

Between Identity, Cultural Revival, and Social Inclusion: Language Revitalization and the Politics of Belonging in Multiethnic Tidore Kepulauan

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Abstract

The article examines how language revitalization operates as both a cultural project and a political strategy in the multiethnic city of Tidore Kepulauan, North Maluku. Focusing on the institutionalization of the Tidore language through local education policy, public campaigns, and cultural initiatives, the study explores how language becomes a symbolic medium for reclaiming historical dignity, negotiating collective identity, and redefining belonging. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between June and October 2024, including classroom observations, policy document analysis, and 30 semi-structured interviews with teachers, school principals, education officials, parents, cultural activists, and community leaders, this study reveals the ambivalent effects of language revitalization in a plural society. On the one hand, the policy strengthens Tidore's cultural pride and challenges the perceived symbolic dominance of Ternate. On the other hand, it generates concerns among non-Tidore communities regarding cultural exclusion, linguistic assimilation, and educational equity. The findings show that language revitalization is not merely a neutral act of preservation, but a contested process shaped by historical memory, symbolic power, and everyday negotiations of identity. The article argues that local language policy in postcolonial and multilingual societies must move beyond ethnic restoration toward inclusive and dialogic models of cultural belonging.

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Introduction

Language revitalization has increasingly become one of the most significant cultural and political projects in multilingual societies. It is no longer understood merely as an effort to preserve vocabulary, grammar, or oral traditions, but as a broader struggle over identity, recognition, dignity, and belonging. Recent scholarship has shown that language recovery is deeply connected to historical memory and social justice, especially when minority and Indigenous communities attempt to repair the cultural damage produced by colonialism, state homogenization, migration, and unequal access to symbolic power (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022; Chikasha & Beukes, 2021; De Costa, 2021; Rauf et al., 2025). In this sense, language is not only a communicative instrument; it is also a social archive through which communities remember their past, claim their place in the present, and imagine their collective future.

The revitalization of local and minority languages has also been reshaped by the growing role of technology, ecological knowledge, and intergenerational learning (Meighan, 2024; Rauf et al., 2024). Digital platforms, online archives, mobile applications, and machine-learning tools can expand access to endangered languages, but they cannot replace the authority of community memory and cultural practice. Indigenous language studies emphasize that technology becomes meaningful only

when it strengthens local ownership, supports intergenerational transmission, and remains connected to land-based knowledge and community-defined goals (Meighan, 2021, 2024; Moshagen et al., 2024). This perspective is important because it shifts revitalization from a purely technical project into a culturally grounded process of reactivating identity.

Community participation remains central to the success of language revitalization. Language survival depends not only on whether a language is taught in schools, but also on whether speakers, families, cultural activists, and institutions create meaningful spaces for its everyday use. Research on minority language learning shows that conversation-based practice allows learners to experience language as part of social identity rather than merely as a formal subject, while grassroots activism demonstrates that revitalization becomes stronger when communities organize themselves as active cultural agents (Niiranen, 2021; O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024; Wiltshire et al., 2024). Therefore, language revitalization is most effective when it moves beyond symbolic celebration and becomes a participatory movement of cultural rearticulation.

However, revitalization is never politically neutral. While it may empower historically marginalized groups, it may also create new symbolic hierarchies when one language is elevated as the privileged marker of authenticity. In multilingual settings, the standardization and institutionalization of a minority language may unintentionally marginalize vernacular speakers, non-dominant varieties, or communities that do not share the promoted linguistic heritage. Recent studies on Basque revitalization, minority language education, and linguistic landscapes show that language policy often determines whose voice is authorized, whose heritage is displayed, and whose belonging becomes publicly recognizable (Bodó & Fazakas, 2025; Gondra, 2025; Robinson-Jones, 2026). This reveals a central paradox: revitalization may restore dignity, but it may also produce exclusion if cultural recognition is organized through a narrow ethnolinguistic frame.

In Southeast Asia, language policy is shaped by the tension between national integration, global competitiveness, and local cultural survival. The region is characterized by remarkable linguistic diversity, yet education and administration often privilege national and international languages over local languages. Recent scholarship argues that language education in Southeast Asia needs to shift from viewing multilingualism as a problem to recognizing it as a resource, while broader studies of Indigenous language protection show that safeguarding linguistic diversity requires policy commitment, educational support, and community involvement (Kundra et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023). This argument is particularly relevant for Indonesia, where Bahasa Indonesia functions as the language of national unity, English is associated with global mobility, and hundreds of local languages continue to face pressure from changing patterns of use.

Indonesia offers an important case for examining the politics of language revitalization. Although the country is widely recognized for its linguistic diversity, many regional languages face declining use among younger generations due to urbanization, formal schooling, migration, digital communication, and the growing prestige of Indonesian and English. Recent Indonesian studies show that regional language revitalization increasingly requires a paradigm shift from preservation-oriented programs toward more participatory, adaptive, and context-sensitive approaches, especially as local languages become vulnerable when they are no longer used consistently in family domains, public spaces, digital interaction, and youth cultural practices (Budiono et al., 2024; Fatinah et al., 2025; Kaharuddin & Kaharuddin, 2024). Thus, Indonesia provides a productive context for

studying how revitalization operates at the intersection of policy, identity, and everyday multilingual life.

The vulnerability of regional languages in Indonesia is also visible in patterns of language shift and changing youth attitudes. Studies on Malay in North Sumatra, intergenerational language shift among regional-speaking families, and young speakers of Skou, Tabla, and Biak in Jayapura indicate that local languages may remain symbolically valued while losing their practical function in daily communication. These findings suggest that revitalization cannot rely solely on formal recognition; it must also address family transmission, peer interaction, language attitudes, and the prestige of local languages among younger speakers (Mukhamdanah et al., 2025; Pramuniati et al., 2024, Pramuniati et al., 2025). Without such attention, local languages may survive as cultural symbols but weaken as living media of social interaction.

Existing studies on Indonesian language policy have contributed important insights into the relationship between language, education, and identity. National language policy continues to position Bahasa Indonesia as both a unifying symbol and an international cultural asset, while translanguaging practices reveal that Indonesian education is increasingly shaped by multilingual realities that exceed rigid language boundaries. In school contexts, linguistic landscapes further show that visible languages in public educational spaces are not merely decorative but reflect how policy is implemented, contested, and experienced in everyday institutional life (Permana & Rohmah, 2024; Rafael et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). These studies indicate that language policy is not simply a top-down regulation, but a lived practice negotiated through schools, public spaces, and everyday language choices.

Nevertheless, studies on regional language revitalization in Indonesia often remain focused on language vitality, curriculum implementation, teaching materials, or digital preservation. Less attention has been given to how local language policy becomes entangled with historical rivalry, symbolic competition, and the politics of belonging in a multiethnic urban setting. Research on multilingual education in rural Indonesia shows that policy ideals often encounter serious classroom challenges when teacher preparation, learning resources, and institutional support remain uneven, while ethnographic work on the Limola language demonstrates that language survival is closely tied to identity formation, cultural agency, and community participation (Hakim et al., 2025; Rusdiansyah et al., 2025). These insights are valuable, but the specific question of how revitalization may simultaneously empower one community and unsettle others remains underexplored.

This article addresses that gap by examining the case of Tidore Kepulauan, North Maluku, where the revitalization of the Tidore language is not merely a cultural preservation program but also a symbolic political project. Tidore has a long historical memory as a former sultanate with significant regional influence, yet in contemporary North Maluku it is often positioned in comparison with Ternate, a neighboring city whose language, administrative influence, and symbolic prestige have been more visibly institutionalized. In this context, the promotion of the Tidore language through local education policy, public campaigns, dictionaries, cultural initiatives, and government regulation cannot be understood only as an attempt to protect linguistic heritage. It also represents an effort to restore historical dignity and reclaim symbolic parity within the wider cultural politics of North Maluku.

The Tidore case is particularly complex because the city is not ethnically homogeneous. Tidore Kepulauan is home not only to Tidorese communities, but also to Ternate, Makianese, Butonese,

Buginese, Javanese, Gorontaloese, Tobelo, and other groups whose everyday linguistic practices are shaped by migration, trade, education, and interethnic interaction. In such a setting, a language policy that elevates Tidore as the emblem of local identity may strengthen Tidorese pride, but it may also raise questions among non-Tidore communities about cultural representation, linguistic burden, and educational fairness. The central issue is therefore not simply whether the Tidore language can be revitalized, but how revitalization can be designed without transforming cultural recognition into cultural exclusion.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it expands the discussion of Indonesian language revitalization beyond technical questions of preservation, curriculum, and vitality by foregrounding the relationship between language, historical rivalry, and symbolic recognition. Second, it shows how local language policy may operate as both an empowering and exclusionary force in a multiethnic urban setting. Third, it proposes that language revitalization in postcolonial and multilingual societies should be understood as a politics of shared belonging rather than a return to ethnic purity. The central argument of this article is that in Tidore, language revitalization will become socially meaningful only when it functions not as a border of cultural membership, but as a bridge of collective dignity.

Method

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic design to examine how the revitalization of the Tidore language is interpreted, practiced, and contested within the multiethnic social landscape of Tidore Kepulauan, North Maluku. An ethnographic approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand language policy not merely as a formal regulation, but as a lived social practice embedded in everyday interactions, institutional routines, historical memory, and community negotiations. Ethnography enables researchers to observe how people attach meanings to cultural practices in natural settings, especially when those practices involve identity, power, and belonging (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In this study, language revitalization was therefore approached as both a policy process and a cultural experience.

Fieldwork was conducted between June and October 2024 in several elementary schools, public spaces, and community settings in Tidore Kepulauan. The research sites were selected purposively because they represented important arenas where Tidore language revitalization was being introduced, discussed, or practiced. These included schools implementing or preparing to implement Tidore as a local content subject, public events where the Tidore language was promoted, and community spaces where cultural activists and local residents negotiated the meaning of language revival. The selection of sites followed the logic of qualitative inquiry, in which participants and locations are chosen based on their relevance to the research problem rather than statistical representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through three main techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and policy document analysis. Participant observation was conducted in classrooms where the Tidore language was introduced as part of local content learning, as well as in public events and government-supported language campaigns. During observation, attention was given to classroom interaction, teacher explanation, student response, language use, learning materials, and symbolic practices surrounding the promotion of Tidore language. Field notes were written to document both verbal and non-verbal forms of participation, including moments of enthusiasm, hesitation, negotiation, and resistance.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants representing key stakeholders in the revitalization process. These included elementary school teachers, school principals, officials from the local education department, parents from Tidore and non-Tidore ethnic backgrounds, cultural activists, youth literacy actors, and community leaders. The interviews explored participants' views on the meaning of Tidore language revitalization, the role of schools in preserving local language, the historical relationship between Tidore and Ternate, and the perceived impact of language policy on multiethnic communities. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a flexible manner to allow participants to narrate their experiences, concerns, and interpretations in their own terms. The composition of participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Participants

Participant Category	Number of Participants	Relevance to the Study
Elementary school teachers	8	Implementers of local language learning in classroom contexts
School principals	4	Institutional actors responsible for school-level policy response
Education department officials	4	Policy actors involved in curriculum and language revitalization programs
Tidore parents	4	Community members who identify with Tidore language and culture
Non-Tidore parents	4	Community members affected by the policy from outside the Tidore ethnic group
Cultural activists and youth literacy actors	4	Grassroots actors involved in language and cultural revitalization
Community leaders	2	Local figures who interpret language policy through historical and cultural memory
Total	30	

In addition to observation and interviews, this study analyzed relevant policy and institutional documents. These included local regulations concerning the Tidore language curriculum, education department guidelines, teaching materials, dictionaries, public campaign materials, and official statements related to language revitalization. Document analysis was used to examine how the Tidore language was represented in formal policy discourse, particularly in relation to cultural preservation, character education, local wisdom, historical dignity, and regional identity. This enabled the study to compare official narratives with community-level interpretations and classroom realities.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, field notes, and policy documents were read repeatedly to identify recurring patterns, tensions, and meanings. The coding process combined deductive and inductive procedures. Deductive codes were informed by the study's conceptual focus on language revitalization, symbolic power, identity politics, and belonging, while inductive codes emerged from participants' narratives and observed practices. Thematic analysis was used because it allows researchers to identify patterned meanings across qualitative data while remaining sensitive to context, interpretation, and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Through this process, the analysis generated several key themes, including language as historical dignity, school-based institutionalization, non-Tidore anxieties, grassroots cultural activism, and the paradox of inclusion and exclusion.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied data triangulation across interviews, observations, and policy documents. Statements from policy actors were compared with school-level practices and community responses. Similarly, classroom observations were interpreted alongside teachers' and parents' interview accounts to avoid relying on a single source of data. Reflexive notes were also maintained throughout the research process to record the researcher's interpretive decisions, positionality, and possible assumptions when dealing with sensitive issues of ethnicity, language, and historical rivalry.

Ethical considerations were central to the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, especially because the study addressed sensitive issues related to ethnic identity, linguistic belonging, and perceptions of exclusion. The research was conducted with respect for local norms, cultural protocols, and the social complexity of Tidore as a multiethnic city.

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings show that the revitalization of the Tidore language operates through a complex interaction between historical memory, local policy, educational practice, and everyday negotiations of belonging. Rather than functioning merely as a cultural preservation program, the policy has become a symbolic arena through which Tidorese identity is reasserted, historical dignity is reclaimed, and the boundaries of local belonging are renegotiated. At the same time, the implementation of the policy reveals tensions in a multiethnic city where not all residents identify with Tidore language and culture. The analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and policy documents generated four major themes: language as symbolic reclamation, institutionalization through education and policy, non-Tidore concerns over inclusion, and grassroots participation in cultural revitalization.

Language Revitalization as Symbolic Reclamation of Tidore Dignity

The first major finding is that the revitalization of the Tidore language is strongly connected to the symbolic reclamation of historical dignity. For many Tidorese stakeholders, language is not viewed merely as a medium of communication or a subject to be taught in school. It is understood as a marker of collective identity, historical continuity, and cultural authority. This perception was especially visible among cultural activists and community leaders, who repeatedly associated Tidore language with the memory of the sultanate, ancestral values, and the need to restore Tidore's position within the cultural landscape of North Maluku. One cultural activist explained:

“For us, the Tidore language is not only about speaking. It is about remembering who we are. If the language disappears from schools and public life, then the history of Tidore will also slowly disappear from the minds of young people.”
(*Cultural activist, interview, August 2024*)

The statement above shows that language revitalization is experienced as a form of cultural memory work. The language is not treated as an isolated linguistic system, but as a vessel through which the

community remembers its past and asserts its presence in the present. For this reason, the promotion of Tidore language is interpreted as an attempt to restore the symbolic position of Tidore within the broader historical relationship between Tidore and Ternate.

The historical rivalry between Tidore and Ternate emerged as an important background in participants' interpretations of language policy. Several participants stated that Ternate had long enjoyed greater administrative visibility, wider linguistic influence, and stronger institutional recognition in North Maluku. Against this background, the institutionalization of Tidore language becomes a form of symbolic correction. A community leader expressed this sentiment as follows:

“Ternate has long been seen as more dominant in government, trade, and language use. Tidore also has a great history, but sometimes our language is treated as if it is secondary. This policy is important because it reminds people that Tidore also has dignity.”
(Community leader, interview, September 2024)

The interview excerpt above illustrates how language policy is tied to historical comparison and symbolic competition. The revitalization of Tidore language is therefore not only about preventing language decline, but also about reclaiming parity within a regional order where cultural prestige has been unevenly distributed. The findings also show that the Tidore language is often framed as the “voice” of the land and the people. This framing appears in policy discourse, cultural activism, and community narratives. A youth literacy actor described the meaning of the language in emotional terms:

“When children read stories in Tidore language, they are not only learning words. They are meeting their grandparents' world, their stories, their jokes, and their way of seeing life.”
(Youth literacy actor, interview, July 2024)

The statement above demonstrates that language revitalization is not limited to formal preservation. It also involves affective attachment, intergenerational memory, and the transmission of cultural sensibility. In this context, Tidore language becomes a bridge between older and younger generations. However, this symbolic reclamation also carries political consequences. When Tidore language is positioned as the central marker of local identity, it may create an implicit hierarchy between those who inherit the language and those who encounter it as an institutional requirement. Thus, the language becomes a source of pride for Tidorese communities while also raising questions about how local identity should be defined in a multiethnic city.

Institutionalizing Tidore Language through Education and Local Policy

The second major finding concerns the institutionalization of Tidore language through education and local policy. The municipal government of Tidore Kepulauan has taken formal steps to promote the Tidore language through local content curriculum, school-based language activities, public campaigns, dictionary distribution, and regulatory support. These initiatives indicate that language revitalization is no longer limited to informal cultural practice but has entered the domain of state policy and educational planning.

Schools play a central role in this process. The inclusion of Tidore language as a local content subject reflects the government's effort to place the language within formal education. Through this

policy, schools become key institutions for transmitting local language, cultural knowledge, and identity values to younger generations. One education official stated:

“The school is the most strategic place to introduce Tidore language to children. If we depend only on the family, not all children will receive the same exposure. Through school, the language can be introduced more systematically.”

(Education department official, interview, June 2024)

The statement reflects the government’s belief that formal education can compensate for the weakening of intergenerational language transmission in family and community domains. The school is imagined as a space where language revitalization can be made systematic, measurable, and institutionally sustainable. Teachers and school principals generally recognized the importance of local language learning as part of character education and cultural preservation. A school principal explained:

“We support the teaching of Tidore language because children need to know the culture of the place where they live. But teachers also need clear materials, training, and examples of how to teach it to students from different ethnic backgrounds.”

(School principal, interview, August 2024)

The excerpt reveals both support and caution. While the school acknowledges the value of Tidore language learning, implementation requires pedagogical preparation. Teachers cannot simply be instructed to teach the language without curriculum guidance, teaching materials, and strategies for multilingual classrooms. A teacher made a similar point:

“Some students understand Tidore words because they hear them at home. But other students do not understand at all. So, in class, we cannot assume that all children start from the same level.”

(Elementary school teacher, interview, September 2024)

The interview excerpt highlights one of the practical challenges of implementing local language education in a multiethnic city. Students’ linguistic backgrounds differ significantly. Those from Tidore-speaking families may have prior exposure, while students from non-Tidore families may encounter the language as an entirely new subject. This difference has implications for teaching methods, assessment, and classroom equity. In addition to curriculum policy, the revitalization effort is supported through the production and distribution of learning materials, including dictionaries and teaching resources. These materials are important because one of the practical challenges in local language education is the availability of standardized references. The development of Tidore-language materials signals an attempt to transform the language into an institutionally teachable subject. However, several teachers noted that the availability of materials alone is not sufficient. They require contextual examples, child-friendly texts, and classroom activities that connect language learning with students’ everyday lives.

Negotiating Belonging: Responses from Non-Tidore Communities

The third major finding concerns the responses of non-Tidore communities to the language revitalization policy. Tidore Kepulauan is a multiethnic city inhabited not only by Tidorese communities but also by Makianese, Ternate, Butonese, Buginese, Javanese, Gorontalo, Tobelo, and other groups. This diversity shapes how the policy is received and interpreted. For non-Tidore families, the institutionalization of Tidore language may be seen both as an opportunity for local integration and as a potential source of cultural pressure. Some non-Tidore parents viewed the policy pragmatically. They considered Tidore language learning useful because their children live and study in Tidore. One non-Tidore parent stated:

“We live in Tidore, so it is good if our children know the local language. It can help them interact with friends and respect the culture here. But the school should remember that not all children speak Tidore at home.”

(Non-Tidore parent, interview, September 2024)

The statement shows that non-Tidore communities do not necessarily reject the policy. Many recognize the value of learning Tidore language as part of social adaptation and respect for local culture. However, their acceptance is conditional upon fairness and sensitivity to linguistic diversity. Another parent expressed concern about assessment and classroom pressure:

“My child is not Tidorese. If the lesson is only for introduction, I agree. But if the grades are treated the same as children who already speak Tidore at home, then it becomes difficult for children like mine.”

(Non-Tidore parent, interview, October 2024)

The excerpt reveals an important issue of educational equity. The concern is not the existence of Tidore language learning itself, but the possibility that non-Tidore students may be evaluated under the same expectations as native or heritage speakers. This creates the risk of unequal learning outcomes if the curriculum does not differentiate between students' linguistic starting points. Some participants also raised questions about cultural representation. A parent from a migrant family explained:

“Tidore culture is important, but this city is now inhabited by many communities. It would be better if children also learned that Tidore is a place where many groups live together.”

(Parent from non-Tidore background, interview, October 2024)

The statement suggests that the issue is not resistance to Tidore identity, but the desire for a more inclusive narrative of local belonging. Non-Tidore communities may accept Tidore language as part of the city's heritage, but they also hope that the policy will recognize the multiethnic character of Tidore Kepulauan. The findings therefore show that the policy produces a negotiation between integration and assimilation. Integration occurs when non-Tidore communities are invited to learn Tidore language as part of shared local life without losing their own identities. Assimilation, however, becomes a concern when the policy is perceived as requiring non-Tidore groups to adjust to a singular cultural standard. This distinction is crucial. The success of language revitalization in a

multiethnic setting depends on whether it is experienced as an invitation to participate or as pressure to conform.

Grassroots Literacy Movements and Community-Based Revitalization

The fourth major finding is the important role of grassroots literacy movements in supporting Tidore language revitalization. The revitalization process is not driven only by government regulation and school policy. Youth literacy actors, cultural activists, and community-based groups also contribute to sustaining the language through creative and accessible forms of cultural production. These include children's stories, folktales, popular literature, reading activities, and informal cultural campaigns. A youth literacy actor explained the importance of producing reading materials in Tidore language:

“Children will not love the language if they only meet it in exams or formal lessons. They need stories, songs, games, and books that make the language feel close to them.”
(Youth literacy actor, interview, July 2024)

The statement reveals a key limitation of school-based revitalization. If language is encountered only as a formal subject, students may treat it as an obligation rather than as a living cultural resource. Grassroots literacy initiatives help overcome this limitation by making the language more accessible, enjoyable, and emotionally meaningful. The production of children's books and folktales in Tidore is particularly significant. These materials allow young learners to encounter the language through narrative, imagination, and cultural memory. Folktales provide access not only to vocabulary and grammar but also to moral values, local wisdom, humor, social relationships, and historical consciousness. A cultural activist described this process as follows:

“Folktales are important because they carry the way Tidore people think. If we only teach vocabulary, children may know the words but not the values behind them.”
(Cultural activist, interview, August 2024)

The excerpt shows that community actors understand revitalization as more than linguistic instruction. For them, language carries a worldview. Teaching Tidore language therefore means transmitting the cultural logic, moral imagination, and social memory embedded in local narratives. The findings also show that youth activists often frame their work as a response to the marginalization of Tidore language. Some participants expressed discomfort with the perception that Tidore is merely a dialect or a secondary language in comparison with Ternate. One literacy actor stated:

“If Tidore was once a great sultanate, then its language should also be treated with respect. Calling it only a dialect makes people forget that this language has its own history.”
(Youth literacy actor, interview, September 2024)

The statement illustrates how linguistic classification can become politically sensitive. For activists, the struggle over language status is also a struggle over historical recognition. Revitalization is therefore inseparable from the desire to affirm Tidore as a distinct cultural and historical community. However, grassroots movements also face limitations. Their impact depends on access to resources,

publication support, distribution networks, and collaboration with schools and government institutions. Without institutional support, community-based initiatives may remain fragmented. Conversely, without grassroots participation, government policy may become bureaucratic and disconnected from lived cultural practice. Effective revitalization therefore requires synergy between state policy and community creativity.

The Paradox of Cultural Revival in a Multiethnic City

Across the findings, a central paradox becomes visible. The revitalization of Tidore language is both necessary and potentially problematic. It is necessary because the marginalization of Tidore language reflects broader issues of historical dignity, cultural recognition, and symbolic equality. The policy provides a means for Tidorese communities to reclaim their heritage, strengthen pride, and transmit local knowledge to younger generations. In this sense, revitalization functions as a legitimate project of cultural recovery.

At the same time, the policy becomes problematic when cultural recovery is framed too narrowly through one ethnolinguistic identity. Tidore Kepulauan is not a homogeneous cultural space. Its social life is shaped by multiple ethnic groups, languages, histories, and forms of belonging. Therefore, a policy that promotes Tidore language must be careful not to position non-Tidore communities as culturally secondary or linguistically deficient. One teacher summarized this tension clearly:

“We want children to know Tidore language, but we also have to remember that our students come from different families. The classroom should become a place where they learn local culture together, not a place where some children feel they do not belong.”
(Elementary school teacher, interview, October 2024)

The excerpt captures the central challenge of language revitalization in Tidore. The question is not whether Tidore language should be preserved, but how it can be taught and promoted without producing symbolic exclusion. The teacher’s statement suggests that inclusive pedagogy is essential if language revitalization is to become a shared cultural project. The findings indicate that language revitalization becomes more inclusive when it is framed as shared cultural learning rather than ethnic ownership. In schools, this means designing instruction that accommodates students with different linguistic backgrounds. In public policy, it means presenting Tidore language as part of the city’s heritage while also recognizing the contributions of other communities. In cultural activism, it means creating spaces where Tidore language can be celebrated without erasing other forms of identity.

The paradox represents the core empirical contribution of the study. The Tidore case shows that language revitalization in a postcolonial and multiethnic society cannot be understood simply as a struggle against language decline. It must also be understood as a negotiation over who belongs, whose history is recognized, and how cultural dignity can be restored without producing new exclusions. The future of Tidore language revitalization therefore depends on its ability to become not only a symbol of Tidorese pride, but also a medium of shared belonging in a diverse city.

Table 2. Major Themes Emerging from the Data

Major Theme	Interview-Based Evidence	Analytical Meaning
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Language as symbolic reclamation	Cultural activists and community leaders described Tidore language as a marker of historical dignity and local pride	Language becomes a medium for restoring symbolic recognition
Institutionalization through education and policy	Teachers, principals, and education officials emphasized the role of schools in transmitting local language and cultural values	Revitalization is formalized through state-supported education policy
Inclusion and anxiety among non-Tidore communities	Non-Tidore parents raised concerns about linguistic burden, fairness, and cultural representation	Language policy may empower one group while unsettling others
Grassroots cultural revitalization	Youth literacy actors described children's books and folktales as tools for sustaining Tidore language among younger generations	Revitalization is sustained through both formal and community-based initiatives

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that language revitalization in Tidore Kepulauan cannot be understood simply as a technical effort to preserve a regional language. Rather, it operates as a cultural and political process through which historical dignity, symbolic recognition, and collective belonging are actively negotiated. The revitalization of the Tidore language is meaningful because it responds to a perceived history of marginalization, particularly in relation to the symbolic dominance of Ternate in North Maluku. In this sense, the Tidore case confirms that language revitalization is not only about increasing the number of speakers or inserting a local language into the school curriculum; it is also about reclaiming the authority to define who a community is and how its history should be remembered. This aligns with broader scholarship arguing that Indigenous and minority language revitalization involves interlocking domains of research, practice, activism, education, and community self-determination (Guerrettaz & Engman, 2023).

One of the most important insights from this study is that Tidore language revitalization functions as symbolic repair. For Tidorese cultural activists, educators, and community leaders, the language is not merely a communicative code but a repository of ancestral memory, moral values, and sultanate history. The desire to institutionalize Tidore in schools and public spaces therefore reflects a deeper effort to restore cultural confidence after a long period in which Tidore's symbolic position was perceived as secondary to Ternate. Similar studies on land-based and relational language learning show that language becomes most powerful when it is connected to memory, place, and embodied cultural experience, rather than treated as an abstract subject detached from community life (Hermes et al., 2023). The Tidore case strengthens this argument by showing that language revival becomes emotionally compelling when it is tied to a community's desire to re-enter history with dignity.

At the same time, the findings reveal that state-led revitalization produces a structural dilemma. Formal policy gives the Tidore language legitimacy, but it also transforms the language into an institutional requirement that must be taught, assessed, standardized, and managed. This creates opportunities for cultural transmission, yet also risks reducing a living language into a bureaucratic object. The experience of minority language education elsewhere shows that schools are often asked to carry two burdens at once: supporting language revitalization while delivering measurable educational outcomes for diverse learners (Peace-Hughes, 2022). This tension is

visible in Tidore, where teachers support the policy but also worry about curriculum guidance, teaching materials, assessment fairness, and the different linguistic starting points of students.

The school, therefore, emerges as both a promising and fragile site of revitalization. On the one hand, schools can expose children to the Tidore language in a systematic way, especially when family-based transmission is weakening. On the other hand, classroom-based revitalization may become ineffective if students experience the language only as a formal subject rather than as a meaningful medium of interaction. Research on new speakers of West Frisian shows that minority language learners often remain confined to classroom use unless they are supported by wider social opportunities, traditional speakers, and positive interactional spaces beyond formal instruction (Kircher et al., 2024). This has direct relevance for Tidore: revitalization will not succeed if the language lives only in textbooks, ceremonies, or examinations. It must also circulate in playgrounds, homes, cultural events, digital spaces, and intergenerational encounters.

The Tidore case also highlights the importance of family and domestic domains. Although schools can introduce local language learning, families remain crucial in shaping whether children perceive the language as intimate, useful, and emotionally valuable. Studies of endangered heritage language contexts show that mothers and families often mediate the everyday survival of minority languages through choices about home language use, emotional attachment, and children's linguistic confidence (Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, 2025). In Tidore, this suggests that revitalization should not rely only on schools and government campaigns. It requires family-oriented programs, parent participation, storytelling practices, and home-based language activities that allow children to experience Tidore as part of everyday affection and cultural intimacy.

However, the multiethnic character of Tidore Kepulauan complicates the meaning of revitalization. The city is inhabited not only by Tidorese communities, but also by Makianese, Ternatese, Butonese, Buginese, Javanese, Gorontaloese, Tobelo, and other groups. For these communities, the Tidore language may be respected as local heritage, yet it may not function as inherited identity. This finding is important because it shows that language revitalization can become socially productive only when it is framed as shared cultural learning rather than ethnic ownership. Studies on minority language rights to education emphasize that the right to learn and maintain a minority language must be balanced with broader principles of inclusion, accessibility, and non-discrimination (Bayat et al., 2023). In the Tidore context, this means that the policy should affirm Tidorese dignity while ensuring that non-Tidore students are not positioned as deficient outsiders.

The responses from non-Tidore parents reveal that the central issue is not rejection of the Tidore language, but concern over fairness and representation. Many non-Tidore families accept the value of learning Tidore because their children live in Tidore and need to understand the local cultural environment. Yet they also expect schools to recognize that not all children begin from the same linguistic background. This echoes studies of multilingual linguistic landscapes and education, which show that language visibility in public and school spaces can strengthen recognition, but may also reproduce hierarchy if only one language is consistently positioned as the legitimate voice of place (Karpava, 2024). Thus, Tidore language policy must be careful not to convert recognition into symbolic dominance.

The findings further suggest that public visibility matters. Dictionaries, public campaigns, school activities, and cultural events help make the Tidore language more visible in the city's

symbolic landscape. However, visibility alone is not enough. Linguistic landscape research in Indonesia demonstrates that public signs, institutional displays, and language commodification can reflect both vitality and power, depending on who controls the representation and whose languages are absent from the public scene (Rohmah & Widya Nur Wijayanti, 2023). For Tidore, this means that the promotion of Tidore language in public spaces should be accompanied by narratives that acknowledge the city's plural composition. A multilingual city can celebrate its heritage language without denying the social presence of other linguistic communities.

The role of grassroots literacy actors is particularly significant because it offers a more flexible model of revitalization. Children's books, folktales, songs, games, and community reading activities help transform Tidore from a policy object into a language of imagination and affect. These initiatives respond to a key weakness of formal language policy: regulation can mandate instruction, but it cannot automatically generate love for the language. Research on minority language revitalization and social media shows that creative, multimodal, and community-generated materials can increase cultural confidence and expand the domains in which minority languages are used (Wang et al., 2024). This insight reinforces the importance of supporting youth literacy communities in Tidore, especially those producing culturally grounded materials for children and young readers.

The discussion also reveals the need to rethink the category of "speaker." In revitalization contexts, not all learners are heritage speakers, fluent speakers, or native speakers. Some are new speakers, partial speakers, passive understanders, or second-language learners who develop affiliation with a language through education and social participation. Research on new speakers in Spain's historic linguistic minorities shows that revitalization depends on recognizing diverse speaker trajectories rather than privileging only inherited fluency (Urla & Ramallo, 2022). This is highly relevant to Tidore because non-Tidore students should not be treated as peripheral to the project. They may become new participants in Tidore language learning if the curriculum welcomes them through inclusive pedagogical pathways.

Relatedly, the Tidore case challenges essentialist notions of authenticity. If revitalization is framed too narrowly around the idea that only ethnic Tidorese are legitimate carriers of the language, the policy risks reinforcing exclusion. Studies on the Galician *neofalante* framework warn that new speakers may be celebrated rhetorically while still being judged against traditional expectations of authenticity (Vázquez-Fernández, 2022). Tidore language revitalization should therefore avoid creating a hierarchy between "authentic" heritage speakers and "less legitimate" learners. Instead, it should treat different levels of language participation as part of a broader ecology of belonging.

Another implication concerns language attitudes. The findings show that positive attitudes toward Tidore language exist among many actors, including some non-Tidore parents. Yet positive attitudes do not automatically produce active language use. Indonesian research on mother tongue vitality in multilingual communities indicates that language vitality depends on patterns of use across family, education, economy, and social interaction, not merely on symbolic pride (Nunung Sitaresmi et al., 2024). For Tidore, this means that policy success should not be measured only by whether people agree that the language is important. It should also examine whether children use the language in meaningful social contexts.

This is especially important because language pride may coexist with language shift. In many communities, speakers express emotional attachment to a local language while increasingly using dominant languages in daily life. Studies of Indonesian students' language attitudes show that heritage languages may be valued positively, but their practical use can decline when Indonesian and English are perceived as more useful for education, mobility, and professional aspirations (Nurlia et al., 2025). The Tidore case must therefore be read within a broader hierarchy of language value, where local language, national language, and global language occupy different symbolic and practical positions.

The multiethnic family context also deserves attention. Tidore's linguistic future will be shaped not only by schools and government offices, but also by intermarriage, migration, and household language decisions. Research on family language policy in multicultural Samarinda shows that families often balance local, national, and foreign languages pragmatically, selecting languages according to identity, utility, education, and social mobility (Lubis et al., 2025). This insight suggests that Tidore language revitalization should not assume a homogeneous family structure. Instead, it should design flexible strategies for mixed-language households and migrant families who may wish to support Tidore learning without abandoning their own linguistic heritage.

The policy implications are also pedagogical. Teachers need more than enthusiasm; they need training in inclusive multilingual pedagogy. Research on language-in-education policy in Nepal shows that multilingual education is often shaped by competing discourses of nationalism, modernization, equity, and global mobility, which can create contradictions in classroom practice (Poudel & Choi, 2022). Tidore teachers face a similar challenge: they must teach a local language that carries historical pride while managing classrooms composed of students with unequal exposure to that language. This requires differentiated instruction, flexible assessment, bilingual scaffolding, and culturally responsive materials.

The issue of youth participation is equally important. Young people are not passive recipients of revitalization; they are active interpreters of language value. Studies of non-Mandarin Chinese languages among youth in Singapore and Vancouver show that younger generations often move beyond survivalist views of heritage language and reinterpret minority languages in relation to identity, community, and transnational belonging (Montsion et al., 2023). In Tidore, youth literacy actors already demonstrate this potential by producing creative materials and reframing Tidore language as relevant to children and young readers. Their role should be strengthened because revitalization cannot survive if it is owned only by elders, officials, or cultural elites.

Inclusion must therefore become the ethical center of Tidore language revitalization. The policy should not force non-Tidore communities into assimilation, but invite them into intercultural learning. Studies on migrant and refugee children show that language can either become a boundary that marks exclusion or a bridge that enables participation, depending on how educational institutions handle linguistic difference (Pečenković & Delić, 2023). This insight is central to the Tidore case. If the curriculum treats Tidore language as a gatekeeping marker of local authenticity, some students may feel alienated. If it treats Tidore language as shared cultural knowledge, the classroom can become a space of mutual recognition.

The affective dimension of language learning must also be considered. Motivation to learn a minority language is shaped not only by policy, but also by ideology, emotion, social acceptance, and perceived legitimacy. Research on Polish migrants' motivation to learn Welsh demonstrates

that learners' engagement with a minority language depends heavily on whether they perceive the language as socially meaningful and whether their participation is welcomed (Rosiak, 2023). For Tidore, this means that non-Tidore learners should be positioned not as outsiders who must catch up, but as legitimate participants in a shared cultural space.

Finally, the Tidore case exposes the broader structural inequality that often shapes multilingual education. Even when policy supports language diversity, implementation may remain uneven because of limited teacher preparation, inadequate resources, and unequal access to culturally relevant materials. Recent scholarship on multilingual education in unequal contexts argues that multilingual policy cannot be separated from political economy, institutional capacity, and structural power (Sah, 2026). This helps explain why Tidore language revitalization requires more than symbolic regulation. It demands sustained investment in teacher development, material production, community partnerships, and inclusive evaluation systems.

In sum, the Tidore case shows that language revitalization is neither a simple success story nor a policy problem to be rejected. It is a powerful cultural project that requires careful ethical and pedagogical design. The revitalization of the Tidore language is legitimate because it restores a historically meaningful voice to public life and strengthens cultural confidence among Tidorese communities. However, its long-term significance will depend on whether it can also recognize the plural character of Tidore Kepulauan. In a multiethnic city, language revitalization should not become a mechanism for defining who belongs and who does not. Rather, it should function as a shared cultural bridge through which historical dignity, educational justice, and social belonging can be strengthened together.

Conclusion

This study shows that Tidore language revitalization is not merely a linguistic preservation effort, but a cultural and political project for restoring historical dignity, strengthening collective identity, and reclaiming symbolic recognition in North Maluku. Through education policy, public campaigns, learning materials, and grassroots literacy movements, the Tidore language has been repositioned as an important marker of local pride and cultural continuity. However, the findings also reveal that revitalization in a multiethnic city must be carried out carefully. While the policy strengthens Tidorese identity, it may also raise concerns among non-Tidore communities regarding inclusion, fairness, and cultural representation. Therefore, Tidore language revitalization should not be framed as ethnic assimilation, but as intercultural learning that welcomes diverse linguistic backgrounds. Ultimately, the future of Tidore language revitalization depends on its ability to balance cultural restoration with social inclusion. If designed inclusively, it can become not only a symbol of Tidorese pride, but also a shared cultural bridge for building belonging in contemporary Tidore Kepulauan.

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