

Research Article

Fostering Entrepreneurial Skills and National Identity through Thematic Experiential Learning: A Case Study of '2 Pintar Market Day' Merdeka-Themed Student Enterprise Project

Anis Nadiah Ahmad Najwa^{1,*}

¹ Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Nangka; g-36249496@moe-dl.edu.my

Keywords:

Primary school
hands on experiential learning
National identity
English as second language

Abstract: This study analyses "2 Pintar Market Day," a Merdeka-themed entrepreneurial initiative involving Year 2 ESL students in Malaysia. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, data gathered via observations, artefacts, and reflections was subjected to theme analysis. The results indicate that thematic experiential learning cultivated entrepreneurial competencies, including initiative, cooperation, and problem-solving, while simultaneously improving authentic English usage. The Merdeka theme facilitated individuals in expressing their cultural pride and national identity. The research enhances entrepreneurial education for young ESL students and demonstrates the significance of employing culturally pertinent approaches to integrate language, skills, and identity.



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the convergence of entrepreneurial education and national identity development has received more focus in elementary education, particularly in bilingual and multicultural environments. Due to the increased emphasis on 21st-century skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, educators and policymakers are exploring experiential learning methodologies that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction. Thematic experiential learning projects that combine cross-curricular goals with practical applications show promise in developing entrepreneurial skills and civic awareness.

Notwithstanding this potential, a significant void persists in the research about the implementation of such initiatives within English as a Second Language (ESL) primary school settings, especially in countries with complex and historically shaped national identities, like Malaysia.

Prior research has primarily focused on entrepreneurial education at the secondary and higher levels (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017). Few studies examine how experiential activities foster entrepreneurial attitudes in primary-aged learners, and even fewer investigate their impact on fostering a sense of national belonging. In ESL programs, where language acquisition frequently supersedes social, emotional, and civic development, the incorporation of national identity themes in entrepreneurial initiatives presents both opportunities and challenges that remain insufficiently explored.

This study addresses this gap by examining "2 Pintar Market Day," a student-operated commercial initiative in a Malaysian ESL primary school centred on the theme of Merdeka. The initiative, centred on Malaysia's Independence Day (Hari Merdeka), illustrates how thematic experiential learning may aid young ESL learners in developing a sense of national identity and entrepreneurial skills concurrently. Students established, marketed, and operated small enterprises while incorporating patriotic symbols, narratives, and ideologies into their products and communications.

The study has three objectives:

1. To examine the implementation of thematic experiential learning in cultivating entrepreneurial skills among ESL primary students.
2. To investigate the development and expression of national identity through student participation in a Merdeka-themed entrepreneurship program.
3. To evaluate the educational opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of such efforts in ESL learning contexts.

These objectives are based on the premise that well-organised theme experiential learning can promote comprehensive skill development, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, entrepreneurial, and socio-cultural abilities, in the early stages of formal education.

This study aims to inform curriculum creation and teaching practices in bilingual education systems that emphasise national unity and economic readiness. The research advances scholarly discussion in three areas: early childhood entrepreneurial education, the significance of education in nation-building, and effective strategies in ESL pedagogy, via the examination of a classroom-based initiative. It provides educators with valuable guidance on developing culturally relevant, interdisciplinary learning experiences that align with educational standards and contribute to national development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurship in Early Childhood Education

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), founded on Kolb's cycle (Concrete Experience → Reflective Observation → Abstract Conceptualisation → Active Experimentation), is extensively employed in

entrepreneurial education. ELT emphasises the significance of learning via active engagement. Mat Aris et al. (2024) analyse the influences of English Language Teaching (ELT), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) on motivation and entrepreneurial ambition.

Research, notably MonsoonSIM in Malaysia and Indonesia, demonstrates that business simulations and gamification improve business acumen and interpersonal skills, however these findings primarily apply to senior students. Yusof, Murad, and Yusof (2022) investigate experiential learning through digital business initiatives in Malaysian universities, highlighting advancements in entrepreneurial mindset and digital literacy. These circumstances, however, are not entirely comparable to those of younger ESL learners.

Research on project-based learning (PBL), including studies in Malaysian Studies and English at Taylor's College/Monash, indicates increased engagement, although prioritises motivation above entrepreneurial or identity advancement.

National Identity in Multilingual and ESL Contexts

ESL textbooks often shape identity by including or excluding cultural values, norms, historical narratives, and national figures (Hussain, Sandaran, & Sukkur). Idrus and Nazri (2016) illustrate that collective identity among Malaysian ESL secondary students is fostered through group affiliation and common ideas, although insufficient English proficiency. Research in elementary schools, including Ulfah, Hidayah, and Halimah's analysis of citizenship education inside madrasah settings, emphasises moral character and patriotic themes, predominantly at the curriculum design level rather than through project-based initiatives.

Thoo et al. underscore the insufficient integration of indigenous literary works in Malaysian secondary curricula, highlighting an erratic assimilation of national identity through literature.

Pedagogical Theories and Approaches

ELT, SLT, and SDT are prevalent theoretical frameworks. Qualitative case studies, focus groups, classroom observations, and artefact analysis are prevalent methodologies. Research on identity often employs content analysis (e.g., textbooks), learner interviews, or narrative inquiry.

Deficiencies in Literature

Age Group: The majority of research focusses on secondary or tertiary students, with little studies on ESL learners in primary education.

Dual Outcomes: Insufficient study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurship and national identity.

Contextual Specificity: Outcomes from higher education settings are not easily transferable to younger students.

A considerable segment of the literature prioritises language proficiency or identification at advanced levels, rather than the intersection of entrepreneurship and identity at the foundational level.

Methodological Concerns: The significant reliance on self-reports and the lack of longitudinal data compromise robustness.

Assessment of entrepreneurial competence and identity is often conducted inconsistently.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2018), suitable for analysing the processes and outcomes of the '2 Pintar Market Day' program in a Malaysian ESL primary school. The case study method enables an in-depth examination of contextual, educational, and socio-cultural elements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) underpins the initiative, emphasising the necessity of active engagement and reflection. The Merdeka theme provided culturally relevant content, aligning with Idrus and Nazri's (2016) claim that cultural context is crucial in postcolonial, multilingual settings.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a national primary school in Beluran, Malaysia, involving 35 Year 2 ESL students (aged 8) from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Malay, Chinese, and several Sabah communities. An ESL instructor, the principal, and two guardians also provided their perspectives. Purposive sample (Palinkas et al., 2015) ensured a diversity of language competencies and degrees of engagement.

Data Collection

Participant observation was conducted over a four-week period encompassing the preparation, execution, and reflection phases. Focused on collaboration, utilising English, demonstrating initiative in business, and articulating culture.

Student artefacts, including products, packaging, booth designs, and thoughts, enhanced our comprehension of students' linguistic utilisation, creativity, and identities. Teacher journals documented the curriculum, student performance, and encountered challenges. All procedures adhered to ethical principles, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and allowing voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed, utilising both deductive and inductive approaches. Predefined constructs included entrepreneurial skills, language competence, and national identity indicators; emergent themes involved peer leadership, linguistic confidence, and cultural pride. The triangulation of data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and member checking enhanced validity.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of the "2 Pintar Market Day" program revealed three primary themes: (1) development of entrepreneurial skills, (2) enhancement of English language competence and self-

confidence, and (3) establishment of national identity through cultural expression. These findings align with and augment existing knowledge about experiential learning, entrepreneurship education, and the formation of identities in ESL contexts.

4.1 Acquiring entrepreneurial skills

Through the planning, marketing, and operation of their own small enterprises, students demonstrated increased independence, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and improved financial management skills. Numerous students demonstrated creativity in product design and adaptability in response to client feedback. These views correspond with research that identifies experiential learning as a catalyst for entrepreneurial capability, especially in younger learners (Kolb, 1984; Floris & Pillitu, 2019). Previous studies have predominantly concentrated on secondary or tertiary students (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017); this research demonstrates that entrepreneurial inclinations can be effectively cultivated in primary school through suitable scaffolding.

4.2. Improving language skills and self-esteem

Taking part in the initiative made it easier to use real English in a variety of situations, such as promoting products, talking to customers, and having meaningful conversations. Teachers said that students who usually didn't want to speak English in public were more inclined to do so, which suggests that they were less scared about speaking English in public. This finding corroborates the perspective that genuine communicative tasks significantly enhance confidence and fluency among ESL learners (Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006). Furthermore, cases of translanguaging, where students integrated English with Malay or other regional languages, exemplify García and Wei's (2014) assertion that multilingual repertoires might function as assets for meaning-making rather than being regarded as weaknesses.

4.3 Creating a National Identity

The Merdeka theme gave pupils a chance to show how proud they are of their culture and feel like they are part of a bigger community. The items and performances included national symbols, traditional food, and patriotic chants, which showed that the kids understood what it meant to be Malaysian. These results corroborate other research highlighting the significance of culturally relevant education in cultivating identity and civic awareness among youth (Idrus & Nazri, 2016; Hussain, Sandaran, & Sukkur, 2020). This project engaged students in tangible acts of representation, so strengthening both individual and collective identity in meaningful ways, in contrast to more abstract techniques for identity building.

The findings demonstrate that thematic experiential learning can amalgamate entrepreneurial education, ESL instruction, and civic development in primary school environments. The findings enhance the current literature by demonstrating that young learners, with appropriate guidance, may integrate linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural learning goals within a single project-based initiative.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that themed experiential learning may assist primary ESL learners in developing entrepreneurial skills, acquiring a new language, and establishing their national identity. According to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, students demonstrated learning through active engagement in planning, problem-solving, and reflection, so affirming the importance of practical experiences in enhancing deep understanding. The findings align with other studies demonstrating that authentic, real-world tasks improve motivation and communication skills in second language acquisition (Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006).

The Merdeka theme underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in multilingual educational settings. The use of patriotic foods, symbols, and slogans by students provided them with authentic contexts to employ English. This corroborates García and Wei's (2014) assertion that multilingual repertoires serve as beneficial instruments for learning rather than hindrances. This supports the conclusions of Idrus and Nazri (2016) that culturally pertinent activities facilitate identity development among Malaysian ESL learners. The project fostered socio-emotional growth with linguistic and cognitive development by linking commercial practice with expressions of national pride.

This study simultaneously enhances the existing literature on entrepreneurship education, which has been concentrated on older pupils (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017). This case study illustrates that entrepreneurial traits, including initiative, collaboration, and financial literacy, may be effectively cultivated in younger students through well crafted instructional activities. This corresponds with Floris and Pillitu's (2019) assertion that responsibility and agency must be amalgamated from an early stage to foster enduring entrepreneurial mindsets.

But a few problems came up. Students needed a lot of help from their teachers to keep track of their work, which shows that projects like this could become too easy or too hard if there isn't a clear plan in place. The evaluation of entrepreneurial competencies and identity-related outcomes is still in its early stages, revealing considerable methodological deficiencies in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These limitations underscore the necessity for comprehensive frameworks that can integrate the many learning outcomes of thematic experiential programs.

In conclusion, the conversation illustrates the viability and effectiveness of incorporating entrepreneurial and identity-focused learning in ESL instruction. It enhances the discussion by framing primary-aged learners not just as language learners but also as engaged participants in socio-cultural and economic education. This dual focus bolsters the argument for interdisciplinary, culturally aware methodologies that accurately represent the realities of multilingual education in Malaysia and elsewhere.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that thematic experiential learning, when integrated into culturally pertinent situations, can profoundly alter ESL primary classrooms. The "2 Pintar Market Day" campaign cultivated entrepreneurial skills like as initiative, problem-solving, and teamwork, while

concurrently encouraging authentic language use in meaningful circumstances. These results align with studies indicating the effectiveness of experiential and project-based learning in fostering engagement and skill development (Kolb, 1984; Nunan, 2004).

The Merdeka theme enabled students to investigate and articulate their national identity, consistent with other research that highlights the importance of culturally appropriate pedagogy in multilingual educational settings (Idrus & Nazri, 2016; García & Wei, 2014). The project integrated civic and cultural narratives into entrepreneurial activity, thereby connecting linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional learning outcomes.

This study expands the discourse on entrepreneurial education to encompass younger ESL contribute to nation-building, in contrast to prior research predominantly centred on secondary and tertiary learners (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017). Simultaneously, it emphasises the significance of teacher scaffolding and organised reflection in facilitating the transition of projects from superficial tasks to profound learning experiences.

The findings indicate that thematic experiential learning is advantageous for curriculum design in multilingual environments, especially if national unity and future economic preparedness are essential concerns. Subsequent study should analyse the enduring impacts of these activities, evaluate differences across various cultural contexts, and determine how evaluation frameworks might more effectively document both entrepreneurial and identity-related learning outcomes.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses her profound gratitude to the school administrators, and students who participated in "2 Pintar Market Day" project. Their contributions were important to this research. Gratitude is also extended to family members for their unwavering support and encouragement during this project.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Colón-Millán, I., & Guerrero, M. C. (2020). Translanguaging and education: A chapter in *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. In García, O., & Wei, L. (Eds.). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765_5
- Fayolle, A., & Gailly, B. (2015). The impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial attitudes and intention: Hysteresis and persistence. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(1), 75–93.
- Floris, M., & Pillitu, D. (2019). Improving entrepreneurship education in primary schools: A pioneer project. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(6), 1148–1169.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765>
- Hussain, S., Sandaran, S. C., & Saeed, A. (2023). Representation of culture and national identity in Pakistani ESL textbooks. *IARTEM E-Journal*, 15(1), 1–17.
- Idrus, F., & Nazri, N. I. M. (2016). The Construction of Collective Identity in Malaysian ESL Secondary Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 9(10), 101. DOI: 10.5539/elt.v9n10p101

- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Mat Aris, N. I., Mahamad Aziz, F. M., Abu Hasan, N., Abdul Rahim, M., Abdul Rahman, M. A., & Mohd Sobri, N. S. (2024). Exploring theories for enhancing school children's path to success as entrepreneurs: A proposed systematic review. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 9(SI22), 13–20.
- Nabi, G., Liñán, F., Fayolle, A., Krueger, N., & Walmsley, A. (2017). The impact of entrepreneurship education in higher education: A systematic review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 16(2), 277–299.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511667336
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Thoo, R. Y. X., Foong, S. S., Khor, Z. L., & Pong, K. S. (2017). Building national identity through the secondary school literature component in Malaysia. *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(2), 21-34.
- Ulfah, M., Hidayah, N., & Halimah, L. (2020). *The formation of nationalism through education of citizenship in elementary school*. *Madrasah: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran Dasar*, 13(1), 65–83. <https://doi.org/10.18860/mad.v13i1.7935>