



MULTILINGUAL PRACTICE AND ATTITUDES AMONG INDONESIAN YOUTH: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Multilingualism plays a crucial role in shaping Indonesian youth's cultural and communicative identities in the context of globalization. However, existing studies tend to emphasize formal education settings, leaving a limited understanding of personal multilingual practices and attitudes in everyday contexts. This study aims to explore the multilingual practices and attitudes of Indonesian youth across social, educational, and digital domains. Using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the study reveals four major themes: multilingualism as a social inevitability, dominance of Indonesian and English, challenges in preserving local languages, and the dual role of education and social media in language practice. The findings indicate that multilingualism reflects both global influence and regional identity, requiring inclusive educational and sociolinguistic approaches to sustain linguistic diversity and equity.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Youth Attitudes, Languages Practices, Social Media, Linguistic Diversity

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with extraordinary linguistic richness. More than 700 regional languages are spoken alongside Indonesian and global languages, such as English. Young Indonesians, especially those in generation-Z and Alpha generation, absorb the positive aspects of these languages through social interactions, education, and media. A study by (Putra & Tustiawati, 2024) found that Balinese students showed positive attitudes towards the use of multiple languages in their academic and social lives. This finding illustrates the phenomenon of multilingualism as an inseparable part of the identity and communication strategies of young people.

Among Indonesian teenagers and students, various multilingual practices are observed, ranging from the use of Indonesian and local varieties (such as Javanese and Sundanese) to a mixture of English, known as slang, teenagers often switch languages according to the context and identity they want to display. Furthermore (Kurniasari & Mbato, 2018) stated that students and college students showed a high tendency towards attitudes (cognitive, affective, and conative) towards both languages Indonesian and English due to the educational benefits and job prospects associated with them.

Research in EFL classrooms also shows significant developments in translanguaging practices, (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020) found that teachers and students are increasingly open to using a mixture of Indonesian and English in the learning process as a strategy for effectiveness and understanding of academic contexts. Outside Java, a study in West Kalimantan by (Sulastriana et al., 2024) showed a positive relationship between inter-ethnic social interaction and attitudes of respect for the local mother tongue. In Pontianak, students



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from six different ethnic backgrounds demonstrated strong language pride, actively maintaining their ethnic languages in everyday conversation. From the results of the study above, we can observe a pattern of natural and strategic multilingual practices among Indonesian teenagers, ranging from the use of their mother tongue, Indonesian, to English. Their attitudes also tend to be positive, reflecting an understanding of the benefits and challenges of multilingualism.

This study examines the language use practices and language attitudes of Indonesian youth in everyday life, particularly in social interactions, education, and digital media. This study examines how youth practice their multilingual skills, which languages are predominantly used in various situations and their views on the value and function of these skills.

In the era of globalization and digitalization, multilingual skills are becoming increasingly important, especially for the younger generation who live in an environment rich in linguistic diversity. Indonesia, as a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, offers a unique context for understanding the dynamics of language use among adolescents. Although many studies have highlighted multilingualism in the context of formal education, research focusing on adolescents' personal experiences and attitudes toward their language practices remains limited. Therefore, this study is important for filling the literature gap by providing in-depth insights through a qualitative approach, particularly by utilizing semi-structured interviews. The following research questions are formulated in this study: "What are the practices and attitudes of the young generation of Indonesia towards the use of various language in everyday life in the era of globalization and digital media?". Therefore, this study is expected to provide insights for educators, policy makers, and researchers on the development of multilingual practices and the potential for revitalizing local languages among the younger generation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview method, as its primary purpose is to explore in-depth the language use practices and linguistic attitudes of Indonesian youth in various contexts of their lives. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is capable of capturing the complexity of social experiences and subjective meanings that cannot be measured through a quantitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Semi-structured interviews provide researchers with the flexibility to explore relevant topics spontaneously while maintaining a focused framework of questions to achieve their research objectives (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This method is very suitable for sociolinguistic studies that emphasize individual perspectives and experiences in language practices.

Instruments

This study uses thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis framework to explore the multilingual practices and attitudes of Indonesian youth. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its flexibility in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in narrative data, particularly in semi-structured interview data. This approach enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings that emerge from the subjective experiences of participants. The analysis process was conducted through the stages of open coding, categorization, and identification of the main themes relevant to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis in a sociolinguistic context has proven



effective in revealing the diversity of language practices and dynamics of linguistic attitudes, especially in multicultural populations such as youth in Indonesia (Rofifah & Rahmawati, 2024). In this study, researchers interviewed DS (pseudonym) as a participant, she is a non-formal teacher at an Islamic boarding school institution.

Procedures

The following are steps in the thematic analysis according to (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- a. Become familiar with data: Repeatedly reading and reviewing the data to understand the overall content. This process includes transcription, in-depth reading, and recording ideas.
- b. Generate initial codes: Identifying important features of the data that are relevant to the research focus. Each meaningful piece of data is coded systematically throughout the dataset.
- c. Search themes: Grouping similar codes into larger categories called "Themes". Themes represent patterns of meaning in the data.
- d. Review themes: Evaluate whether the themes formed are valid about the overall code and data: This process may involve combining, deleting, or reshaping themes.
- e. Define themes: Give each theme a clear and descriptive name, and define the scope and meaning of each theme in depth.
- f. Write-up: Compiling a narrative of research findings based on themes that have been analysed. Included in this stage is the inclusion of data citations to support interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To interpret the dataset from the interviewee, the researcher employed the theory of Thematic Analysis steps, as explained by Braun and Clarke above.

1. Become Familiar with Data

The initial step in thematic analysis is to read the transcripts repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interview's content and nuances as a whole. From the interview transcript with the informant (DS), it is evident that the main issues that emerged were related to multilingual experiences, perceptions of using local and foreign languages, and the influence of social media and education on young people's language practices.

During this process, the researcher noted that the informant explicitly mentioned Indonesian, English, and local languages, such as *Acehnese* or *Padangnese*, as part of their daily lives. The researcher also paid attention to communication styles, providing concrete examples (such as the use of terms like "FOMO" and TikTok slang) and the informant's attitude toward language policies and practices in educational and social environments.

2. Generate Initial Codes

After understanding the data, the researcher identified and organized the information into initial codes. Some important codes found include multilingual experiences in Islamic boarding schools, the association of English with intelligence, the influence of social media, mixed codes in communication, the decline in the use of regional languages, and the lack of curriculum support for local languages.

These codes reflect various aspects related to the language practices of the younger generation in Indonesia. For example, "The influence of social media" emerged when the informant mentioned popular terms such as "Rizz" or "Sigma," which are widely used by young people.



Meanwhile, "The decline of local languages" emerged when the informant observed that many young people in Aceh could no longer speak regional languages and felt ashamed to use them.

Table 1. Data Initial Codes

No	Initial Code	Transcript Quote/Phrase	Theme
1	Multilingual experience in boarding school	...in boarding school which required me to be able to speak in Arabic, English...	Multilingualism as a Social Reality
2	Use of local language in the family	...we only speak in local language that are Acehnese and Indonesians...	Erosion of Local Language among Youth
3	English as a symbol of status	...if they talk in English fluently... it's really look really so smart...	Language as a Symbol of Social Status
4	Code-mixing/code-switching	...we use now, we use like Otewe... Gabut...	Dominance of Indonesian and English
5	Influence of influencers and social media	...it's influenced by influencer... such as TikTok...	Role of social media in Language Practice
6	English in educational settings	...of course it's obligation for me to speak English...	Role of Education in Multilingualism
7	Decline in local language usage	...some of young people cannot speak in local language... they're shy...	Erosion of Local Language among Youth
8	Local language as cultural identity	...youth and creative content use their local language which makes them popular...	Local Language as Cultural Identity
9	Inequity in language policy	...curriculum in Indonesia today is not support the local language...	Challenges in Language Policy
10	Globalization and connectedness	...globalization, young people are more connected to work to express different language...	Impact of Globalization on Multilingualism
11	Self-perception as bilingual	...they tend to see themselves as bilingual or multilingual...	Youth Linguistic Self-Perception
12	Language as a skill	...Language is not a lesson, but it's a skill... the key point... is practice.	Language as a Skill
13	Local language seen as outdated	...local languages are sometimes viewed as old-fashioned...	Erosion of Local Language among Youth
14	'Language week' as a solution	...first week Bahasa, second week English, third week local language...	Strategies for Preserving Local Languages
15	Imbalance in the education system	...students may feel pressure to use only formal or standard language...	Role of Education in Multilingualism
16	Influencers spreading impolite local language	...TikTokers use bad language... influencers cannot give a good local language as a speaker...	Challenges in Preserving Local Languages

Source: Research Data Processing, 2025

3. Search for Themes

The codes that have been developed are grouped into broader and more meaningful themes. Some of the main themes that emerged from the results of this interview are: (a) Multilingualism as a Social Inevitability, (b) Dominance of Indonesian and English, (c) Challenges of Preserving Local Languages, and (d) The Role of Social Media and Education in Language Practice.

Theme 1: Multilingualism as a Social Inevitability

Multilingualism emerges as a social inevitability in the daily lives of Indonesian society. This is clearly illustrated in the experiences of the informants, who have been accustomed to using various languages since school. Multilingualism is an integral part of the dynamics of educational and social life, where a person not only uses Indonesian but also foreign languages and local languages. This phenomenon reflects the linguistic reality of Indonesian society, which is plural and demands cross-language adaptation in various contexts.

“Since I was I Junior High School... I have been in boarding school which required me to be able speak in Arabic and English.... and in daily life I familiar use too... we only speak in local language that are Acehnese and Indonesians...” (DS, Participant)

Theme 2: Dominance of Indonesian and English

Indonesian and English are the dominant languages in use, especially among urban youth and in educational contexts. Indonesian is the national lingua franca used in schools and public spaces, while English is seen as a symbol of intelligence and high social status. This perception is driven by the influence of globalization and social media that places English as a prestigious language.

“Most of Indonesian today... in the school we use Bahasa, in public are we use Bahasa... and English... our perceptions who talk in English fluently is so cool...” (DS, Participant)

Theme 3: Challenges of Preserving Local Languages

Preserving local languages faces significant challenges due to the dominance of Indonesian and English. Many young people feel embarrassed or reluctant to use their local languages because they are considered old-fashioned or impractical. However, small initiatives are emerging from social media to reintroduce local languages to young audiences, although the content sometimes displays inappropriate language forms.

“Some of young people cannot speak in local language ... they are shy if they can speak local language... Bahasa is more modern and practical. Local language are sometimes viewed as old-fashioned...”

“The influencers cannot give a good... local language as a speaker... most TikTokers use bad.. impolite language...” (DS, Participant)

Theme 4: The Role of Social Media and Education in Language Practice

Social-media and formal education play dual roles in language practices. On the one hand, social media reinforces the use of mixed languages (code-switching), integrating slang and English loanwords into digital communication. On the other hand, formal education provides limited space for local languages, with a greater emphasis on Indonesian and English. Nevertheless, education has the potential to be a means of strengthening multilingual skills if it is designed with a curriculum that incorporates local languages.

“Social media... really have influenced our multilingual language... young Indonesians combined Bahasa with English... adopt words and expressions from global trend and foreign language...”

“Formal education also limits multilingual practice... focus is mainly on Bahasa and English... while the local language are often ignored...” (DS, Participant)



4. Review Themes

This stage aims to review whether the data supports the identified themes, as well as to verify the internal coherence and separation between themes.

Multilingualism as a Social Inevitability

This theme has proven to be strong and consistent, as the informants mentioned the use of three types of languages (local, national, and foreign) in various areas of life (family, education, and social). Her statements reflect a broader social reality in which multilingualism is a natural part of life in Indonesia. The data consistently support this theme and do not overlap with other themes.

Dominance of Indonesian and English

This theme recurs and is explained in detail. Bahasa Indonesia is the dominant language in the education system and public interactions, while English is often seen as a status symbol. The interviewees mentioned the social perception that speaking English shows intelligence or a sense of “coolness.” This theme has a clear boundary from the themes of social media and local language preservation.

Challenges of Preserving Local Language

This theme is valid and important because it reflects the contradiction between the use of modern languages and local cultural identity. Although local languages are still used in specific contexts, especially in rural areas, there is a tendency for their use to decline in cities and among younger generations. The data reveal feelings of shame, a decline in local language skills, and a lack of support in formal education.

The Role of Social Media and Education in Language Practice

This theme is quite complex but cohesive. Formal education and social media have distinct influences: education fosters formality and standardization (e.g., Bahasa Indonesia and English), whereas social media enables creativity and the adoption of slang. Although there is some overlap with the theme of language dominance, the primary focus remains on how media and educational institutions facilitate or constrain multilingual practices.

5. Define Themes

At this stage, each theme is clearly defined and given a name that represents its essence in a concise but meaningful way.

Multilingualism as a Social Inevitability

Definition: This theme describes the daily reality of Indonesian society, which is accustomed to using more than one language. Local, national, and international languages are present in the lives of individuals, depending on their social context and educational background.

Indonesian and English as a Symbol of Dominance and Status

Definition: This theme highlights the hegemony of Indonesian and English, which not only dominate functionally in education and public communication but also symbolically reflect intelligence and modernity in the eyes of society.



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The Marginalization of Local Languages in the Modern Era

Definition: This theme explores the challenges of preserving regional languages due to negative perceptions, limited use, and inadequate institutional support. Local languages tend to be seen as irrelevant or “old-fashioned” by the younger generation.

The Ambivalence of the Role Social Media and Education in Language

Definition: This theme examines two major forces that shape young people’s language practices: education and social media, which can both strengthen and weaken the practice of multilingualism.

6. Write-Up

This study examines how linguistic practices among Indonesian youth reflect the evolving complexities of social, cultural, and global contexts. Through in-depth interviews with informants, four main themes emerged that reflect the current linguistic conditions: Multilingualism as a Social Inevitability, Dominance of Indonesian and English, Challenges of Preserving Local Languages, and The Role of Social Media and Education in Language Practices.

Multilingualism emerged as an inseparable part of the informants' lives from school age. The use of local languages, Indonesian, and foreign languages (especially English and Arabic) became a standard practice adapted to the local context. Education, especially in the *Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) environment, requires the ability to speak both Arabic and English, while family interactions often continue to use local languages, such as Acehese and Indonesian.

“Since I was in junior high school... I have been in boarding school which required me to able to speak in Arabic, English... and in daily life I familiar use English too... but my family... we only speak local language that are Acehese and Indonesians...”
(DS, Participant)

This suggests that language practices in Indonesia are not singular or rigid but rather relatively flexible, depending on the function and social domain. Bahasa Indonesia remains the primary language in formal and public contexts, but English is slowly building an image as a symbol of intellectuality and social status. Young people often feel that speaking English is a reflection of intelligence and global competitiveness.

“Our perceptions... who talk in English fluently is so cool... that is mean it looks so smart...” (DS, Participant)

English is no longer just a means of communication but has also become a social marker that differentiates those who are “modern” and “competitive” from those who are not. In this context, local languages experience degradation in use and status. Many young people feel ashamed of using their local language, and many are unable to speak it at all. Local languages are often viewed as “old-fashioned” and less relevant in the era of globalization.

“Some young people cannot speak nin local language... they are shy... because Bahasa is more modern and practical.” (DS, Participant)



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However, social media has opened up new opportunities for revitalizing local languages. Creative content using local languages has received a positive response, although some also contain impolite or vulgar language.

“In TikTok. some youth and creative content use their local language which makes them popular... but most of TikTokers use bad... impolite language.” (DS, Participant)

Formal education plays a significant role in shaping young people’s language habits, Indonesian and English receive a large portion of the curriculum, while local languages often appear only as a local content without significant reinforcement.

“Formal education... focus is mainly on Bahasa and English... while the local language is often ignored or seen as less important.” (DS, Participant)

On the other hand, social media provides a free space for linguistic expression. Code mixing, slang usage, and language creativity on social media are adequate means of practicing multilingualism, although they do not always support formal language maintenance.

“Young Indonesians combine Bahasa with English... and adopt ne words and expressions from global trend and foreign languages.” (DS, Participant)

Finally, the participant views multilingualism not as a burden but as a potential strength that can enhance cultural identity while increasing global competitiveness. Preserving local languages does not have to be at odds with mastering a foreign language. However, it can go hand in hand with the right approach, primarily through more inclusive language education and policies.

“Multilingualism supports strong communication skills... and maintain local language preserve cultural identity... build a more competitive, inclusive and culturally rich society.” (DS, Participant)

DISCUSSIONS

The finding that students use multiple languages (English, Indonesian, local, and even Arabic) in their daily lives strengthens the translanguaging approach in ELT classrooms, where students strategically utilize their language repertoires to facilitate comprehension of the target language. (Sugiharto, 2024) study demonstrated that translanguaging serves as a counter-narrative, enabling teachers to expand students' multilingual identity space and enhance classroom interactions. In addition, (Saputra & Atmowardoyo, 2015) found five types of translanguaging and their practical functions in English language learning in higher education. The practical implication is that ELT teachers need to be trained to recognize and facilitate translanguaging in the learning process, for example, through bilingual instruction or bilingual discussions, so that learning is more inclusive and effective.

The dominance of English as a symbol of intelligence and prestige reflects the phenomenon of linguistic imperialism, in which English maintains its hegemonic status through the use of teaching materials and educational policies. (Budairi, 2019) highlights textual and visual biases in ELT textbooks that favor the English-speaking perspective, thereby sidelining the content. The consequences for ELT policy: Implementing the World English approach in the curriculum is necessary, as well as preparing teaching materials that are local and critical of the discourse of English dominance.

(Sinaga & Putrawan, 2024) study revealed the ambivalence of ELT teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging: some accept and see its benefits, but others still adhere to



monolingual norms. This suggests that multilingual policies in ELT are not merely formal, they require support through teacher development and a shift in mindset, ensuring the implementation of translanguaging is integrative and pragmatic rather than merely rhetorical. Advances in language technology, such as the dataset and speech recognition models for regional languages, open up opportunities for innovative bilingual and multilingual learning. The implementation of language applications for local vocabulary, cultural introductions through digital content, and technology materials can be future ELT strategies. ELT policies need to support collaboration between language education and technology developers so that local teaching materials can be diversified through digital platforms, thereby strengthening language preservation as well as global language competency.

The finding that local languages are marginalized, but social media and translanguaging show potential for revitalization underscores the urgency of an inclusive multilingual approach. Dewey's theory of contextual learning and Canagarajah's critical translanguaging pedagogy suggest that ELT curricula should accommodate mother tongues as cultural and cognitive resources. This means that national education policies should integrate the use of local languages in assessments, bilingual literacy, and classroom cultural activities—not just local content alone

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that language practices among Indonesian youth cannot be separated from the complex dynamics of social, cultural, and global influences. There are four main interrelated findings: (1) multilingualism is an everyday social reality, (2) the dominance of Indonesian and English creates a language hierarchy, (3) the preservation of local languages faces significant challenges from educational perceptions and structures, and (4) social media and education have dual roles in strengthening and weakening linguistic diversity.

The implications of these findings are broad. For teaching practice, an approach that supports translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in English Language Teaching (ELT) classes is needed. Teachers need to be trained not only to teach English exclusively but also to utilize students' linguistic diversity as a learning asset. For educational policy, the curriculum must be more inclusive of local languages and provide real (not just symbolic) space for learning. For future research, it is essential to investigate further how young people's linguistic identities are formed and negotiated in the digital era, as well as how technology can be leveraged to support inclusive and meaningful multilingual learning.

Finally, by gaining a deeper and more critical understanding of multilingual practices, we can design learning systems that are not only academically effective but also culturally and socially just.

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