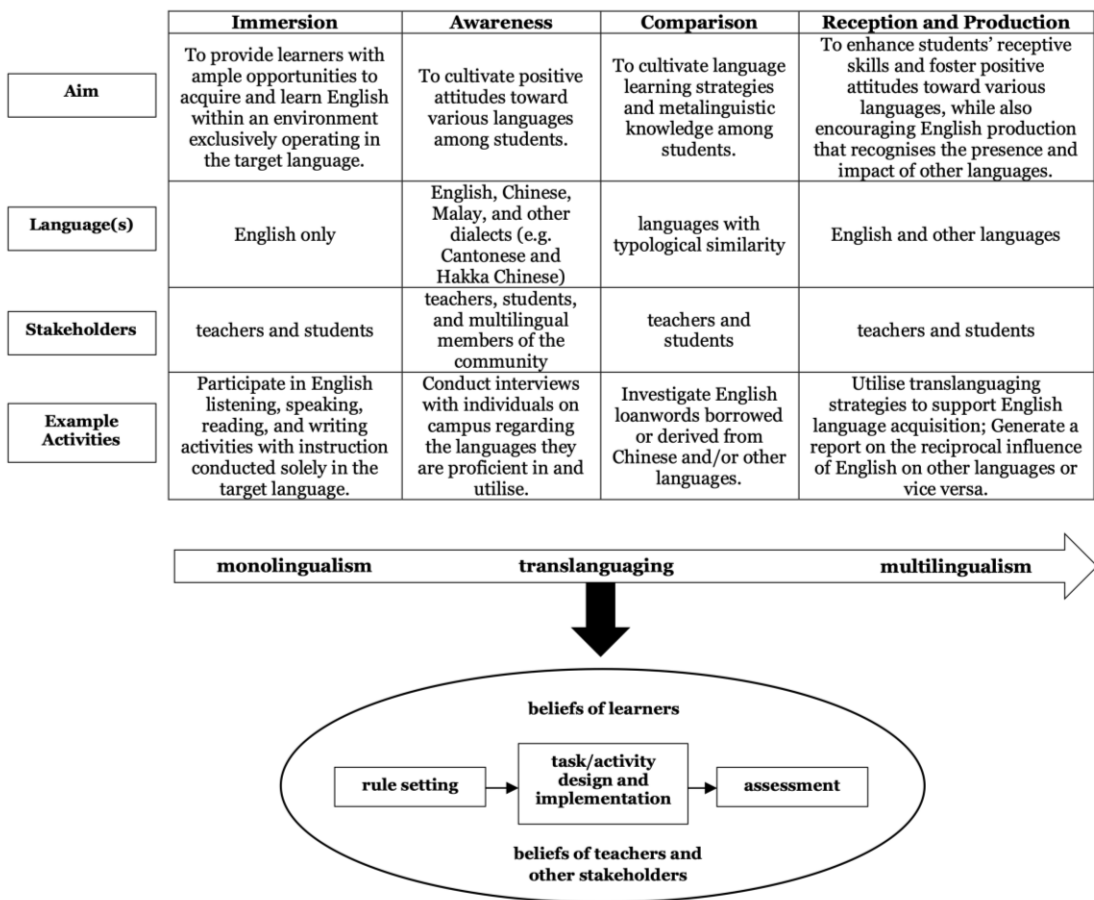
The teachers and programme staff who participated in the interviews, all of whom were bilingual (proficient in English and Malay), echoed the sentiment of embracing different languages in higher education, mirroring the views of some student participants. Students were bilingual (Mandarin and English) and even multilingual (Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Hakka Chinese, and French), albeit with varying degrees of proficiency, and emphasised the importance of developing proficiency in multiple languages through education. However, the participating teachers and staff expressed concerns about incorporating additional languages into an IEP, whose primary objective should be to enhance English proficiency. They worried that such inclusivity might compromise teaching effectiveness and the overall quality of the programme. Additionally, they acknowledged their lack of knowledge and instructional approaches to embracing multilingualism in teaching English. These challenges, coupled with their identified needs, underscored the necessity for a comprehensive model or framework that could facilitate the organisation of multilingual IEPs.

The insights garnered from the needs analysis were considered alongside pertinent issues identified in the literature, such as the advantages of incorporating additional languages alongside the target language (Wang, 2022); circumstances warranting the use of supplementary languages (Özkanal & Yüksel, 2023); the concept of translanguaging, wherein multilingual individuals use their full linguistic repertoire to communicate and understand messages (Paulsrud et al., 2021); comparative analyses of language typologies (Salokhiddinov & Rabimov, 2022); and stakeholders' awareness and perspectives (Tanner & Balıkçı, 2022). These findings had a profound influence on the development of the multilingualism model for IEPs.

The synthesis of the aforementioned findings led to the model tested in the study, depicted in Figure 1. This model primarily comprises four stages of instruction: immersion, awareness, comparison, and reception and production. These stages are underpinned by a transition from monolingualism to translanguaging, and ultimately to multilingualism. In the immersion phase, the model places a premium on immersing students in an English-exclusive environment, aligning with the overarching objective of fostering English proficiency within IEPs (Litzenberg, 2023; Noguchi, 2019; Taib et al., 2021). This phase entails complete and formal immersion, wherein interactions occur predominantly among students and instructors engaged in the IEPs. In this phase, the model adopts a traditional, monolingual approach commonly observed in IEPs, which

typically emphasise monolingualism (Jan et al., 2020; Litzenberg, 2023), as noted earlier. Consequently, activities facilitating target language immersion remain consistent with conventional practices. These activities aim to foster comprehensive language development and focus particularly on the macro skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Figure 1. *A Model of Multilingualism for IEPs*

	Immersion	Awareness	Comparison	Reception and Production
Aim	To provide learners with ample opportunities to acquire and learn English within an environment exclusively operating in the target language.	To cultivate positive attitudes toward various languages among students.	To cultivate language learning strategies and metalinguistic knowledge among students.	To enhance students' receptive skills and foster positive attitudes toward various languages, while also encouraging English production that recognises the presence and impact of other languages.
Language(s)	English only	English, Chinese, Malay, and other dialects (e.g. Cantonese and Hakka Chinese)	languages with typological similarity	English and other languages
Stakeholders	teachers and students	teachers, students, and multilingual members of the community	teachers and students	teachers and students
Example Activities	Participate in English listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities with instruction conducted solely in the target language.	Conduct interviews with individuals on campus regarding the languages they are proficient in and utilise.	Investigate English loanwords borrowed or derived from Chinese and/or other languages.	Utilise translanguaging strategies to support English language acquisition; Generate a report on the reciprocal influence of English on other languages or vice versa.

monolingualism → translanguaging → multilingualism

beliefs of learners

rule setting → task/activity design and implementation → assessment

beliefs of teachers and other stakeholders

While the model does not prescribe specific activities, it underscores instruction through the target language (Rethinasamy et al., 2021). Therefore, when implementing the model in the studied IEP, specific activities were designed to align with this principle. Interactive speaking tasks such as debates, role plays, and discussions were incorporated to promote oral fluency and communication skills. Reading comprehension activities involved authentic texts related to students' interests and academic disciplines, encouraging engagement and comprehension. Writing tasks focused on various genres, including essays, reports, and summaries, to develop writing proficiency and genre awareness. Additionally, listening exercises utilised a range of audio materials, such as podcasts, interviews, and lectures to enhance listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Throughout these activities, English was the primary medium of instruction and communication, immersing students in an environment conducive to language learning and skill development.

The second phase of the model aims to cultivate students' awareness of multilingualism. This phase serves as an introduction to the concept, focusing on fostering recognition and appreciation of linguistic diversity rather than immediate multilingual development. The rationale behind this approach is rooted in the belief that positive attitudes towards multilingualism, particularly within educational contexts, can foster a supportive

environment and lay the groundwork for multilingualism consciousness conducive to language learning and intercultural understanding (Shah & Latif, 2021; Török & Jessner, 2017).

While the second awareness-raising stage has already embraced multilingualism to some extent, the model advocates for the incorporation of various languages other than English within IEPs and the broader socio-educational setting surrounding them. This aligns with Mushi's (2021) and Omidire's (2019) general suggestion that acknowledges the broader social perspective on the issue of multilingualism in education. When implementing this model in our context, students brought various languages into the classroom, including their first language, Mandarin Chinese, as well as dialects such as Cantonese and Hakka Chinese. Additionally, being situated in Malaysia, a multilingual society, students had exposure to different languages, not only in the classroom but also within the campus environment. Although English remained the predominant language of instruction in the classroom, students occasionally encountered Malay spoken by classroom teachers or native Malay speakers for simple purposes such as greetings. Moreover, being located within a university setting, students regularly interacted with multilingual members of the university community while studying or socialising on campus, although this exposure to multiple languages occurred inadvertently.

It is important to note that this stage of the model does not necessitate the active use or formal learning of specific languages other than English but rather focuses on developing students' initial awareness of multilingualism in socio-educational contexts. As such, an example activity outlined in the model involves students interviewing members of the university community about the languages used in the local context or broader society, which was also an activity organised during the implementation of the studied IEP. By fostering an appreciation for linguistic diversity and promoting an understanding of the role of language in shaping social interactions and identities, the programme equips students with the ability to navigate multilingual environments and engage effectively with a range of linguistic resources (Mishra, 2014; Nyamayedenga, 2022). Moreover, by integrating multilingual awareness activities into the curriculum, educators can create a more inclusive learning environment that validates students' linguistic backgrounds and promotes cultural exchange. This not only enhances students' language learning experiences but also contributes to the development of intercultural competence and global citizenship (Sebouai, 2022; Stein-Smith, 2021).

This emphasis on an awareness of multilingualism lays the groundwork for more comprehensive multilingual development in subsequent phases of the model. Specifically, the third phase, language comparison, is guided by the belief that students engaged in IEPs should cultivate multilingual abilities, albeit with the primary learning objective still focused on the development of English proficiency. To realise this aim, this phase and its associated learning activities are rooted in the concept of translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that acknowledges and leverages students' multilingual repertoires to support learning and communication across languages (Paulsrud et al., 2021). This approach encourages students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, including their native languages and other languages in which they may be proficient, to make meaning and negotiate understanding (Rabbidge, 2019).

In the context of IEPs, translanguaging recognises that students bring diverse linguistic backgrounds and competencies to the learning environment and aims to leverage these resources to enhance language learning outcomes (Tamami, 2022). Given the cognitive demands associated with learning English in an environment that may differ significantly from their previous educational experiences (Chen & Luria, 2022), the objective of this stage, underpinned by translanguaging, is to cultivate students' language learning strategies and metalinguistic knowledge. Consequently, English, as the primary language of instruction, can be juxtaposed with other languages brought into the classroom, potentially revealing typological similarities. This facilitates negotiation and interaction between classroom teachers and students and enriches the learning process.

An example activity outlined in the model and implemented in our class involves exploring English loanwords borrowed from other languages, such as Chinese and Malay. This activity aims to maintain a focus on English language proficiency while fostering multilingual development. Beyond this example, additional activities can be created in which students may utilise their native languages and other languages in which they are proficient alongside English during language learning. These may include code-switching between languages, collaborative tasks that necessitate the integration of various linguistic resources, and reflective tasks that prompt students to compare and contrast language structures across different languages. While acknowledging the ongoing need for English language proficiency in educational contexts, students can enhance their language skills across multiple languages, develop greater linguistic flexibility, and deepen their intercultural understanding and communicative competence.

In its final stage, the model encourages both language reception and production—the ultimate aspects of multilingual development expected to occur in classrooms (Jin, 2020)—with a focus on enhancing students' receptive skills in various languages while nurturing positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity. Additionally, it invites English production themed as different languages, allowing students to engage with English in a context that reflects language diversity, ultimately equipping them with multilingualism. Notably different from the previous awareness-raising and comparison stages, the last stage features a true embrace of different languages existing in an IEP. For instance, in our own context, students had the opportunity to acquire basic Malay from their classroom teachers, particularly classroom Malay utilised for greetings, task instructions, and classroom routines. Moreover, this stage, also rooted in translanguaging, advocates for the use and exchange of other languages to support English learning. In our setting, students were permitted to use Chinese to translate complex terms and sentences, memorise vocabulary words, request clarification when encountering difficulties with English comprehension, and seek assistance when feeling perplexed. Additionally, they were tasked with composing an English report addressing the influence of English on other languages and vice versa, requiring them to employ various languages to provide comprehensive examples.

The primary aim of an IEP is to enhance English language proficiency. Therefore, the ultimate outcome of such programmes may vary from the conventional understanding of multilingualism which suggests complete multilingual fluency (Sarsembayeva et al., 2021). Instead, the emphasis is placed on creating an environment where students can effectively navigate linguistic diversity while focusing on English language acquisition (Mishra, 2014; Nyamayedenga, 2022). This nuanced approach acknowledges the importance of multilingualism within the broader educational context while aligning with the central objective of IEPs, which is to equip learners with the linguistic skills necessary for academic and professional success in an English-speaking environment.

This model stands out from conventional IEPs in two significant ways. Firstly, it actively engages various stakeholders beyond just teachers and students, to enrich the linguistic diversity within the programme. Given Malaysia's linguistic diversity, this model capitalises on the multilingual individuals present on campus to introduce and celebrate a range of languages and dialects (Shah & Latif, 2021). Secondly, the incorporation of translanguaging, particularly in the context of a predominantly Chinese-speaking student body, is a distinctive aspect, acknowledging that students' native languages can serve as a bridge for learning (Hu, 2022).

As illustrated in the model, promoting positive beliefs regarding multilingualism within IEPs is expected to create a supportive learning environment (Shah & Latif, 2021; Török & Jessner, 2017). These beliefs, held by students, teachers, and other stakeholders, such as staff involved in IEPs, permeate through all stages of the multilingual model, facilitating the development of multilingualism. Given that other languages are embraced and even utilised within such IEPs, it is crucial to establish clear rules or guidelines, an essential consideration when incorporating additional languages in an English classroom (Özkanal & Yüksel, 2023; Wang, 2022). This ensures that students and other stakeholders, including classroom teachers and campus staff, feel comfortable employing languages other than English when necessary for task completion or engagement in

activities. As indicated above, this can involve understanding complex linguistic concepts, learning new vocabulary, or comprehending task requirements.

Considering the dilemma that arises when languages other than the target language are embraced in classrooms, the programmes should also be assessed to fully demonstrate multilingualism (Gottlieb, 2017). Formative assessment, in this case, can help resolve the dilemma. In the context of IEPs, formative assessment considers limited English proficiency and can be conducted in languages familiar to respondents, providing opportunities for reflection and feedback in a supportive manner (Franchis & Mohamad, 2023). Such assessments play a crucial role in gauging students' progress and understanding, while also fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment that values linguistic diversity.

Reflections From Implementation and Evaluation

Promoting multilingualism in the studied IEP significantly enhanced the language learning experience by embracing and celebrating linguistic diversity. Through the post-IEP interviews, students revealed a notable shift in their attitudes towards their native languages, expressing a newfound sense of pride and appreciation for their linguistic heritage. Concurrently, they reported tangible improvements in their English language proficiency, indicating the effectiveness of the multilingual approach. Furthermore, the inclusive nature of the IEP, which encouraged the exploration and recognition of various languages, fostered a sense of belonging and community among students, which they mentioned when commenting on this programme. This inclusive environment created a supportive atmosphere in which students felt valued for their linguistic backgrounds, leading to increased motivation and engagement in language learning activities (Shah & Latif, 2021; Török & Jessner, 2017).

In addition to the benefits of cultural appreciation and enhanced sense of belonging, students also noted the broader impact on their language development of embracing multilingualism. Students believed that by practising strategies such as translanguaging, they were able to deepen their understanding of language structures and patterns, resulting in improved metalinguistic awareness. This, in turn, facilitated a reciprocal relationship between English proficiency and other languages they knew, highlighting the interconnectedness of language skills (Jin, 2020; Paulsrud et al., 2021).

However, the implementation of these models was not without challenges. The foremost was the need for a paradigm shift in institutional support, a hurdle often experienced by classroom teachers, including ourselves. Innovating IEPs requires resource allocation, ongoing professional development, and collaborative initiatives (Litzenberg, 2023) in which faculty and staff must continuously refine their instructional approaches and engage in research to better understand the nuances of multilingualism in IEPs. In this case, the structures and support systems within the institution failed to keep pace with these innovative approaches and led to a gap between the vision of these models and their practical implementation—a scenario also documented in other contexts (Winkle & Algren, 2018). Particularly when designing activities that necessitated the use of resources beyond the prescribed textbooks, we faced challenges, in terms of securing adequate resources, garnering institutional buy-in, and maintaining a sustained commitment to the models. This was revealed in our continuous reflection journals and periodic interviews with other teachers.

Resistance to change, from students, educators, and programme leaders who were more accustomed to traditional methods, also posed challenges, requiring thoughtful strategies for fostering a culture of acceptance and adaptability. Due to the teacher-centred and focus-on-form IEP instruction students received in their home countries, during our daily interactions some openly expressed their preference for familiar teaching approaches to expedite their improvement in English proficiency (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). Simultaneously, teachers encountered difficulty balancing the incorporation of innovative models with the primary goal emphasised by programme leaders: enhancing English proficiency. Thus, some were hesitant to

incorporate these innovations, concerned that doing so might divert attention from the objective of improving English language skills, a live issue in Malaysia (Mohamad et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, these challenges have provided valuable opportunities, especially for professional growth, an essential factor in the continuous improvement of IEPs (Litzenberg, 2023). The process of innovating the IEP has encouraged a philosophy of self-reflection and adaptability among us teachers, instilling a profound appreciation for the intricate interplay of diverse issues within IEPs. As we continually document our experiences and insights about the IEP, we find ourselves becoming more adaptable and culturally sensitive educators. Also, periodic interviews with our fellows have evolved into collaborative opportunities for us to share best practices and learn from one another's successes and challenges, creating a sense of camaraderie and commitment to providing a transformative educational experience within our IEP.

Future Directions

Looking ahead to the future of IEPs in the present context and beyond, we must continue to challenge the limitations of monolingualism. While the model proposed in this paper has provided preliminary insights into how multilingualism can be embraced in IEPs—primarily through raising multilingual awareness, initiating multilingual comparisons, and encouraging multilingual reception and production—future endeavours should delve deeper into refining and implementing such approaches. From the lessons learned, we can see it is imperative to foster stronger alliances with key institutional stakeholders, in order to advocate for the long-term benefits of IEP innovations, which include not only enhanced language proficiency but also producing graduates who are culturally sensitive, adaptable, and globally competent. Furthermore, future pedagogical directions should place a heightened emphasis on professional development and training. Empowering educators with the necessary tools and skills to mount effective innovation in IEPs is paramount. Additionally, collaborative initiatives that bring together teachers, administrators, and students can serve as a platform for building consensus and promoting a shared vision for the future of IEPs. With a commitment to ongoing research and evaluation, we can refine and adapt IEPs, at least in our context, to meet the ever-evolving needs of an increasingly diverse world, ultimately positioning IEPs as trailblazers in transformative language education.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix

Construct	Item
Openness towards other cultures	1. It is rewarding to travel to other countries.
	2. It is important to be in touch with people from other cultures.
	3. Wanting to learn more languages comes with getting to know people from other cultures better.
	4. It is important to show interest in people's cultural background.
	5. It is important that students get to work with tasks/projects about other countries and cultures.
Multilingualism in general	6. Multilingualism is something positive.
	7. In today's world, it is important to be multilingual.
	8. Individuals who know several languages have a greater chance of success in the future.
	9. Individuals who know several languages come across as more intelligent than individuals who know only one language.
	10. Individuals who keep their home language alive have a better chance of success in the future.
Current language situation	11. In my home country, it is important that students with another home language than the offical language keep this language alive.
	12. In my home country, one's chances of getting a job increase if one is multilingual.
	13. If you learn English well, your chances of getting a job increase.
	14. If you learn several languages, your chances of getting a good job increase.
Additional language learning	15. When learning an additional language, one should as little as possible draw on background languages.
	16. When learning an additional language, the influence of background languages is mostly negative.
	17. In the process of learning an additional language, individuals should as often as possible be encouraged to use their background language(s).
	18. The more languages you know, the easier it is to learn yet another language.
English learning	19. Student motivation to learn English is enhanced if they are allowed to use their background language(s) in the learning process.
	20. Students learn English best if they are allowed to use their background language(s) in the learning process.
	21. As a teacher of English, it is important to be familiar with students' language background(s), i.e., the language(s) they know and use.
	22. When students cannot think of an English word or expression, one should encourage them to try to think in one of their background languages.

Beliefs about monoloingualism	23. Multilingual students should be offered regular school subjects in their mother tongue(s).
	24. By speaking their mother tongue(s) at school, multilingual students do not learn an additional language sufficiently.
	25. Multilingual students should be offered mother-tongue instruction at their schools.
	26. The most important cause of academic failure of multilingual students is their insufficient proficiency in the native language.