

A Comparative Sociolinguistic Analysis of Indonesian and Local Language Use: Evidence from Public and Islamic Boarding Schools in Gunungputri

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dynamics of language use and attitudes toward bilingual practices in two contrasting institutional contexts in Indonesia: a public junior high school (SMPN 04 Gunungputri) and an Islamic boarding school (Pesantren Rumah Al-Qur'an Daarut Tarbiyah). Guided by sociolinguistic theories of language shift and maintenance, the research explores how national and local languages interact within educational and domestic domains. Employing a mixed-method design with survey questionnaires and descriptive statistical analysis, data were collected from students in both institutions to examine intergenerational transmission, language practices at school and home, and attitudes toward bilingualism. The results indicate that while Bahasa Indonesia overwhelmingly dominates in formal educational settings, local languages remain vital in home and community domains, with maternal figures playing a central role in intergenerational transmission. Students across both institutions expressed strongly positive attitudes toward bilingual practices, high confidence in using both languages, and firm resistance to eliminating local languages. Notably, pesantren students demonstrated stronger endorsement of the benefits of bilingualism compared to their counterparts in public schools, suggesting that religious schooling may reinforce rather than diminish multilingual repertoires. These findings highlight the complex interplay between institutional environments, national policies, and cultural identity in shaping linguistic behavior. The study implies that policies to sustain linguistic diversity should move beyond family and community spheres by incorporating local languages into school curricula and extracurricular activities, thereby strengthening both cultural heritage and national cohesion.

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Introduction

Language is not only a medium of communication but also a social practice that reflects cultural identity, social hierarchy, and interpersonal relations. As a symbolic system, language allows speakers to construct meaning, transmit knowledge, and negotiate cultural values across generations (Dominguez-Whitehead et al., 2016; Han & Varghese, 2019; Li & Huang, 2021). In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, where the national language coexists with hundreds of local languages, the dynamics of language use have been central to sociolinguistic inquiry. The

interaction between Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language, and local vernaculars, as heritage languages, demonstrates how linguistic choices are deeply embedded in cultural, educational, and social contexts (Fauziyah & Rohmah, 2025; Kushartanti, 2020; Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022; Samuel, 2025).

The Indonesian context provides a rich setting for analyzing the interplay between national and local languages. Bahasa Indonesia functions as a lingua franca, ensuring interethnic communication and national unity, while local languages are markers of cultural identity and heritage preservation (Alwan et al., 2024; Kertiasih, 2018; Kushartanti, 2020). However, the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia in formal domains such as education, governance, and media has led to a decline in the use of local languages, especially among younger generations (Andriyanti & Riazi, 2020; Noveintine, 2024; Pramuniati et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025). Scholars have argued that the marginalization of local languages may accelerate language shift and language loss, which threatens linguistic diversity and erodes cultural heritage (Bromham et al., 2021; Collins, 2022). This phenomenon is particularly visible in urban and semi-urban areas where inter-ethnic communication compels speakers to prioritize the national language over local dialects.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language variation and choice are influenced by multiple factors, including domain, setting, and speaker identity. Domain analysis, for example, highlights that language use varies depending on whether communication occurs at home, in school, or within religious institutions. Similarly, Balqis & Basuki, (2022) concept of situational and metaphorical code-switching explains how speakers strategically alternate between languages to signal identity or align with social norms. More recent studies emphasize how language ideologies shape linguistic behavior, with speakers often associating national languages with modernity and mobility, while local languages are perceived as traditional or even backward (Abtahian et al., 2022; Samuel, 2025). These frameworks are essential for understanding language practices in Indonesian schools and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), where educational policies and cultural environments differ significantly.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping language practices. Public schools in Indonesia predominantly use Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction, reinforcing its position as the national language (Samuel, 2025; Stroupe & Halimi, 2025). Conversely, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) often maintain local cultural traditions, including the use of regional languages alongside Arabic for religious purposes (Muhammad & Purbani, 2024; Sofyan et al., 2022). This contrast provides an opportunity to examine how institutional environments mediate the balance between Bahasa Indonesia and local languages. Previous studies have investigated bilingualism and diglossia in Indonesian education (Fauziyah & Rohmah, 2025), yet few have compared language practices across different types of educational settings such as public schools and pesantren.

Furthermore, while existing research has highlighted the decline of local languages among younger speakers (Fitriati et al., 2025; Noveintine, 2024), less attention has been given to how students themselves perceive and negotiate the value of local languages in their everyday interactions. Understanding students' attitudes is critical because language shift does not occur merely through structural forces but also through speakers' agency in valuing or devaluing particular languages (Fauziyah & Rohmah, 2025; Misnadin & Yuliawati, 2023). Studies in

sociolinguistics have shown that language attitudes influence language maintenance and revitalization efforts (Sofyan et al., 2022; Stroupe & Halimi, 2025). Yet, there is limited empirical evidence on how these dynamics unfold in Indonesian contexts where national, local, and religious languages intersect.

Against this background, the present study seeks to contribute to the literature by conducting a comparative analysis of Indonesian and local language use in two distinct educational environments: a public junior high school (SMPN 04 Gunungputri) and an Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren Rumah Al-Qur'an Daarut Tarbiyah). By focusing on students' reported practices and perceptions, this study aims to capture not only the patterns of language use but also the underlying attitudes that sustain or inhibit bilingual practices. The novelty of this research lies in its comparative design, which allows for an examination of how institutional and cultural contexts shape language practices differently.

The research gap addressed here concerns the lack of comparative studies that simultaneously investigate language use in both secular and religious educational settings in Indonesia. While prior research has documented language attitudes in universities or general communities (Abtahian et al., 2022; Fauziyah & Rohmah, 2025; Noveintine, 2024; Stroupe & Halimi, 2025), few studies have systematically compared how students in public schools and pesantren perceive and use local languages alongside Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by answering the following questions: (1) How do students in public schools and pesantren use Indonesian and local languages in their daily interactions? (2) What are the dominant factors influencing their linguistic choices? and (3) How do students perceive the relevance and value of local languages in the face of increasing dominance of Bahasa Indonesia?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the broader sociolinguistic debate on language maintenance and shift in multilingual contexts. It also provides practical implications for policymakers, educators, and cultural institutions in promoting balanced bilingualism that safeguards linguistic diversity while supporting national integration.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to examine patterns of Indonesian and local language use among students in two different educational contexts, namely a public junior high school (SMPN 04 Gunungputri) and an Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren Rumah Al-Qur'an Daarut Tarbiyah). A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of sociolinguistic practices and students' perceptions in their natural settings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A total of 60 students participated in the study, with 35 drawn from the public school and 25 from the pesantren, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants were directly relevant to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data were collected through three complementary methods: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. The questionnaires, distributed online for the public school and offline for the pesantren, were designed to capture students' language use in different domains, such as home, school, and peer interactions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gain deeper insights into their attitudes toward Indonesian and local languages. In addition, classroom and extracurricular observations were

conducted to validate the self-reported data and to capture actual patterns of language use in practice.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by combining multiple methods of data collection. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants to verify accuracy, while peer debriefing with linguistics scholars was used to reduce researcher bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with informed consent obtained from all participants and pseudonyms assigned to protect their anonymity.

Data analysis involved both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Questionnaire results were summarized through frequency counts and percentages to identify patterns of language use, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using Braun & Clarke, (2006) thematic analysis framework. This combination of approaches allowed the study to capture both the distribution of language use and the underlying reasons behind students' linguistic choices.

By integrating quantitative descriptions with qualitative insights, the methodology ensured a rigorous and comprehensive account of how students in public schools and pesantren negotiate between Indonesian and local languages in their daily interactions.

Results and Discussion

Transmission of Local Languages

The data revealed that intergenerational transmission of local languages is still taking place, although unevenly distributed. Most respondents (63.9%) reported acquiring their local language from both parents, while 30.1% credited their mother as the main source, and only 6% from their father. This indicates that maternal figures play a stronger role in sustaining local language use within families.

Language Use in Educational and Home Domains

Language use patterns differed across domains. In the school setting, Bahasa Indonesia dominated, with 83.1% of students reporting exclusive use of Indonesian, and 16.9% reporting a mix of Indonesian and local languages. No respondents reported using local languages exclusively in school. At home, however, the distribution was more balanced: 56.6% used Indonesian, 31.3% combined Indonesian with a local language, and 12% used only a local language. These findings suggest that while schools reinforce the dominance of Indonesian, the home domain still provides space for bilingual practices.

Students' Attitudes toward Bilingual Practices

Students' perceptions were measured across several dimensions, including bilingual use, perceived impacts, benefits, cultural perceptions, confidence, and attitudes toward the elimination of local languages. The results are summarized in Table 1.

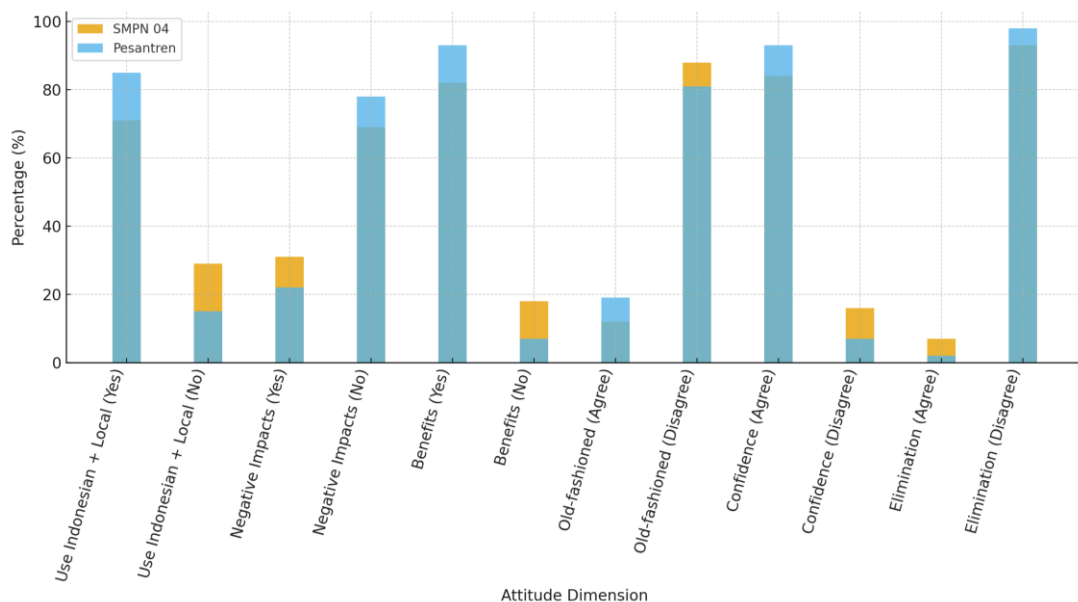
Table 1. Students' Attitudes toward Bilingual Practices

Attitude Dimension	Response	SMPN 04 (%)	Pesantren (%)
Use Indonesian + Local	Yes	71	85
	No	29	15
Negative impacts of mixing	Yes	31	22
	No	69	78
Benefits of mixing	Yes	82	93
	No	18	7
Local language as "old-fashioned"	Agree	12	19
	Disagree	88	81
Confidence in bilingual use	Agree	84	93
	Disagree	16	7
Elimination of local language	Agree	7	2
	Disagree	93	98

The results demonstrate that both groups of students overwhelmingly value bilingual practices. A strong majority reported using Indonesian and local languages together (71% SMP; 85% pesantren). Most did not perceive negative impacts (69% SMP; 78% pesantren), and nearly all acknowledged benefits (82% SMP; 93% pesantren). The majority also rejected the notion that local languages are "old-fashioned" (88% SMP; 81% pesantren). Confidence in bilingual use was high (84% SMP; 93% pesantren), and nearly all respondents opposed the elimination of local languages (93% SMP; 98% pesantren).

Visual Representation of Findings

To enhance clarity and enable direct comparison between institutions, students' attitudes toward bilingual practices were consolidated into six key dimensions: (1) use of Indonesian and local languages together, (2) rejection of negative impacts from bilingual use, (3) recognition of benefits from bilingual practices, (4) disagreement with the notion that local languages are "old-fashioned," (5) confidence in bilingual communication, and (6) opposition to the elimination of local languages.

**Figure 1.** Comparative Attitudes toward Bilingual Practices

The results illustrated in Figure 1 confirm the consistently positive orientation of students toward bilingualism. In both institutions, a majority of respondents reported practicing bilingual communication (71% SMP; 85% pesantren) and strongly rejected the perception that local languages are outdated (88% SMP; 81% pesantren). Recognition of the benefits of bilingual practices was especially high in pesantren (93%) compared to SMP (82%). Confidence in using both languages was also robust in both groups (84% SMP; 93% pesantren). Most notably, opposition to the elimination of local languages was nearly unanimous, with 93% of SMP students and 98% of pesantren students rejecting such a proposition. These findings underscore that, although Bahasa Indonesia dominates formal domains, students across educational contexts remain supportive of maintaining and valuing local languages alongside the national language.

Overall, the findings show that Indonesian is dominant in formal education, while local languages retain a presence in domestic and informal contexts. Students expressed strong support for bilingual practices, high confidence in using both languages, and resistance to eliminating local languages. These patterns suggest that although Indonesian is firmly established as the language of education and public life, local languages continue to hold symbolic and cultural importance for younger generations.

Discussion

The present findings resonate strongly with and also extend several strands of sociolinguistic research. Consistent with Fishman's domain model and intergenerational transmission framework, the data show that the home remains a crucial site for local-language maintenance even when the national language dominates formal domains (Baker, 2011; Hornberger, 2008). This explains why students reported continued use of local languages at home despite near-universal use of Indonesian in school.

The broadly positive attitudes and high self-reported confidence in bilingual use align with García's conceptualization of additive bilingualism—where bilingual repertoires are seen as assets rather than deficits—mirroring findings from bilingual education research that communities which view heritage languages positively are likelier to sustain them (Baker, 2011; Hornberger, 2008). In the Indonesian context, our results corroborate Musgrave's observations about the resilience of local languages in domestic and community settings, while adding nuance by showing that religious schooling (pesantren) can bolster positive attitudes toward multilingual repertoires rather than accelerate language shift (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014).

Compared with UNESCO and endangered-language literature that warn of rapid language attrition where institutional support is lacking (UNESCO, 2021), our study offers a more hopeful portrait: even where Indonesian is institutionally dominant, strong affective ties, parental transmission (notably maternal influence), and positive student attitudes produce conditions that may slow shift. At the same time, the empirical pattern of near-exclusive Indonesian use in school echoes policy-oriented analyses showing that national language policy and school practices strongly privilege the national code, which can indirectly reduce opportunities for classroom-based maintenance unless deliberately counteracted (Hornberger, 2008).

The novelty of this study lies in its direct, comparative focus on two contrasting institutional environments—public junior high school and pesantren—and in demonstrating

that positive attitudes toward bilingualism are robust across both. Pesantren students in this sample even showed higher endorsement of bilingual benefits and stronger opposition to eliminating local languages, which contrasts with prior work that treated religious schools either as similar to or less supportive of vernacular maintenance. In doing so, this study fills a comparative gap in Indonesian sociolinguistic studies (Baker, 2011; Fitriati et al., 2025).

Practically, the findings imply that policy interventions aiming to preserve linguistic diversity should not only target family and community programs but also leverage school curricula. Introducing culturally responsive activities, extracurriculars, and teacher training that legitimize local languages alongside Indonesian would capitalize on already-positive student attitudes and provide structured domains for intergenerational transmission (Baker, 2011; Hornberger, 2008).

Finally, important limitations qualify these conclusions. The study used purposive sampling with a modest sample size and uneven representation across the two sites, relied primarily on self-reported questionnaire data that are susceptible to social desirability and recall bias, and lacked longitudinal follow-up to assess whether positive attitudes translate into sustained competence and intergenerational transmission over time. Consequently, future research should employ larger, probabilistic samples, incorporate direct proficiency measures and naturalistic interactional data, and adopt longitudinal designs to track whether institutional or policy changes produce measurable effects on language use and vitality (Fitriati et al., 2025; Misnadin & Yuliawati, 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that while Indonesian overwhelmingly dominates in formal educational domains, local languages remain resilient in home and community contexts, sustained through parental transmission—particularly maternal influence—and reinforced by students' broadly positive attitudes toward bilingual practices. The comparative analysis between a public junior high school and an Islamic boarding school reveals that institutional setting does not diminish students' appreciation of local languages; in fact, pesantren students demonstrated slightly stronger support for bilingualism and more decisive rejection of language elimination. The novelty of this research lies in its dual-site comparison and its focus on students' perceptions, showing that positive attitudes coexist with declining fluency, thereby highlighting both opportunities and challenges for language maintenance. These findings imply that educational policies and school-based initiatives should actively incorporate local languages in curricula and extracurricular activities to complement family transmission and prevent further language shift. At the same time, limitations such as the modest, purposively selected sample and reliance on self-reported data call for broader, longitudinal, and multi-method research to assess the long-term vitality of local languages in Indonesia's rapidly changing sociolinguistic landscape.

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