

Language Capital and Entrepreneurial Orientation Among University Students: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Malaysia as a Basis for Business Ecosystem Development

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ABSTRACT:

Abstract: Youth unemployment among university graduates remains persistent in both Indonesia and Malaysia, prompting national policies that position entrepreneurship as a strategic pathway to graduate employability. This study examines the relationship between language capital and entrepreneurial orientation (EO) among university students, comparing Indonesia and Malaysia as two ASEAN neighbors with markedly different national language ecologies. A quantitative, comparative, cross-sectional survey design is proposed, involving undergraduate students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), Indonesia, and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. Language capital is operationalized as a multidimensional construct covering proficiency in English, the national language, and heritage/regional languages, together with the breadth of domains in which these languages are used. Entrepreneurial orientation is measured using the established five-dimension framework of autonomy, innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness. Partial least squares structural equation modeling with multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA) is proposed for hypothesis testing. Contextual secondary indicators already show substantial cross-country contrast: Malaysia ranks 24th globally and 1st in Asia in English proficiency, while Indonesia ranks 80th of 123 countries, alongside differing entrepreneurial-activity and graduate-employment profiles reported by national statistical agencies and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. The study extends Bourdieu's theory of capital into the entrepreneurship domain and offers one of few dual-country, dual-institution comparative accounts of how language capital shapes entrepreneurial orientation among ASEAN university students, with direct implications for bilingual/multilingual entrepreneurship curriculum design.

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Keywords: language capital; entrepreneurial orientation; comparative study; Indonesia; Malaysia

1.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been positioned as a national strategic response to graduate unemployment across Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, the open unemployment rate (Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka/TPT) among holders of Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees stood at 5.39% in August 2025, exceeding the national average unemployment rate of 4.85% recorded for the same period (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2025). In Malaysia, unemployment among youth aged 125-134 was recorded at 9.6% in 2025, even as the country's overall unemployment rate fell to a ten-year low (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2025a). These figures illustrate that a university credential no longer guarantees smooth labor market entry, reinforcing policy interest in entrepreneurship as an alternative or complementary career pathway for graduates in both countries.

Both governments have translated this policy interest into concrete higher education initiatives. Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology introduced the Wirausaha Merdeka (Independent Entrepreneurship) program in 2022 under the broader Kampus Merdeka framework, alongside long-running campus level schemes such as the Program Mahasiswa Wirausaha (PMW) implemented at universities including Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA, 2025). Malaysia has pursued a parallel strategy through the Entrepreneurship Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions (EAP-HEIs) 125-134, operationalized at institutions such as Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) through dedicated units like the Malaysian Academy of SME and Entrepreneurship Development (MASMED), which runs structured entrepreneurial-competence programs for students (UiTM MASMED, 2025). Despite these parallel efforts, the two countries differ sharply along a dimension that has received comparatively little

attention in the entrepreneurship education literature: language capital.

Following Bourdieu (1986), linguistic capital is a species of cultural capital: command of a language variety particularly a prestige or globally dominant one - functions as a convertible resource that expands an individual's access to information, networks, and markets. Indonesia and Malaysia present a striking natural contrast in this regard. Indonesia is one of the world's most linguistically diverse nations, with 718 regional languages documented by the national language body, Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa (2024), yet its command of English, the dominant language of international trade remains comparatively weak: the 2025 EF English Proficiency Index ranks Indonesia 80th of 123 countries worldwide, with a score of 471 placing it in the "low proficiency" band and 12th of 25 within Asia (EF Education First [EF EPI], 2025a). Malaysia, by contrast, is an officially multilingual nation in which Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, and Tamil are used across education, media, and commerce, and it recorded a score of 581 in the same 2025 indeks, the highest in Asia and 24th globally (EF EPI, 2025b).

This contrast raises an open question: given comparable government commitment to entrepreneurship education, does the divergent language capital endowment of Indonesian and Malaysian students correspond to a divergent entrepreneurial orientation? Prior studies in each country separately link entrepreneurship education and related antecedents to entrepreneurial intention or orientation among students (e.g., Ramadani & Fauzi, 2024, on Indonesian university students; Kamaruddin et al., 2021, on UiTM students), but none, to the authors' knowledge, treats language capital as a distinct, multidimensional antecedent examined comparatively across the two countries.

This study therefore aims to (1) conceptualize and measure language capital as a

multidimensional construct among university students, (2) examine its relationship with entrepreneurial orientation, and (3) test whether this relationship differs significantly between students at UNESA (Indonesia) and UiTM (Malaysia). The study contributes theoretically by extending Bourdieusian capital theory into the entrepreneurship domain, and practically by informing the design of bilingual/multilingual components within university entrepreneurship curricula in both countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Capital

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes economic, social, and cultural capital as convertible resources that structure an individual's position within a social field. Linguistic capital, a component of embodied cultural capital, refers to the value attached to command of a given language or language variety within a specific market of linguistic exchange. In education and labor market research, linguistic capital has been used to explain unequal access to opportunity: individuals who command a linguistic repertoire recognized as prestigious or economically useful typically a globally dominant language such as English, alongside the national and regional languages relevant to their immediate market are better positioned to access information, build networks, and negotiate favorable outcomes. In multilingual developing economies, language capital is increasingly conceptualized as multidimensional, encompassing not only proficiency but also the range of social and economic domains in which a language is actively used.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Orientation

Miller (1983) originally conceptualized entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as a firm-level construct combining innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Covin and Slevin (1989) operationalized these dimensions psychometrically, and Lumpkin and Dess (1996) extended the construct to five independent dimensions by adding autonomy and competitive aggressiveness, arguing that each dimension can

vary independently depending on organizational and environmental context. At the individual level, including among students who have not yet founded a firm EO has been adapted to capture a disposition toward entrepreneurial thought and action, and is widely used as a predictor of subsequent entrepreneurial intention and behavior in higher-education research.

2.3 Linking Language Capital and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Conceptually, language capital may shape EO through several mechanisms. Proficiency in a globally dominant language expands access to international information, market knowledge, and digital/online business ecosystems, plausibly strengthening proactiveness and opportunity recognition. A broader multilingual repertoire has been associated in the cognitive and sociolinguistic literature with greater cognitive flexibility and comfort operating across cultural frames, which may support innovativeness and risk tolerance in ambiguous or cross-border business contexts. Empirically, studies on Indonesian university students show that entrepreneurship education and role-model exposure shape entrepreneurial orientation and intention, with cultural factors acting as moderating or mediating conditions (Ramadani & Fauzi, 2024). Similarly, research on UiTM students finds that entrepreneurship education mediates the relationship between individual attributes and entrepreneurial intention (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). Neither stream, however, isolates language capital as a distinct antecedent, which constitutes the gap this study addresses.

2.4 National Context: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared

Indonesia and Malaysia are both tracked by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) within the Asia and Oceania region, though under different income classifications (GEM classifies Indonesia as a low/lower-middle-income economy and Malaysia as a middle income economy). Indonesia's most recent Adult Population Survey places its Total early stage

Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate at 9.6% in 2020, a decline from 15% in 2018, a period affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; notably, GEM expert assessments rated Indonesia's post-school entrepreneurial education at 7.2 out of 10 in 2020 - among the highest of all GEM participating economies suggesting a comparatively favorable institutional environment for entrepreneurship education despite the pandemic-related dip in activity (GEM, 2020). Malaysia's most recent full GEM Adult Population Survey dates to 2017, limiting direct like-for-like comparison, but national policy instruments such as the EAP HEIs indicate sustained institutional investment in graduate entrepreneurship (GEM, 2017; EAP-HEIs, 2021).

3. Research Gap and Novelty

Existing EO literature has extensively examined education, culture, gender, and family background as antecedents of entrepreneurial orientation and intention, but language capital - particularly as a multidimensional construct spanning global, national, and regional/heritage languages - remains underexplored as a distinct antecedent. This gap is especially salient in a comparative ASEAN context: despite sharing a common Austronesian linguistic root (Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia are mutually intelligible to a significant degree) and broadly similar cultural values, Indonesia and Malaysia diverge sharply in national English proficiency standing and in the institutional status accorded to multilingualism. This study's novelty lies in (a) operationalizing language capital as a multidimensional construct rather than a single English-proficiency proxy, and (b) applying a dual-country, dual-institution (UNESA vs. UiTM) comparative multigroup design to test whether the language capital-EO relationship is contingent on national language ecology.

4. Research Questions and Objectives

RQ1: How is language capital distributed among university students in Indonesia (UNESA) and Malaysia (UiTM)?

RQ2: What is the relationship between language capital and entrepreneurial orientation among university students in each country?

RQ3: Does the strength or pattern of the language capital-entrepreneurial orientation relationship differ significantly between Indonesian and Malaysian students?

Corresponding to these questions, the study's objectives are to (1) measure and profile language capital among UNESA and UiTM students; (2) test the relationship between language capital and entrepreneurial orientation within each national sample; and (3) conduct a multigroup comparison to determine whether national context moderates this relationship.

5. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The proposed model positions language capital (exogenous construct, comprising English proficiency, national language proficiency, regional/heritage language proficiency, and breadth of language-use domains) as a predictor of entrepreneurial orientation (endogenous construct, comprising autonomy, innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness), with country/institution (UNESA vs. UiTM) specified as a grouping variable for multigroup comparison rather than a simple control, in order to test whether path coefficients differ significantly across groups.

H1: Language capital has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial orientation among Indonesian (UNESA) students.

H2: Language capital has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial orientation among Malaysian (UiTM) students.

H3: The magnitude of the language capital-entrepreneurial orientation relationship differs significantly between Indonesian and Malaysian students.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This study proposes a quantitative, comparative, cross-sectional survey design, consistent with prior comparative EO research. Data will be

collected simultaneously from both sites to minimize temporal confounds.

6.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprises active undergraduate students at UNESA, which reported 72,528 active students across 14 faculties as of mid-2026, including 6,262 new entrants admitted via the SNBP pathway and 8,813 via the UTBK-SNBT pathway in 2025 (UNESA, 2025; Jawa Pos, 2025; Diskominfo Jatim, 2025), and at UiTM, which reported 57,274 students in 2025 across its faculties and branch campuses (UiTM, 2025). A minimum sample of approximately 125-134 respondents per site is recommended, based on common PLS-SEM sample-size guidance and Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error; the final figure should be confirmed via a priori power analysis (e.g., G*Power) once the model's maximum number of predictors per construct is finalized. Purposive or proportionate stratified sampling by faculty/study program is recommended to ensure representativeness.

6.3 Instrument

Entrepreneurial orientation will be measured using the established Lumpkin and Dess (1996)/Covin and Slevin (1989) five-dimension scale, adapted to individual/student level wording, using a 5-point Likert scale. Language capital will be measured using a researcher developed scale covering (a) self-rated English proficiency, (b) self-rated national language proficiency, (c) self-rated regional/heritage language proficiency, and (d) breadth of domains (academic, social, digital/online, economic) in which these languages are actively used. Both instruments should be translated/back-translated into Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia as appropriate, and validated through expert judgment and a pilot test ($n \geq 30$ per site) prior to full data collection.

6.4 Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), assessed for convergent validity ($AVE \geq 0.5$), discriminant validity (HTMT), and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.7), followed by structural model testing (path coefficients, R^2 , Q^2) within each national sample. Hypothesis H3 will be tested using Multigroup Analysis (PLS-MGA) or the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure to confirm that comparison across groups is valid before interpreting differences in path coefficients.

6.5 Ethical Considerations

The study will be conducted following informed consent procedures and institutional research ethics clearance from both UNESA and UiTM, with respondent anonymity and voluntary participation assured throughout data collection.

7. Comparative Contextual Data

The following tables summarize secondary indicators collected to frame the comparative analysis. These figures situate the two national and institutional contexts but do not substitute for the primary survey data required to test H1-H3. Macroeconomic and MSME/SME indicators are included because they anchor the study's stated relevance to business ecosystem development: micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contribute 61.07% of Indonesia's GDP and absorb 97% of national employment (Kadin Indonesia, 2025), while Malaysia's MSMEs contributed 39.7% of GDP in 2025, growing faster (5.7%) than the national economy (5.2%) (DOSM, 2025b). Student entrepreneurial orientation therefore feeds directly into a sector that already anchors both economies, underscoring the practical stakes of identifying language capital as a modifiable antecedent.

Table 1. National Comparative Indicators: Indonesia vs. Malaysia

Indicator	Indonesia	Malaysia	Source
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Population (2025)	≈287.2 million (4th most populous country)	≈34.2 million	World Bank/IMF, 2025
GDP, nominal (2025)	≈US\$1,512 billion (largest economy in Southeast Asia; 16th globally)	≈US\$437 billion (GDP growth 5.2%)	IMF/World Bank, 2025
MSME/SME contribution to GDP	61.07% of GDP (≈Rp8,573.89 trillion); 97% of employment; 99% of business units	39.7% of GDP (RM689.8 billion in 2025, up from RM652.8 billion in 2024); MSME GDP grew 5.7%, outpacing the 5.2% national rate	Kadin Indonesia, 2025; DOSM, 2025b
English proficiency (EF EPI 2025 score / global rank of 123)	471 - 80th ("low proficiency")	581 - 24th ("high proficiency," 1st in Asia)	EF EPI, 2025a, 2025b
Linguistic diversity	718 regional/local languages recorded	Multilingual: Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, Tamil, plus indigenous languages in Sabah/Sarawak	Badan Bahasa Kemendikbud, 2024
Unemployment among tertiary graduates	5.39% (Diploma IV/S1/S2/S3, Aug 2025); national average 4.85%	Youth (125-134) unemployment 9.6% (2025); overall unemployment at 10-year low	BPS, 2025; DOSM, 2025a
Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)	9.6% (2020 APS; 15% in 2018)	Most recent full APS: 2017 (pre-dates current comparison window)	GEM, 2020; GEM, 2017
National entrepreneurship education policy for HEIs	Wirausaha Merdeka (since 2022) under Kampus Merdeka; campus-level PMW schemes	Entrepreneurship Action Plan for HEIs (EAP-HEIs) 125-134	UNESA, 2025; EAP-HEIs, 2021

Table 2. Institutional Profile: UNESA vs. UiTM

Profile	UNESA (Indonesia)	UiTM (Malaysia)
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Total active students	72,528 (as of mid-2026)	57,274 (2025)
Academic structure	14 faculties; 104 bachelor's, 15 vocational, 48 master's, 20 doctoral programs	Multiple faculties across main and branch campuses
New student intake (most recent cycle reported)	6,262 (SNBP 2025) + 8,813 (UTBK-SNBT 2025)	Not specified in sources reviewed
Dedicated entrepreneurship unit(s)	Program Mahasiswa Wirausaha (PMW); Wirausaha Merdeka scheme	Malaysian Academy of SME & Entrepreneurship Development (MASMED), incl. Unicorn Scholarship Program

Source: UNESA (2025); UiTM (2025).

8. Expected Results and Discussion Framework

This section will report descriptive statistics, measurement model results, structural path estimates for H1 and H2, and PLS-MGA results for H3 following primary data collection. The discussion should interpret findings against the contextual indicators in Table 1 for instance, whether Malaysia's substantially stronger national English proficiency standing corresponds to a stronger language capital-EO path coefficient among UiTM students than among UNESA students, and whether Indonesia's markedly greater linguistic diversity manifests as a distinct effect of regional/heritage language capital not present in the Malaysian sample.

9. Conclusion

This study is positioned to provide comparative, theory grounded evidence on how language capital relates to entrepreneurial orientation among university students in two ASEAN economies with contrasting language ecologies and converging entrepreneurship education policy. Once completed with primary survey data from UNESA and UiTM, the findings are expected to inform both theoretical extensions of Bourdieusian capital theory into entrepreneurship research and practical

recommendations for embedding language/multilingual competence development within university entrepreneurship curricula.

10. Limitations and Future Research

This proposal relies on self reported language proficiency, which may be subject to social desirability bias; future work could incorporate standardized proficiency testing. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causality between language capital and EO; a longitudinal design would strengthen causal inference. Finally, the two-institution sample (UNESA and UiTM) may not fully represent national student populations; future research could extend the comparison to additional universities in each country.

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Contribution of individual authors

Prima Vidya Asteria conceptualized the study, led the comparative research design, and coordinated manuscript writing. Rizki Ramadhan conducted the literature review, coordinated data collection among Indonesian respondents, performed the pilot-stage descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, and drafted the results section. Didik Nurhadi contributed to the theoretical framing of language capital and reviewed the manuscript. Amalina Rachmi Fatina contributed to instrument development and the language-capital measurement approach. Leylawati Joremi contributed to the entrepreneurial orientation framework and the Malaysian institutional context. Nurhaslina Che Radzi contributed to the methodological design and data-analysis

planning. Badrul Isa contributed to the entrepreneurship-education context at UiTM and reviewed the manuscript.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Claude (Anthropic) in order to reformat the manuscript to conform to the journal's template and assist with language editing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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