

Breaking the Monolingual Barrier: A Conceptual Framework for Leveraging Pedagogical Translanguaging to Enhance the Performance of Low-Achieving MUET Candidates in Malaysia

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the potential of pedagogical translanguaging as a strategic intervention for Malaysian students exhibiting low performance in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Despite years of formal English education, many students remain stuck in the "Basic User" category (Bands 1 to 2.5), primarily due to cognitive overload and language anxiety in English-only environments. By synthesizing the core constructs of translanguaging—Inclusivity, Teacher Support, and Perceived Effectiveness—this paper proposes a framework where the students' first language (L1) acts as a scaffold rather than a crutch. The paper argues that a flexible linguistic approach can lower the affective filter, improve comprehension of complex MUET components (particularly Reading and Writing), and ultimately foster greater student engagement.

Keywords: Pedagogical Translanguaging; MUET, Low-Achieving Learners, Scaffolding Strategy, Affective Filter, English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

Introduction

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) serves as a critical gateway for tertiary education and employment in Malaysia. However, a significant cohort of students consistently performs at low levels, struggling to cross the threshold of functional proficiency. Traditional "English-only" immersion models in MUET preparatory courses often marginalize these learners, as the gap between their current proficiency and the required academic standards is too wide to bridge through L2 alone (Mohammad Sauffi et al., 2026).

Pedagogical translanguaging offers a paradigm shift. It recognizes that multilingual learners do not have separate "language compartments" but a single integrated linguistic system (Rajendram, 2023). For a low-performing MUET student, using Malay or Mandarin to clarify a complex "True/False/Not Given" reading strategy is not a sign of failure; it is a high-level cognitive process that facilitates deep learning.

The central problem lies in the persistent "monolingual bias" within MUET preparatory programs, which creates an insurmountable cognitive barrier for students in the lower proficiency bands (Band 1 to 2.5). While the examination strictly assesses English output, the rigid enforcement of English-only instruction during the learning process often leads to "learned helplessness," where students disengage due to an inability to grasp high-level meta-cognitive strategies in a language they have yet to master (Nasir et al., 2025). This misalignment between instructional delivery and the students' actual linguistic capabilities results in stagnant test scores and heightened language anxiety, necessitating a framework that strategically utilizes the students' existing linguistic resources to scaffold their journey toward English competency.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to propose a robust, seven-construct framework that integrates pedagogical translanguaging into MUET preparation for low-performing students. By shifting the instructional focus from a rigid monolingual requirement to a fluid, strategic use of the students' entire linguistic repertoire, this paper seeks to provide educators with a roadmap for enhancing student engagement and cognitive clarity. Ultimately, this framework serves to demonstrate that leveraging a student's first language is not an academic regression, but a sophisticated scaffolding technique that accelerates the acquisition of high-level English proficiency required for MUET success.

The Seven Constructs in the MUET Context

The literature review of this paper is structured into seven distinct parts, each corresponding to a critical construct within the pedagogical translanguaging framework. These sections systematically explore the socio-emotional, cognitive, and instructional dimensions of language learning, ranging from the foundational role of classroom inclusivity to the final behavioral outcome of student engagement. By synthesizing existing research through these seven lenses, the review provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding how low-performing MUET candidates can transition from linguistic frustration to academic proficiency through a strategic, multilingual approach.

Inclusivity

For low-performing students, English is often associated with failure. Inclusivity in translanguaging validates the student's identity. When a MUET instructor acknowledges the student's L1, it reduces the "Affective Filter," making the student more open to learning the target language.

The construct of Inclusivity serves as the psychological foundation for low-performing MUET candidates, who often view the English language as a symbol of academic exclusion or personal inadequacy. By shifting from a restrictive "English-only" environment to a translanguaging-oriented one, educators can transform the classroom into a space where the student's primary linguistic identity is viewed as a bridge rather than a barrier.

First, pedagogical translanguaging serves to lower the Affective Filter, a psychological barrier consisting of high anxiety and low self-confidence that often plagues Band 1 and 2 students. When a MUET instructor acknowledges and permits the use of the student's native language (L1) during complex instruction, the perceived threat of the English-only environment is neutralized. This validation of the student's linguistic background creates a "safe space,"

allowing learners to take the necessary risks in practicing their L2 without the paralyzing fear of being silenced for their lack of proficiency (Akmar Muhamad Nasir & Ab Rashid, 2026a). . Second, this approach promotes cognitive equity by ensuring equal access to high-level content. Low-performing students often possess the intellectual capacity to understand MUET-level themes—such as global warming or economic trends—but lack the L2 vocabulary to process them. Translanguaging allows students to use their L1 as a "placeholder" for complex thoughts (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). By discussing or brainstorming these global topics in their native tongue first, students are not marginalized by their current English limitations; instead, they are included in the academic discourse, ensuring that their critical thinking skills are developed simultaneously with their language skills.

Third, it strengthens cultural and linguistic validation, which prevents the sense of alienation common in international or EMI settings. For a MUET student, being told to "forget" their native language in the classroom can lead to a disconnect between their home identity and their academic identity. Pedagogical translanguaging signals that the student's L1 is a legitimate scholarly resource (Akmar Muhamad Nasir & Ab Rashid, 2026b). This inclusive stance fosters a positive attitude toward the English language itself, as students no longer see L2 acquisition as a "subtractive" process that replaces their identity, but as an "additive" process that expands their communicative repertoire.

Table 1

Summary of Inclusivity Benefits

Feature	Pedagogical Impact	Outcome for MUET Students
Reduced Affective Filter	Lowers anxiety and builds psychological safety.	Increased willingness to participate in Speaking and Writing tasks.
Cognitive Equity	Facilitates access to complex MUET themes via L1.	Prevents academic marginalization and promotes critical thinking.
Linguistic Validation	Recognizes the L1 as a valuable academic resource.	Fosters a positive attitude toward L2 and reduces identity alienation.

Teacher Support

Teachers must act as bilingual facilitators. For the **Writing (Task 2)** component, a teacher might allow students to brainstorm ideas in their L1 to ensure depth of thought before providing the English academic vocabulary needed to translate those thoughts into an essay. Teacher support is the primary catalyst for transforming translanguaging from a random occurrence into a structured pedagogical strategy. For low-achieving MUET students, the instructor's role shifts from a "linguistic enforcer" to a "multilingual facilitator" who guides the transition from L1 thought to L2 expression.

First, pedagogical translanguaging allows teachers to provide Strategic Scaffolding for Complex Exam Components. In the MUET Writing Task 2 (Extended Essay), students often struggle with generating high-level arguments due to limited English vocabulary. A supportive teacher allows students to brainstorm these ideas in their native language first. This ensures that the depth of the argument is not sacrificed. Once the conceptual logic is sound, the teacher then provides the specific English "linking words" and "academic register" needed to translate those ideas into a formal essay (Rahman et al., 2023).

Rahman, Islam, Karim, Singh, & Hu, (2025). Ideologies of teachers and students towards meso-level English-medium instruction policy and translanguaging in the STEM classroom at a Malaysian university. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 16(2), 825-848.

Rajendram, (2023). Implementing a collaborative translanguaging pedagogy in an elementary ESL classroom in Malaysia through teacher–researcher collaboration. *Re) imagining Translanguaging Pedagogies through Teacher-Researcher Collaboration*, 41-69.

Ravinthar, & Zainal (2024). Multilingual Pedagogical Practices in Dialogic Teaching in Malaysian ESL Classrooms.

Second, it enables Immediate Clarification of Meta-cognitive Strategies. The MUET Reading paper (Part 1–7) requires advanced strategies like "scanning," "skimming," and "identifying the writer's tone." Low-performing students often find these instructions abstract when delivered solely in English. A teacher supporting translanguaging can use the L1 to provide "meta-talk"—explaining how to find an answer. This clear instructional delivery ensures that the student understands the strategy before attempting the language task, preventing the frustration that leads to disengagement (Rajendram, 2023).

Third, teacher support fosters Positive Error Correction and Risk-Taking. In traditional MUET speaking drills, low-performing students often remain silent for fear of making grammatical mistakes. A teacher who supports translanguaging allows "interlanguage" or code-switching during practice (Ravinthar & Zainal, 2024). By letting the student complete a sentence in their L1 when they get stuck, the teacher maintains the flow of communication. This support builds the student's confidence, eventually allowing the teacher to provide the missing English terms and gradually increase the "English-only" requirement as the student's Band level improves.

Table 2

Summary of Teacher Support Benefits

Strategic Point	Pedagogical Action	Outcome for MUET Students
Brainstorming Scaffold	Facilitates L1 ideation before L2 drafting.	Enhances the depth and quality of Writing Task 2.
Meta-talk Delivery	Uses L1 to explain complex Reading strategies.	Improves accuracy in identifying correct exam answers.
Confidence Building	Allows code-switching during Speaking practice.	Increases oral fluency and reduces communication breakdown.

Peer Support

Low-performing students often feel intimidated by the instructor. Translanguaging allows for "Collaborative Scaffolding," where peers explain MUET grammar rules or vocabulary to each other in a shared language, creating a horizontal support network.

In the MUET classroom, peer interaction is often a source of anxiety for Band 1 and 2 students who fear being judged by more fluent classmates. Translanguaging transforms peer dynamics by creating a collaborative linguistic "safety net."

BIE, SIM, & NIKITINA, (2021). Peer interaction in the L2 classroom: a study among Malaysian ESL learners. *Issues in Language Studies*, 10(1), 131-150.

Nguyen, (2020). Engagement with language: A potential construct in peer interaction research. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 35(6).

Soh, Tam, & Nikitina (2024). Peer Interaction in the L2 Classroom: A Study among Malaysian ESL Learners.

First, it facilitates Collaborative Scaffolding in Group Speaking Tasks. In MUET Speaking Part 2 (Group Discussion), low-performing students often drop out of the conversation when they lack a specific English word (Bie et al., 2021). By allowing brief L1 "whisper-ins" or "side-talk" with a peer, the student can retrieve the necessary concept and then attempt to present it in English. This peer-led support ensures that the discussion continues, allowing the student to practice the structure of a turn-taking discussion even if their vocabulary is still developing.

Second, it allows for Peer-Mediated Clarification of Instructions. Low-performers often struggle to follow the complex instructions of the MUET Listening paper (e.g., matching headings or completing flowcharts). Translanguaging permits a more proficient peer to explain the task in their shared L1 (Nguyen, 2020). This peer mediation ensures that the student is actually testing their listening ability rather than failing simply because they didn't understand the instructions of the test itself.

Third, it builds Social Comfort and Risk-Taking. When students are allowed to use their full linguistic repertoire with peers, the classroom hierarchy based on English fluency is leveled. This social comfort encourages students to experiment with more complex English sentences

(Soh et al., 2024), knowing that if they fail, their peers can help "translate" the intent. This collective support system is crucial for building the stamina needed for the 80-minute MUET Reading paper.

Table 3

Summary of Peer Support Benefits

Strategic Point	Pedagogical Action	Outcome for MUET Students
Collaborative Ideation	Using L1 to brainstorm discussion points.	Sustained participation in Speaking Part 2.
Instructional Mediation	Peers clarifying exam tasks in a shared L1.	Reduced "task-failure" due to misunderstanding instructions.
Linguistic Leveling	Creating a non-judgmental, multilingual space.	Increased frequency of L2 practice attempts.

Perceived Effectiveness

If students see that using their L1 helps them finally understand the "Linear and Non-Linear" texts in the **Reading** paper, their self-efficacy increases. This perception of success is vital for students who have historically struggled with English.

The "Effectiveness" of a pedagogy is determined by the student's perception of their own progress. For those who have historically failed English, seeing immediate results is vital for maintaining motivation.

First, translanguaging Enhances Comprehension of Technical Jargon. MUET texts often deal with specialized topics like technology, ecology, or sociology. Translanguaging allows students to map these new English technical terms onto their existing L1 knowledge base (Hao, 2024). This "mapping" makes the learning feel effective because the student is not just memorizing sounds; they are connecting new English labels to concepts they already understand, resulting in better retention for the Reading and Listening papers.

Second, it provides Clarity in Grammar and Syntax Acquisition. For many low-performers, English grammar rules (like tense consistency or subject-verb agreement) feel arbitrary. When translanguaging is used to compare English structures with L1 structures (Contrastive Analysis), students gain a "lightbulb moment." This perceived clarity makes the lesson feel highly effective, as the student finally understands the why behind the rule, leading to fewer errors in the Writing and Speaking components (Noh et al., 2024).

Third, it increases Self-Efficacy through Successful Communication. When a student successfully conveys a complex point by using a mix of L1 and L2, they experience a sense of achievement. This perceived effectiveness shifts the student's mindset from "I cannot speak English" to "I can communicate my ideas." This boost in self-efficacy is a powerful predictor

of eventual MUET Band improvement, as it encourages the student to persist with more difficult English-only tasks (Zaki & Sulaiman, 2024).

Table 4

Summary of Perceived Effectiveness Benefits

Strategic Point	Pedagogical Action	Outcome for MUET Students
Concept Mapping	Links English technical terms to L1 concepts.	Faster vocabulary acquisition and better reading comprehension.
Contrastive Analysis	Compares L1 and L2 grammatical structures.	Greater clarity in English syntax and fewer writing errors.
Achievement Loop	Facilitates successful (though hybrid) communication.	Increased motivation to tackle harder English tasks.

Skill Development

Translanguaging specifically targets the "Interdependence Hypothesis." By using the L1 to grasp the *logic* of an argument, students can better focus on the *linguistic* mechanics of English, leading to improved scores in the MUET speaking and writing components.

The ultimate goal of MUET preparation is the development of the four core skills. Translanguaging acts as a "booster" that helps low-performers move from basic recognition to active production.

First, it supports Interdependent Reading Comprehension. According to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, skills in the L1 can be transferred to the L2 (Memari, 2024). For MUET Reading, students can use their L1 to summarize a paragraph's main idea before identifying the English "keywords." This process proves to the student that they possess the comprehension skills; they just need to map them onto English text. This builds a stronger foundation for tackling Part 5 and 6 of the Reading paper (Complex Articles).

Second, it enables Cognitive Processing in Writing. For MUET Writing Task 2, low-performers often produce short, repetitive essays. By using translanguaging to "pre-write" an outline in their L1, students can organize their thoughts logically (Introduction, Body Paragraphs, Conclusion). Once the logic is secure, they can focus their cognitive energy entirely on translating those thoughts into academic English, resulting in longer, more coherent essays that meet the requirements for higher Bands (Wong & Tian, 2025).

Third, it develops Strategic Competence in Speaking. Strategic competence is the ability to overcome communication gaps. Translanguaging teaches students how to use "circumlocution" (describing a word they don't know). If a student forgets the word "environment," the teacher can allow them to use the L1 term briefly to trigger the English synonym (Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022).. This practice trains the brain to keep communicating rather than giving up, which is a key skill assessed in the MUET Speaking criteria.

Table 5

Summary of Skill Development Benefits

Skill Area	Translanguaging Strategy	MUET Performance Impact
Reading	L1 summarization of English paragraphs.	Better identification of main ideas and "True/False" logic.
Writing	L1 outlining and logical structuring.	Improved essay coherence and extended development of ideas.
Speaking	L1-aided circumlocution and turn-taking.	Higher fluency scores and reduced "long pauses" during tasks.

Challenges (Moderating Variable)

The primary challenge in the MUET context is the risk of L1 over-reliance. Since the MUET exam itself is 100% English, the framework must include a "Strategic Fading" process where L1 support is gradually reduced as the student's Band level increases.

In any translanguaging framework, particularly one designed for high-stakes examinations like MUET, the presence of Challenges acts as a moderating variable. This means that while the support constructs (Inclusivity, Teacher Support, etc.) generally increase engagement, the presence of certain hurdles can dampen or "moderate" that positive relationship. For low-performing candidates, identifying and managing these challenges is essential to ensure that the L1 remains a scaffold rather than a permanent crutch.

First, the most significant risk is L1 Over-reliance and Fossilization. For Band 1 and 2 students, there is a natural temptation to remain within the comfort zone of their native language. If the translanguaging is not professionally managed by the instructor, students may fail to push themselves toward the "Target Language" (English). This can lead to fossilization, where the student's English proficiency plateaus because they rely on the L1 to bridge every gap rather than struggling to acquire the necessary L2 vocabulary. This challenge is particularly dangerous for the MUET Listening component, where students must process real-time English without the luxury of L1 translation (Ben Hammou et al., 2025).

Second, there is the hurdle of Cognitive Confusion and Code-Mixing. While translanguaging is a natural cognitive process, frequent and unstructured "ping-ponging" between languages can sometimes lead to mental fatigue or confusion, especially during the 80-minute MUET Reading paper. Students might accidentally use L1 syntax or "Manglish" structures in their Writing Task 2, which would lead to lower marks for "Language and Accuracy." The challenge here is to ensure that while the process of learning is multilingual, the product (the essay or the speech) remains strictly in academic English (Padchonga et al., 2025).

Third, the framework must address the Assessment-Instruction Gap. Since the MUET examination is conducted 100% in English, a classroom that relies too heavily on translanguaging right up until the exam date may leave students underprepared for the "monolingual shock" of the test hall. This is where the "Strategic Fading" model becomes vital. As the student progresses, the instructor must systematically reduce the amount of L1 used in instructions and brainstorming (Yusri et al., 2022). By the final weeks of the course, the classroom environment should mirror the exam conditions—shifting from a high-translanguaging "Learning Phase" to a low-translanguaging "Exam Simulation Phase."

Table 6
Summary of Challenges and Mitigation

Specific Challenge	Pedagogical Risk	Mitigation (Strategic Fading)
L1 Over-reliance	Stagnant L2 vocabulary growth and fossilization.	Set "English-only" milestones for specific tasks.
Cognitive Confusion	Interjecting L1 syntax into formal L2 writing.	Explicitly teach "Contrastive Analysis" to separate the two grammars.
Assessment Gap	Anxiety during the 100% English exam.	Gradually reduce L1 support as the exam date approaches.

Student Engagement (Outcome)

The final goal is a student who is an active participant. Instead of remaining silent in a **Speaking (Task 1)** practice, a translanguaging-supported student uses their full repertoire to build confidence, eventually transitioning to fuller English production.

For low-performing MUET candidates, engagement is the behavioral evidence that the translanguaging scaffold is working. It represents the shift from a passive, silent student to an active, contributing participant.

First, pedagogical translanguaging facilitates Behavioral Engagement through increased classroom participation (Shaikh, 2025). In a traditional monolingual setting, Band 1 and 2 students often exhibit "avoidance behaviors"—sitting in the back, avoiding eye contact, or failing to submit drafts. When the pressure of "perfect English" is removed through translanguaging, these students are more likely to raise their hands, ask questions in a mix of L1 and L2, and complete their MUET practice sets. This consistency is what leads to incremental Band improvements.

Second, it promotes Emotional (Affective) Engagement by fostering a "Can-Do" attitude. Because the five support constructs (Inclusivity, Teacher Support, etc.) have lowered the student's anxiety, the student begins to enjoy the English lesson rather than dreading it (Valdez Jr, & Protacio, 2025). This positive emotional state is a powerful predictor of long-term persistence. A student who feels successful in a hybrid-language environment is much

more likely to spend extra time practicing the MUET Listening or Reading components outside of class.

Third, it leads to Cognitive Engagement, where students move beyond rote memorization to "Deep Processing." Instead of just copying English phrases they don't understand, translanguaging allows students to grapple with the logic of a MUET argumentative essay. They become mentally invested in the "Task 2" topics because they can finally relate the academic prompts to their own lived experiences and L1 knowledge (Wong, 2025).

Table 7
Summary of Student Engagement Outcomes

Engagement Type	Manifestation in MUET Class	Long-term Academic Impact
Behavioral	Higher submission rates and active Speaking practice.	Consistency in exam preparation and stamina.
Emotional	Reduced language anxiety and increased motivation.	Higher self-efficacy and resilience during the exam.
Cognitive	Deep processing of Reading and Writing tasks.	Better mastery of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The following model illustrates how these variables interact to improve MUET outcomes. The proposed conceptual framework for pedagogical translanguaging offers a sophisticated, asset-based strategy to bridge the gap between low-achieving MUET candidates' current linguistic abilities and the high-stakes demands of the exam. By integrating five core support constructs—**Inclusivity, Teacher Support, Peer Support, Perceived Effectiveness, and Skill Development**—the model aims to lower the "Affective Filter" and reduce language anxiety, which are major barriers for students in the Band 1 to 2.5 range. While the framework acknowledges challenges like L1 over-reliance, it incorporates a "Strategic Fading" process to ensure that the students' native language acts as a temporary scaffold rather than a permanent crutch, eventually leading to independent English proficiency. (refer Figure 1).

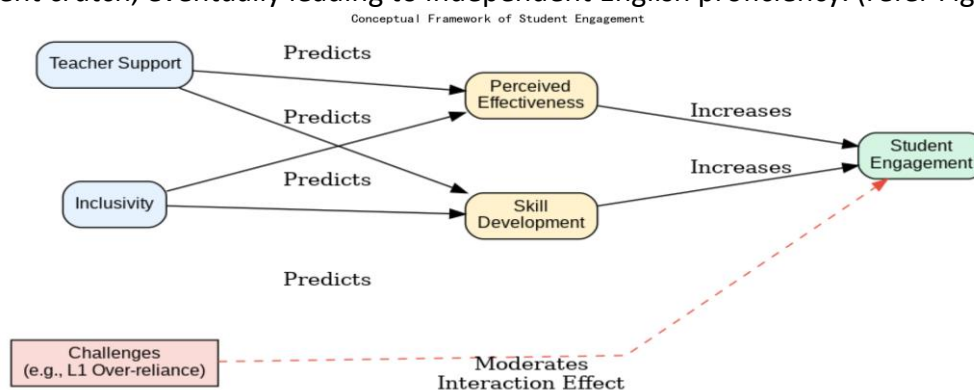


Figure 1 conceptual framework

The benefits of this framework are far-reaching, particularly in enhancing student engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. It can be applied across all MUET components: for instance, using L1 to brainstorm complex arguments in **Writing Task 2**, clarify meta-cognitive strategies like skimming and scanning in **Reading**, or provide a "safety net" during **Speaking** practice to maintain communication flow. Beyond the classroom, the framework serves as a roadmap for curriculum designers to develop "Bridge Modules" and for policy-makers to reconsider rigid monolingual guidelines in Malaysian higher education, ultimately fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment for struggling learners.

Implications

The implications of this conceptual paper are far-reaching, offering a transformative perspective for the Malaysian ELT landscape, particularly for the thousands of "low-performing" candidates who find the MUET daunting.

First, the pedagogical implications suggest a radical shift in classroom management for MUET preparatory courses. By moving away from a punitive "English-only" policy, educators can adopt a "Multilingual-as-an-Asset" approach. This implies that teacher training programs (TESL) should incorporate modules on structured translanguaging, teaching future instructors how to strategically use the L1 to explain complex "True/False/Not Given" logic in Reading or to brainstorm sophisticated argumentative structures for Writing Task 2. This does not mean a return to grammar-translation methods, but rather a sophisticated, cognitive-led scaffolding process that respects the learner's existing linguistic resources (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022; Wang, 2022).

Second, there are significant policy and institutional implications for Malaysian higher education. If translanguaging is proven to increase student engagement and self-efficacy, university language centers should reconsider rigid monolingual curriculum guidelines. This conceptual framework suggests that the "success" of a MUET program should not be measured solely by the amount of English spoken in the classroom, but by the depth of the students' conceptual understanding and their eventual transition to English-only proficiency. Policy-makers could use this framework to design "Bridge Programs" for Band 1 and 2 students that explicitly allow for a higher percentage of L1 support in the early stages, followed by the "Strategic Fading" model as they move toward the examination date (Debreli, 2026; Eren, 2026; Wei, 2022).

Third, the socio-emotional implications highlight the critical need to address "language anxiety" as a primary barrier to academic success (Adam et al., 2025 ; Dovchin et al., 2025 ; Song et al., 2022). By implementing the constructs of Inclusivity and Teacher Support, institutions can mitigate the sense of failure often felt by students in lower MUET bands. This suggests that when a student's native language is validated, their "Affective Filter" drops, leading to a more positive long-term relationship with the English language. This shifts the narrative of the low-performing MUET student from one of "deficit" to one of "potential," ultimately fostering a more equitable educational environment where linguistic background is used as a tool for empowerment rather than a reason for exclusion. To synthesize the practical application of this conceptual framework, the following table outlines the key implications for various stakeholders within the Malaysian higher education ecosystem.

Table 8

Implications for Stakeholders in MUET Preparation

Stakeholder Group	Key Implication	Actionable Strategy
MUET Instructors	Shift from "Language Police" to "Bilingual Facilitators."	Implement Strategic Scaffolding by allowing L1 brainstorming for Task 2 Writing.
Curriculum Designers	Move away from rigid "English-Only" syllabi for lower bands.	Develop Bridge Modules that incorporate structured translanguaging for Bands 1–2.5.
University Policy Makers	Recognition of L1 as a cognitive asset rather than a deficit.	Formalize language policies that allow for multilingual scaffolding in early-stage EMI.
Teacher Trainers (TESL)	Need for training in "Translanguaging Pedagogy."	Include Contrastive Analysis techniques in teacher professional development.
MUET Candidates	Reduced language anxiety and increased self-efficacy.	Use L1 to clarify meta-cognitive strategies (e.g., skimming/scanning) before L2 output.
Educational Researchers	Need for longitudinal data on "Strategic Fading."	Conduct empirical studies comparing monolingual vs. translanguaging MUET outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This conceptual paper serves as a response to the stagnant performance of low-achieving MUET candidates. By addressing the Affective Filter through Inclusivity and leveraging Teacher and Peer Support, the framework bridges the gap between a student's current linguistic reality and the high-stakes demands of the MUET examination. While Challenges such as L1 over-reliance exist, the implementation of a Strategic Fading process ensures that the first language remains a temporary scaffold that eventually leads to independent, high-level English proficiency.

This paper proposes that for MUET students at the Band 1 or 2 level, a strict English-only policy is pedagogically counterproductive. By implementing a **Translanguaging Framework**, educators can:

1. **Lower Anxiety:** Use L1 to explain complex MUET exam formats.

2. **Boost Cognition:** Use L1 to brainstorm high-level arguments for writing tasks.
3. **Bridge the Gap:** Use L1 as a temporary scaffold that is systematically "faded" as proficiency grows.

The proposed framework demonstrates that for low-performing MUET students, Pedagogical Translanguaging is not a sign of academic weakness, but a sophisticated instructional strategy. By leveraging the seven constructs—Inclusivity, Teacher Support, Peer Support, Perceived Effectiveness, and Skill Development—educators can overcome the Challenges of L1 over-reliance to achieve high Student Engagement.

This conceptual model provides a roadmap for Malaysian educators to move away from "Deficit-based" teaching (focusing on what the student lacks) toward "Asset-based" teaching (leveraging the languages the student already knows).

Future research should focus on a quantitative comparison of MUET Band improvements between "English-only" classrooms and "Translanguaging-supported" classrooms to validate this conceptual model.

In conclusion, the proposed pedagogical translanguaging framework represents a transformative shift from "deficit-based" to "asset-based" instruction for low-achieving MUET candidates in Malaysia. By systematically integrating constructs such as Inclusivity, Teacher Support, and Strategic Scaffolding, the model effectively lowers the affective filter and reduces the "learned helplessness" often caused by rigid monolingual policies. While the framework acknowledges the risk of L1 over-reliance, it addresses this through a "Strategic Fading" process that gradually transitions students toward 100% English proficiency in preparation for the high-stakes exam. Ultimately, this approach demonstrates that leveraging a student's full linguistic repertoire is not an academic regression but a sophisticated cognitive tool that fosters deep engagement and equips learners with the mastery needed for MUET success.

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