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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Impact of Learning Malay as a Second Language on Communication and Social Integration in Ban Iso Narathiwat Thailand

Indra Hadinata Rambe<sup>1</sup> ✉ Khairunnisah Nasution<sup>2</sup> and Devinna Riskiana Aritonang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>University Muhammadiyah of South Tapanuli, Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:** Indra Hadinata Rambe, **E-mail:** [indrahadinata04@gmail.com](mailto:indrahadinata04@gmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

This research explores the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. While the native language of the community is Thai, Malay is taught as an additional language due to its cultural and historical significance. The study adopts a qualitative approach, conducting interviews and surveys with community members, educators, and language experts. Participants' perspectives and experiences regarding their proficiency in Malay as a second language are examined to understand their motivations, challenges, and perceived benefits. Preliminary findings indicate that learning Malay facilitates improved communication with the Malay-speaking community and enhances cultural exchange. Additionally, it grants access to historical and religious texts written in Jawi script, strengthening their connection to their cultural heritage. The research focuses on the impact of learning Malay as a second language on social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. It aims to investigate how the learning of Malay influences interactions, mutual understanding, and social relationships in a diverse and dynamic community. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of bilingualism and its implications on other aspects of community life.

**KEYWORDS**

Malay Language, Multilingualism, Social and Cultural Impact, Ban Iso Narathiwat

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### 1. Introduction

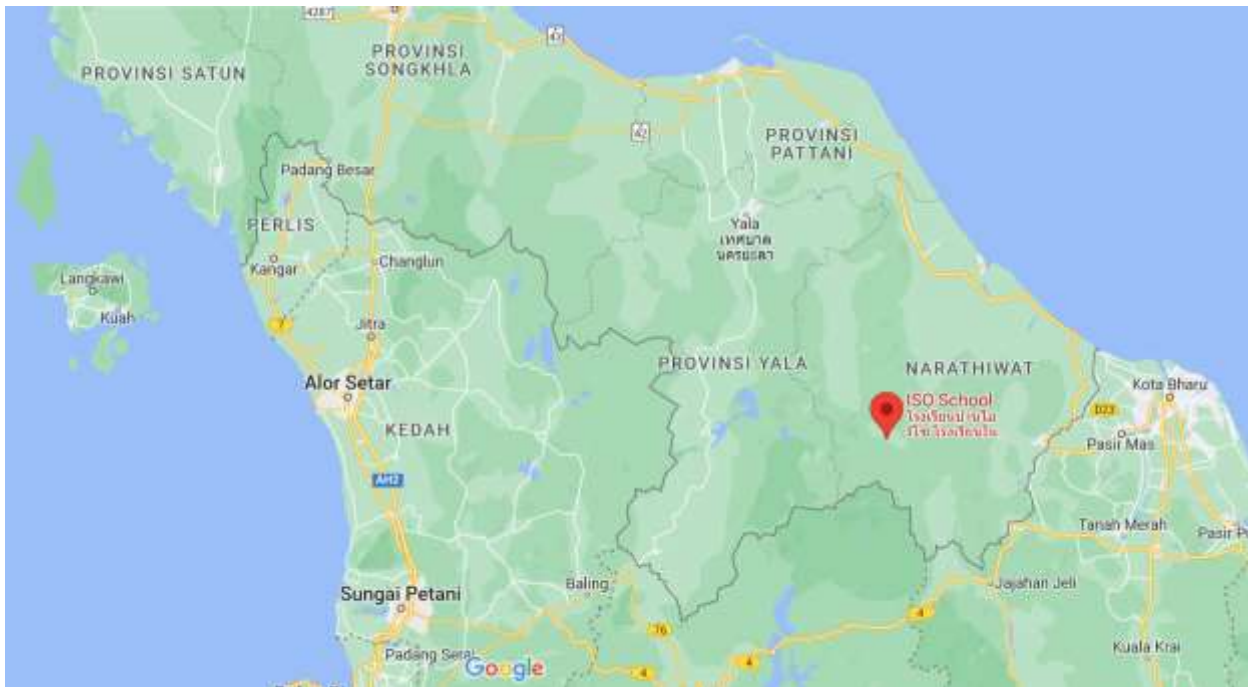
Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand, is a Muslim community rich in cultural and linguistic diversity. As a multilingual region, the Thai language is recognized as the primary language and the mother tongue for the majority of its residents (Ní Choisdealbha et al., 2023). However, as part of its history and cultural identity, the Jawi Malay language also plays a significant role in the daily life and traditions of this community. The Muslim-Thai society in Southern Thailand continues to use Malay (Jawi) as a means of communication within families and the general community (Muslim-thai 2022).

Ban Iso Narathiwat, situated in Narathiwat Province, Thailand, is an area rich in diverse history and culture. (Saldaña et al. 2017). The majority of the population in Ban Iso Narathiwat is a Muslim community, and this region possesses a unique characteristic due to its proximity to the border with Malaysia. Its geographical location and connections with neighboring countries make Ban Iso Narathiwat an area that enriches cultural diversity, languages, and traditions (Davani et al., 2023).

As part of Narathiwat Province, Ban Iso Narathiwat has faced challenges and undergone social changes, particularly within the context of the complex political situation in southern Thailand (Majewska et al., 2023). The prolonged conflict between the Thai government and separatist movements has impacted the lives of the people in this region, including the education and cultural sectors. In the face of these challenges, the community in Ban Iso Narathiwat has shown resilience and determination in preserving and conserving its cultural identity (Koga et al., n.d.). The Jawi Malay language and oral traditions have become crucial tools in

passing down stories and knowledge from generation to generation, and the community here regards them as integral components of their identity as Malay Muslims (Siriwardhana et al., 2023).

However, ongoing globalization and social changes have also impacted the community in Ban Iso Narathiwat (Efland and Collins, 2023). The use of Malay as the mother tongue has undergone changes and even declines due to the influence of popular culture and predominantly Thai-language mass media (Li, Wisniewski, and Crabbé, 2023). In this context, the learning of Malay as a second language has gained increased attention from the community and educational institutions (Sadeghi and Gerami-Seresht, 2023). Efforts to preserve Malay as a means of identity and cross-cultural communication have become increasingly important for the Muslim community in Ban Iso Narathiwat while still upholding the Thai language as the national language and a symbol of unity in Thailand (Hamdani, Blythe, and Barnes, 2022).



**Gambar 1. Geographical Location of Ban Iso Narathiwat Thailand (Google Maps, 2023)**

Jawi Malay, also known as Malay in Jawi script (Stärk, Kidd, and Frost 2023), Jawi Malay has become an inseparable part of the history and social life in Ban Iso Narathiwat. The Jawi script, an Arabic-based writing system used in the Malay language, has become a vital tool for conveying knowledge, religion, and cultural traditions among the Muslim community in this region (Shapiro and Leonard, 2023).

Although the Thai language remains the primary language and mother tongue for the residents of Ban Iso Narathiwat (Fox and Chang-Bacon 2023), the teaching of Malay as a second language has been introduced in several educational institutions (Valvoda, Cotterell, and Teufel 2023). This has raised questions about the impact of learning Malay on communication and social integration within this community.

This research aims to explore the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration among the Muslim community in Ban Iso Narathiwat. The significance of Malay as a form of cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and studied is highlighted, even though the Thai language remains the primary language and the language of daily communication. (Bos, Laura Egelhofer, and Lecheler 2023).

Through a qualitative approach, this research will encompass in-depth interviews with community members, educators, and language experts to understand their perspectives and experiences in learning Malay as a second language (Githinji et al., 2023).

The use of Malay as a second language among the Muslim community in Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand, highlights the importance of language in strengthening cultural identity and facilitating social integration in a multicultural society (Nguyen, Grant-pereira, and Rizkyana, 2023). The Malay language has become relevant due to its value in local history and culture (Feng, Cho, and Luk, 2023). In this context, the aim of this research is to uncover the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration within that community.

Furthermore, the formulated questions to be addressed can be divided into two as follows. (1) How does learning the Malay language affect communication among community members? (2) How does it strengthen social integration, overcome challenges, and emphasize the importance of preserving the Malay language as a cultural identity? Therefore, this research is expected to provide a deeper insight into the significance of preserving language in supporting social cohesion in Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. The outcomes of this study are anticipated to offer a more profound understanding of participants' motivations, challenges, and perceived benefits in adopting Malay as an additional language.

This research will serve as a window to understand the cultural and linguistic dynamics in Ban Iso Narathiwat within the local and regional context. Through collective efforts to understand and appreciate the cultural and linguistic richness in this region, it is hoped that the community can grow and flourish harmoniously, strengthening peace and social integration amidst the complexities of the modern world.

**2. Literature Review**

The literature review highlights the significance of the Malay Language (Bahasa Melayu) in preserving cultural and religious identity within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. Malay Language, particularly in Jawi script, has become an integral part of their daily life and cultural heritage. Although Thai remains the primary language, the introduction of the Malay Language as a second language has been initiated in various educational institutions. Previous research has revealed varying perceptions and challenges in learning this language, along with its benefits in strengthening cultural identity. (Waeyusoh and Yaakub 2023) This study aims to investigate the impact of learning the Malay Language on communication and social integration within this community, utilizing in-depth interviews and surveys as research methods. It is expected that this research will provide a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping the lives of a multi-ethnic society in Ban Iso Narathiwat.

**3. Methods**

This research employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and surveys to comprehend the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. The study involves a total of 20 participants, categorized into 13 community members, 5 educators, and 2 language experts, all selected based on defined criteria. Community member participants will represent diverse age groups and educational backgrounds to offer varied perspectives. Educators involved in teaching Malay as a second language are also interviewed to understand the implementation of the language learning program and the challenges faced in an environment where Thai is predominantly used. Additionally, language experts or linguists contribute to providing deeper insights into the socio-linguistic and cultural impact of learning Malay in the context of Ban Iso Narathiwat society. By engaging participants from diverse fields, this research aims to yield a comprehensive understanding of the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand.

**4. Results and Discussion**

The results of in-depth interviews with several participants revealed diverse perspectives on the impact of learning Malay as a second language in Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand. Some participants expressed that this language learning initiative has provided significant benefits in enhancing cross-cultural communication skills. They feel more confident in interacting with fellow community members who speak Malay and also feel a closer connection to their culture (Roberts, Adams, and Kuch, 2023). Furthermore, several participants also stated that the Malay language has helped them understand oral traditions and the cultural values embedded within them.

Here is an example table. 1, which contains several words and phrases in Malay in Jawi script and their translation in English :

No	Script Jawi	Malay Language	Translation in English
1	مسجد	Masjid	Mosque
2	سلام	Salam	Greetings
3	ناس	Nass	People
4	توق	Tawakkal	Reliance/Faith
5	كتب	Kitaab	Book
6	سورة	Surah	Chapter (of the Quran)
7	رمضان	Ramadan	Ramadan
8	جمعة	Jumaat	Friday (Jumu'ah)
9	اسلام	Islam	Islam
10	جنازة	Janazah	Funeral

**Tabel. 1**

The table above shows several examples of words and phrases in Jawi script that are used in everyday Malay language among the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat, along with their translations in English. This highlights the significance of the Malay language and Jawi script as integral parts of the cultural heritage and religious identity of this community (Van Noordwijk et al., 2023).

However, there were also participants who conveyed challenges in the process of learning Malay. Some of them faced difficulties in understanding the grammar and vocabulary that differed from Thai, their daily language. Some participants also expressed concerns about the lack of resources and support in this second language learning program.

Diverse perceptions also emerged regarding the importance of preserving Malay as a part of cultural identity. Some participants viewed Malay as a crucial tool for safeguarding cultural heritage and ancestral values, while others preferred to prioritize Thai as the national language and a means for national integration.

Overall, the outcomes of these interviews demonstrate that learning Malay as a second language has a significant impact within the context of communication and social integration in Ban Iso Narathiwat. The diverse perceptions and experiences of the participants highlight the complexity of understanding the role of language in the life of a multicultural community.

The results of this research have revealed several intriguing findings regarding the impact of learning Malay as a second language on communication and social integration in Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand.

**Impact Positif:**

- 1) **Enhanced Cross-Cultural Communication:** Research participants disclosed that learning Malay has enhanced their ability to communicate with the Malay-speaking community in the surrounding region. Acquiring proficiency in a second language facilitates smoother interactions, increases cross-cultural understanding, and strengthens social relationships.
- 2) **Cultural Identity Strength:** The Malay language and its associated oral traditions are regarded as crucial elements of the cultural identity of the Muslim community in Ban Iso Narathiwat. Language learning enhances their awareness of cultural heritage, and the use of the Jawi script in Malay serves as a vital tool to preserve and strengthen their connection to ancestral traditions.

**Impact Challenge :**

- 1) **Differences in Language Structure:** Research participants faced challenges in learning Malay due to differences in language structure compared to Thai. Understanding grammar, vocabulary, and the usage of Jawi script posed difficulties for those who have Thai as their mother tongue.
- 2) **Language Competition:** Despite the acknowledged importance of the Malay language, Thai remains the dominant language in everyday life. The role of Thai as the primary language and national language influences the linguistic environment, raising concerns about the potential decline in the use of the Malay language in the future.

**Impact Education:**

- 1) **Enhancing Inclusive Education Quality:** Learning Malay as a second language demonstrates a commitment to bolster inclusive education in Ban Iso Narathiwat. By affording students the opportunity to learn a language that reflects their culture, education becomes more inclusive and provides a relevant learning experience for the local community.
- 2) **Understanding Culture and Oral Traditions:** Malay language opens doors for students to comprehend and appreciate oral traditions and folktales that have been passed down through generations. This understanding contributes to the enrichment and preservation of culture.
- 3) **Access to Information and Knowledge:** By mastering the Malay language, students gain broader access to informational and knowledge resources available in that language. This can help enhance the quality of their education and knowledge.

Overall, the findings of this research affirm that learning Malay as a second language yields positive impacts in strengthening communication and social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat. With an enhanced understanding of culture and religious identity through the Malay language, this community becomes more connected and empathetic, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious social framework. This study underscores the importance of preserving Malay (Jawi) as a part of the cultural and historical heritage of the Ban Iso Narathiwat community.

The research findings affirm that learning Malay as a second language holds significant positive impacts on cross-cultural communication and the reinforcement of cultural identity in Ban Iso Narathiwat. Efforts to preserve and promote the Malay

language as a cultural heritage should be continuously encouraged while still upholding the Thai language as the primary language and a tool for national integration. The study also underscores the need for further support and efforts to enhance teaching methods and facilitate language exchange between the Thai and Malay-speaking communities.

Learning Malay has helped strengthen social integration within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat through several avenues. The participants noted that being able to speak Malay has made it easier for them to engage in community activities and events involving Malay-speaking members. This creates opportunities for deeper interactions, forging new friendships, and expanding cross-cultural social networks. By being able to communicate in a language understood by all community members, a stronger sense of connection and deeper understanding is fostered among different ethnic groups.

Learning Malay has also assisted participants in overcoming challenges in the adaptation process. While some participants initially faced difficulties in understanding the differences in language structure and vocabulary of Malay, they found solutions through their commitment to continuous learning and support from fellow community members and educators. In the face of these challenges, motivation to learn Malay and the awareness of its benefits in overcoming communication barriers and enhancing social integration became key factors in overcoming these obstacles.

This research highlights the importance of preserving the Malay language as an integral part of the cultural identity of the Muslim community in Ban Iso Narathiwat. The research participants describe how the Malay language plays a vital role in safeguarding their cultural heritage and traditions. Furthermore, the use of the Jawi script within the Malay language has provided access to historical and religious texts that enrich their understanding of religious and cultural identity. Therefore, preserving the Malay language is regarded as a crucial step in safeguarding cultural richness and fostering solidarity within the community.

Overall, learning the Malay language not only influences communication and social integration but also brings about positive impacts in overcoming challenges and enriching cultural identity within the Muslim community of Ban Iso Narathiwat. Efforts to preserve the Malay language as part of the cultural heritage become essential in maintaining diversity and strengthening social relationships within a multicultural environment.

In addressing language challenges and social integration, the second language education programs in Ban Iso Narathiwat need to be well-designed to provide support and assistance to participants. Further involvement from the government, educational institutions, and the local community in supporting the learning of Malay as a second language will reinforce the role of this language in connecting the community and strengthening cultural identity.

While this research has provided significant insights, further studies are needed to understand the long-term effects of this second language learning and how it influences various aspects of community life in Ban Iso Narathiwat. With a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, cultural identity, and social integration, appropriate strategic measures can be taken to promote diversity and harmony within this multicultural community.

## 5. Conclusion

The research sheds light on the positive impact of learning Malay as a second language in Ban Iso Narathiwat, Thailand, by enhancing cross-cultural communication and reinforcing the cultural identity of the Muslim community. Despite challenges arising from linguistic differences and competition with Thai, continued support from the government, educational institutions, and the local community is vital to sustain these language programs. The goal is to leverage linguistic diversity as a strength that fosters social bonds and mutual understanding. This study also contributes to broader insights into second language learning's significance in multicultural contexts. The findings aim to shape language education policies, ensuring accessible and quality Malay instruction, particularly benefiting the younger generation. Additionally, the research's outcomes can guide future studies on multilingualism's role in communities, advancing linguistic and cultural anthropology. Collaborative efforts between academia, government, and the community can further promote Malay, nurturing a harmonious environment that values linguistic diversity and mutual respect. Ultimately, the research's impact extends to global language preservation and cultural identity, fostering inclusivity and appreciation for diversity.

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